English Senior Projects

What is a senior project?
A senior project is a capstone project that allows you to showcase the knowledge and skills you have learned as an English major. It should draw from and then extend current knowledge and skills in order to produce an original and meaningful text or experience.

When do I do a senior project?
You should register for it in one of the last two quarters of your Cal Poly career.

How many units is a senior project?
If you began your college career (here or at another institution) before fall 2013, you may do a one-unit project OR a four-unit project. Those students who began their college careers in fall 2013 and beyond must complete a four-unit project.

Why did the senior project units change?
The major changed to a four-unit project because majors overwhelmingly requested the larger project. They wanted the opportunity to produce a more substantial work that illustrated their abilities and sensibilities as English majors.

What's the difference between the one-unit and four-unit project?
The difference is merely one of scope. For a one-unit project, you should plan to spend at least 30 hours over the course of the quarter (roughly three hours/week). For a four-unit project, you should plan to spend at least 120 hours (roughly twelve hours/week).

How do I decide between project types?
In general, the faculty believe that the four-unit projects are more meaningful experiences. However, depending on your remaining graduation requirements, you may not have room for a four-unit project. To help you decide, visit your major advisor or Dr. Rummell.

How do I sign up for the senior project?
Once you have decided which unit value you want to pursue, you should approach a faculty member whose specialty intersects with your interests. Your faculty supervisor will help you register for the project.

What kinds of projects can I pursue?
The goal is to find a project that is meaningful to you. For instance, if you are hoping to go to graduate school, a more "traditional" scholarly paper or creative writing portfolio might be a good option. Or, perhaps you hope to pursue a career in writing for the web; if so, maybe you'd create a literary blog, tumblr, twitter feed, etc. Not sure what you want to do post-graduation, but really love literature? Consider a public literature project—one that brings literature out of the classroom space and into the public sphere. Are you interested in the performance of literature? Maybe you could write, direct, and/or star in an adaptation of a novel or short story. Do you find linguistics interesting? Consider conducting a linguistic analysis of a social media site. Do you have a minor? Perhaps you could pursue a project that highlights the intersection of English and your minor field of study. Did a particular English course leave you wanting more? Why not deepen your understanding of that subject with a more focused study of the author/period? The ideas are limitless! Use your talents and interests to guide your choice of project. (See next page for some specific ideas.)

What if I'm completely overwhelmed by this prospect and don't know what to do?
Make an appointment to see your advisor or Dr. Rummell (krummell@calpoly.edu).

Ideas for Possible Senior Projects

On the following pages are some ideas generated by individual faculty members. If one of these ideas strikes your fancy, visit the professor to learn more information. Or, use these ideas to help you jump-start your own creative thinking!

Dr. Campbell (bcampb02@calpoly.edu):
1) A project based on my Core VI "Modernist Little Magazine" unit: this would see the student engaged in all aspects of theorizing, designing, creating, editing, and publishing a contemporary "little magazine" based on the protocols followed by the modernists in the early C20. It would require the student to develop and articulate his or her own literary manifesto or ethos. It would/could include creative works and works of literary criticism written and selected by the student (along with a rationale for his/her selections). Prior to actually producing the magazine, the student would research and read richly in the literature and history of print production, so the project would also double as a kind of mini-seminar on materiality-of-the-text issues.

2) An annotated edition of one of the many autobiographies of mental illness currently residing, neglected, in the public domain. In our own time, memoirs of illness have become remarkably popular, but the genre has a long and storied pedigree. The late C19 and early C20 saw numerous, fascinating narratives of mental illness published, but most of them are long neglected (though easy to locate and free to download thanks to Google). The project I am imagining here would be, essentially, a scholarly edition of any one of these works. It would require the student to participate deeply and meaningfully in one dimension of the life of our profession. He/she would become "the" expert on the chosen text and author (because quite literally no one else writes about these texts), and he/she would be responsible for writing an introduction, providing footnotes, etc.

