

THE FIELD

Perhaps the greatest value in the study of English-language literature and its cultures is that it provides powerful visions of what it means to live in the world, visions that foster one's personal growth, participation in society, and ability to engage diverse communities. Studying literature teaches both empathy and critical judgment. Reading and writing, at increasingly sophisticated levels of complexity, are the intertwined approaches by which students of literature and culture pursue their work. As a department of writing and literature, English offers an excellent humanistic education, a solid foundation for many careers and for further graduate or professional study. English majors may also pursue secondary-education certification in conjunction with the major. For more information, see the education major sheet or the educator licensing programs website (umass.edu/education/be-teacher).

A minor in English is available.

THE MAJOR

Any student can enroll in the English major. In order to build a strong foundation of relevant skills, students are strongly encouraged to begin the major with English 200: Intensive Literary Studies Seminar for Intended Majors.

The English major requires 10 courses, most of which include substantial reading loads and hone writing skills through the production of multiple essays and other assignments. A typical schedule for the first semester of the English major may include English 200 paired with a course in British or American literature or one in global Anglophone or ethnic American literature. English majors may also take creative writing courses as electives.

OPTIONS WITHIN THE ENGLISH MAJOR

There is no requirement that students choose a particular focus for their upper-level courses, but they may choose to concentrate on one area of literature. The department also offers letters of specialization in American studies, creative writing, digital humanities and games, environmental humanities, literature as history, social justice, the study and practice of writing, teaching the English language arts, and an individualized option. It also offers a certificate in professional writing and technical communication. American studies enable students to shape an interdisciplinary course of study in American culture, combining courses in literature with courses from other disciplines, such as history, art, or Afro-American studies. Creative writing involves a series of courses, mostly in the form of workshops that develop students' craft in the writing of poetry, fiction, or drama. The digital humanities and games specialization confers training in the history, theorization, and production of new media and other digital technologies in order to give students experience combining their writing, critical thinking, and oral communication skills with various technical literacies. Environmental studies prepare students to engage in issues and topics relating to our environment and climate change. Literature as history emphasizes links between history, narrative, and writing—and reminds us that the past is always a part of the present. The social justice specialization explores the ways that diverse writers cast a spotlight on injustices and help us imagine a world that is better and more just. The study and practice of writing prepares students for careers in freelance writing or publishing; it also prepares majors for graduate programs in publishing, nonfiction writing, or rhetoric and composition. Teaching the English language arts is a good fit for any undergraduate student interested in teaching or tutoring English, whether in middle or secondary schools, ESL programs, or other sites. Professional writing and technical communication provide training in professional research and editing, grant writing, software and hardware documentation, report writing, and business communications.

HONORS

The departmental honors pathway serves the interests of students who would like to deepen and expand their work in the major, providing both enriched courses and a yearlong culminating thesis or project under the guidance of English faculty. To join the program, students must have a minimum GPA of 3.4 and should arrange to meet with English Honors Program Director Janis Greve and an advisor from Commonwealth Honors College as soon as possible to discuss courses and writing interests. In order to earn departmental honors, students must complete four honors English courses with a grade of B+ or better, two of which include the yearlong thesis/project mentioned above. All honors students are required to complete either a research-based critical thesis or a creative writing project.

STUDY ABROAD

Students are urged to consider the department's Oxford Summer Seminar, the Edinburgh Fringe Theatre Festival summer program, or a semester or yearlong program at universities in Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, and other countries.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The English major trains students to write and speak well, to think analytically and critically, to persuasively engage multiple audiences, and to solve problems quickly—all vital skills in today's job market. Knowing this, college graduates with a degree in English can enter a wide variety of career fields, including business, education, technical writing, public affairs, social media, writing and editing, publishing, or politics. Students can also continue their education through graduate programs in literature, creative writing, languages, education, law, and more. With this flexibility of career fields comes a broad range of potential employers; English alumni work for public and private schools, colleges and universities, libraries, museums, nonprofit organizations, television stations, newspapers and magazines, government agencies, publishing companies, broadcast media outlets, law firms, and trade, professional, and consumer publications. The department encourages majors to meet with Humanities and Fine Arts (HFA) career advisors, pursue internship possibilities, attend events featuring alumni from a range of professions, and take advantage of the network of alumni mentors posted on our website. Students are also highly encouraged to take English 491 AC: The Major and Beyond, a career exploration workshop offered every semester.

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND FINE ARTS

The humanities focus on human creativity, endeavor, and culture. The imaginative and creative arts—literary and performing—derive from life and teach about human behavior and constructs of social reality. The history of social, political, and economic systems illuminates and shapes the present and future. Students in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts are expected to broaden their perspectives on individual and cultural expression within their own and other societies, to understand the development and evolution of the discipline of study in relation to the culture from which it emanates, and to learn the methods by which knowledge in the discipline is gained.

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