

English Department Senior Capstone Experience Guidelines

DESCRIPTION

The Senior Capstone Experience (SCE) requires students to demonstrate the ability to think critically and to engage in a project of active learning in their major field of studies. In the SCE, required of all graduating seniors, students integrate acquired knowledge and skills in a senior project demonstrating mastery of a body of knowledge and intellectual accomplishment that goes significantly beyond classroom learning. Upon successful completion of her/his SCE, a student will receive a grade and four academic credits. These four credits will count toward the total needed to graduate from the College.

The SCE in the English department allows students the opportunity to pursue a substantive research project while working closely with a faculty advisor. English majors will bring their research and interpretive abilities, their writing skills, and their understanding of the literary tradition to bear on a long-term, independent project in the form of an annotated bibliography *and* an essay that will serve as the culmination of their literary studies at Washington College.¹ The SCE for English majors exemplifies each student's accumulated knowledge and mastery of literary analysis.

The information provided in this document is intended to communicate the English department's expectations clearly and consistently to its students. We realize that questions and special circumstances may arise that are not addressed here. Students and their SCE advisors should use this document to guide their conversations about what they both expect from individual SCE projects.

DEVELOPING AN SCE PROPOSAL

During the period of proposal formulation, a student should work in close contact with a member of the English Department. A student should contact a member of the English Department who represents the field or literary period in which the student proposes to work to ask if that faculty member would be willing to serve as his or her thesis advisor.

Each member of the English faculty may limit his or her Senior Capstone Experience students to six, thus students may not have their choice of advisors. If their first choice of advisor is not possible, students must select an alternative.

After the student and advisor have agreed on a topic and approach, the student must complete a written proposal. Once completed, and approved by the individual faculty member who has agreed to direct the thesis, the proposal must be sent electronically to the chair of the department, who will bring it to the entire department for its consideration.

The proposal should be approximately two pages long (though it may be longer). It should be free of spelling errors and grammatical mistakes. The more specific the proposal 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 a tentative bibliography.

¹ Students graduating in December 2013 or May 2014 may choose to write a "traditional thesis" (approximately 50 pages) instead of an essay and annotated bibliography.

Proposal Checklist:

- 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 tentative bibliography, including books and articles likely to be used, that shows familiarity with the field of study.
- A writing sample. This should be the essay submitted for a course upon which the thesis will be developed (if applicable).

THE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

An annotated bibliography consists of a comprehensive list of works about a particular topic accompanied by a paragraph intended to explain, describe and evaluate each work. Students should identify and annotate a minimum of 10-12 sources that pertain to their essay topic. The specific number of and type of sources will be chosen in consultation with and with the approval of the SCE advisor. These sources may consist of primary texts and peer-reviewed, secondary sources. The department expects students to complete this portion of the SCE project before the end of the fall semester.

The annotated bibliography must:

- Demonstrate historical breath as well as an understanding of the body of critical literature appropriate for the topic
- Show the ability to locate and use both print and electronic information resources
- Use proper MLA or Chicago citation conventions.

THE ESSAY

The student will produce a substantial (25-30 page) scholarly research paper on the literary topic. Essays will normally address British or American literature or literature written in English outside of the US (like postcolonial literature) and will grow out of coursework completed for the English major; this might be expanded in the case of an interdisciplinary project or a thesis topic designed to fulfill a double major. Topics may be defined by author, historical period, theme, cultural or theoretical issue and must be chosen in consultation with and approved by the SCE advisor and by the department.

The essay must demonstrate:

- knowledge of the primary subject as well relevant scholarship and criticism
- a clear, well-structured argument that is supported with evidence
- appropriate use of literary terminology and effective use of at least one critical method or interpretive strategy
- the ability to incorporate secondary sources
- effective use of revision and editing strategies to produce a polished final essay
- completion of a final essay that is well written, convincing, imaginative, and engages meaningfully with both primary texts and scholarly literature.

FORMATTING AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Both the annotated bibliography and essay should include:

- A coversheet including the thesis title, name of student, name of thesis advisor and date.
- The Honor Code statement (any thesis found to violate the Honor Code will be reported to the Dean's office. See **HONOR CODE** below).
- If images are used in the essay, a list of illustrations.
- Page numbers (but no page number on the cover sheet).

The essay must include a Works Cited List. Either MLA or Chicago Style is acceptable, but the essay must be consistent.

Submitting the SCE bibliography and essay:

- Be sure to proofread everything before final submission. Do not rely on spell-check alone.
- Submit a complete electronic copy (final version) to Canvas on or before the deadline (listed on the department webpage). Submitting your bibliography and essay to Canvas will make it available for the English department faculty to access it.
- **PLEASE NOTE:** Submit **ONLY** an electronic copy. Do not print and submit a hard copy.

GRADING CRITERIA

The English department will use the following rubric to designate a letter grade for the SCE.

