

Senior Capstone Experience – Humanities Program

Humanities Advisory Board

Richard Gillin, Chairman Clayton Black Peter Wiegel

The Senior Capstone Experience in Humanities is an opportunity for Humanities majors to bring their interpretive abilities, their writing skills, and their understanding of cultural traditions to bear on a long-term, independent project in the form of a thesis or a comprehensive examination that will serve as the culmination of their humanities studies at Washington College. The Senior Capstone Experience for Humanities majors exemplifies each student's accumulated knowledge and mastery of analysis. All seniors majoring in Humanities may choose between two options as a means of fulfilling the Senior Capstone Experience: writing a thesis or taking a comprehensive examination.

Critical Thesis

The Humanities Program sees the thesis option for fulfilling the Senior Capstone Experience as a privilege. Therefore, it is vital that the student wishing to pursue this option demonstrate sufficient preparation through coursework, have a good working knowledge of the topic proposed, and show evidence of strong research and writing skills.

A student who chooses to write a thesis can use an essay written in a particular course as the foundation for further development into a thesis. A student electing to write a thesis must show initiative by conducting preliminary research to develop an appropriate topic.

The completed thesis should demonstrate the student's ability to interpret texts and support the interpretation with secondary critical sources. The student must draw on at least two humanities disciplines for the thesis, which means that at least two professors from those disciplines must approve the thesis project and be willing to serve as advisers to the thesis.

During the period of proposal formulation, a student should work in close contact with members of the Humanities faculty. The Humanities Program advises each student to begin consulting with humanities faculty during the junior year.

- A student should contact two faculty members who represent the fields in which the student proposes to work to ask if those faculty members would be willing to serve as his or her thesis adviser.
- After the student and advisers have agreed on a topic and approach, the student must complete a written proposal.
- Once completed, and approved by the individual faculty members who have agreed to direct the thesis, the proposal must be sent electronically to Professor Richard Gillin, who will bring it to the Humanities Advisory Board for its consideration.

Guidelines for Thesis Proposals

The proposal should be approximately 2 pages long (though it may be longer.) It should be narrative and free of spelling errors and grammatical mistakes. The more specific the proposal (including the argument) is, the more likely it is to be approved without problems.

The thesis proposal must detail the project carefully. It must include a description of the scope and range of the projected thesis, an explanation of the problem or problems to be investigated, and a description of what strategies will be used in the investigation. The proposal must also include a clearly articulated thesis statement and well-documented bibliography.

It must include the following specific elements: A description of the proposed project (what the argument will be). A description of what has already been done. (This should include a list of relevant coursework and other preparation. It should also indicate if the thesis is an expansion of a paper from a class.)

A description of critical or theoretical problems the thesis will investigate and the questions to be explored.

A chapter outline with brief details about what each chapter will cover. For example, an introduction to the problem, chapter descriptions (this number will vary), and a conclusion would be appropriate.

A working bibliography, including books and articles likely to be used, that shows familiarity with the field of study.

A writing sample. This should be a sample chapter, if available, or the essay, submitted for a course, upon which the thesis will be developed.

Guidelines for Thesis Completion

Research should begin as soon as the proposal receives formal approval from the Humanities Program. Following notification of approval during the spring of the junior year, students should begin researching their topic by surveying the critical literature related to the chosen subject. Students are expected to work through the summer. In early fall of the senior year, chapters must be completed to meet deadlines established by each thesis adviser. In the final semester of a student's undergraduate career, when the student is completing the thesis, he or she should register for HMN SCE for academic credit. The thesis itself should be at least 50 pages. Theses are to be turned in electronically. The digitized theses will be made available to the college community via the library catalog. Upon completion, members of the Humanities Advisory Board in consultation with the advisers will evaluate each thesis. The thesis will be evaluated to receive honors, pass or fail. Completed theses are due on April 12, 2013 by noon in Dr. Gillins office, 206 Daly.

Senior Comprehensive Examination

For the comprehensive examination a student will be responsible for preparing to take a three-part examination:

Two parts of the examination will be based on two humanities courses selected by the student. The student is responsible to contact professors who have taught the courses the student has selected to ask them for guidance in preparation for the exam. The student is responsible to ask each faculty member for questions for the Comprehensive Examination.

The third part of the Senior Comprehensive Examination is based on the Humanities Seminar. Students are responsible to seek guidance for preparation for the exam from the faculty member who taught the Humanities Seminar.

In the final semester of a student's undergraduate career, he or she should register for HMN SCE for academic credit and plan to take the comprehensive exam at the end of the semester.

- Faculty members selected by the student guides the preparatory work for the comprehensive examination. The faculty member's qualifications with regard to a particular subject in the Humanities should be the basis of the student's selection.

Students must contact a each potential adviser to ask the faculty member if he or she would be willing to serve as the comprehensive exam adviser.

Comprehensive Exam Preparation Guidelines

During the last semester of a student's undergraduate career the student will meet regularly with the comprehensive exam advisers. Active inquiry and integration of acquired knowledge and skills will be at the heart of the preparatory tutorial sessions. In preparation for the Senior Comprehensive Examination, students should compile a reading list of works and selected critical texts they have studied in the course on which they are to be examined. Additionally, students are required to develop an annotated bibliography that shows familiarity with the critical literature related to the specific subject that they have selected. Students are expected to use both the general reading list and the books on their subject-specific bibliography to focus their preparation. Successful completion of the comprehensive examination serves notice to the college community that a particular student has been recognized by the members of the Humanities Program as having acquired depth and range in the Humanities.