A (excellent). An **A** SCE meets the standards in all these areas and excels in one or more of them: The SCE as a whole presents a fresh subject or main idea and treats it in an interesting or original manner, displaying unusual insight while also effectively engaging and responding to relevant critical sources. The essay has a clear argument and organizational pattern appropriate for the audience. The SCE effectively uses appropriate information resources, and it documents all of them correctly following MLA or Chicago conventions. The paragraphs are fully developed with detail that supports the argument; sentences within the paragraphs are clearly linked, forming an appropriate pattern; transitions are effective. Sentences are varied and imaginative in style, concise and creative in wording. The SCE contains few errors in grammar and punctuation or errors only in sophisticated matters, and few spelling errors. The student meets draft deadlines on time and is routinely responsive to the advisor's feedback. *As noted in the College Catalog, only theses "receiving a letter grade of 'A-' or better qualify for honors."*

B (strong). A **B** SCE meets the standards in all these areas: The SCE as a whole presents an interesting subject or main idea and approaches it in a consistent and careful manner, engaging critical sources while displaying good insight, though without the originality characteristic of the A SCE. The argument is evident and the pattern of organization is appropriate for its purpose, and the writing makes use of consistent rhetorical strategies and a tone appropriate for the audience. The SCE uses appropriate information resources, and it documents most of them correctly following MLA or Chicago conventions. Paragraphs are, with only a few exceptions, adequately developed and generally successful in supporting the argument; transitions are clear, and sentences within the paragraphs are, for the most part, clearly related. Sentences are clear and correct in structure and style and are not excessively wordy. Word choice is usually appropriate. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling follow accepted conventions, except for a few minor errors. The student meets most of the draft deadlines on time and is regularly responsive to the advisor's feedback.

C (adequate). A **C** SCE is deficient in one of these areas: The SCE as a whole presents a subject or main idea, but the treatment may be trivial, uninteresting, or too general and the insight adequate but not marked by independent thought nor effective response to relevant critical sources. The essay lacks a clear argument or inconsistently or incompletely supports the argument. The tone may be inconsistent. The SCE makes minimal use of appropriate information resources, or it does not follow MLA or Chicago conventions correctly. Some paragraphs may lack adequate supporting detail or may be only loosely linked to the argument. Sentences within paragraphs may be only loosely related, and some transitions may be missing. Sentences are generally correct in structure but may be excessively wordy, vague, or, at times, even incorrect. Style and word choice may be flat, inconsistent, or not entirely appropriate for the audience. The SCE may display isolated serious errors in grammar and punctuation or frequent minor errors that do not interfere substantially with meaning or that do not greatly distract the reader; the SCE may contain occasional misspellings. The student meets only some of the draft deadlines on time and is minimally responsive to the advisor's feedback.

D (weak). A **D** SCE is seriously deficient in any one of these areas: The SCE as a whole presents a poorly defined or inconsistently treated subject or argument and displays little insight and no response to critical sources. The plan and purpose are not treated consistently. The tone is inappropriate for the audience. The SCE does not use appropriate information resources, or it does not follow MLA or Chicago conventions correctly. Paragraphs do not support the argument or contain little supporting detail. Sentences within paragraphs are often unrelated to the main idea, and transitions are lacking. Sentences are frequently incorrect in structure, vague, wordy and distracting. Style and word choice are inappropriate, incorrect, or inconsistent. The SCE may contain serious and distracting errors in grammar and punctuation as well as numerous irritating minor errors and frequent misspellings. The student does not meet any of the draft deadlines on time and is not responsive to the advisor's feedback.

F (unacceptable/no credit). An **F** SCE is unacceptable in any one of these areas: The SCE as a whole does not have a clear subject, main idea or argument and has no apparent purpose or plan. The SCE does not use any appropriate information resources, or it does not follow MLA or Chicago conventions correctly, or it contains plagiarized material. Paragraphs are not related to the argument; sentences within paragraphs are unrelated, and transitions are missing. Sentences are so faulty in structure and style that the essay is not readable. Frequent serious errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling indicate an inability to handle the written conventions; there are excessive minor errors or misspellings. The student does not meet any of the draft deadlines on time, if at all, and is not responsive to any of the advisor's communication.²

HONOR CODE

Students must adhere to the Washington College Honor Code when completing the Senior Capstone Experience. Any student found responsible for violating the Honor Code will be reported to the Dean.

Plagiarism is a serious academic and professional offense. Any SCE submission found to contain plagiarized material will be considered in violation of the Honor Code and will be reported to the Dean's office. The consequences for plagiarizing may include expulsion from Washington College. Washington College has contracted with Turnitin.com, a web-based plagiarism prevention service. Theses submitted for the Senior Capstone Experience may be submitted electronically to Turnitin.com.

² This rubric has been adapted from *The Little, Brown Handbook*.