3) A "critical geography" of a central coast writer (e.g. Jeffers, Steinbeck, George Sterling, etc.). Though scholars pay considerable attention to the lives and times of the writers they study, they are less often interested in the landscapes those writers occupied and represented. Readers can only learn so much about a writer from reading his/her biography--that's why some scholars are calling for the production of "critical geographies." Like a biography, a critical geography is a work of literary criticism that seeks to situate a writer and his/her works in the particular landscapes that they inhabited and represent. As a senior project, such a geography would allow a student to dig deeply into the work of a single author and invite them to VISIT the landscapes that he/she represents (this is why I have specified a central coast writer). The student would study the writer's work "in situ" and have a unique opportunity to reflect upon and articulate the ways that a physical landscape collaborates with a writer to produce a work of art. This project would be for a student who wants to get outdoors, do some hiking, and go hands-on with his/her project.

Dr. Clark (kclark) and Dr. Pierce (tjpierce@calpoly.edu):
Senior Project in Creative Writing - Students who have completed two 400-level creative writing courses (in either fiction OR poetry) are eligible to pursue a senior project in creative writing. A senior project in creative writing is a focused exploration of one's own creative work with an eye toward showcasing one's best writing. Projects can include, among other options, a thematically- or vocally-unified collection of poetry (usually 25 or more pages), a collection of short stories (usually 35 or more pages), a complete novella, or

chapters toward a novel. Students often produce new work in addition to revising and expanding work previously produced within a writing workshop. Students also produce a non-fiction introduction to their own work, exploring connections between their creative work and other English courses taken at Cal Poly. The senior project may be taken at the same time as or after a student takes the second 400-level creative writing workshop.

Dr. Guise (meguise@calpoly.edu):
If you are considering a career in teaching English at the secondary level, this research opportunity might interest you. For 2014-2015, I am looking for an English undergraduate who is interested in serving as research assistant in a research study that examines teaching practices during a student teaching experience. The focus of the research study is on co-teaching – an approach to the student teaching experience where both the cooperating teacher and student teacher actively co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess throughout the student teacher's yearlong placement. Research for this project will include exploring the following questions: What does co-teaching look like? How does the definition of co-teaching evolve? What challenges do co-teachers face when implementing co-teaching? What support must a teacher education program provide its co-teachers in order for co-teaching to be effectively implemented? English majors interested in working on this research study for their senior project will gain experience designing research tools, collecting data (e.g., interviewing research participants, conducting classroom observations), analyzing data, and writing findings. This senior project also has the potential to extend into an additional quarter in the form of a paid research assistant position.

Dr. Helmbrecht (bhelmbre@calpoly.edu):
Students could:

- Film, screen, and analyze their own documentary film.
- Study how images (in the form of advertising or even graphic novels) communicate with various audiences. Students could also create their own imagistic text and analyze it.
- Study effective methods for teaching writing to high school students (especially for students interested in going into education).
- Rhetorically and stylistically analyze written, persuasive texts
- Undertake a letter-writing campaign to address issues of importance with public officials and organizations.
- Work with a local non-profit organization to develop materials to help communicate their goals and values.
- Study a local space to determine how it communicates with various audiences. Spaces could include the local mission, monuments, statues, etc.
- Create a zine by writing text, creating images, and compiling them into a published zine distributed across campus.
- Conduct a rhetorical analysis of a campus organization (the Cal Poly Gender Equity Center, e.g.).

Dr. Kauffmann (kjkauffm@calpoly.edu):
1) A curated website on a particular author, period, or literary movement. Depending on the student's knowledge of web design (or lack thereof), this could involve the student building a website or using a wiki. The student would include links to relevant web archives, web exhibitions, images, critical articles, etc. The project would involve substantial research and exploration on the student's part, as well as written reflection on the choices she/he has made in terms of design, usability, and content.

2) For artistically inclined students: A visual-verbal project reflecting on their undergraduate careers/trajectories as English majors. This might, for example, be some sort of extended photo-essay (the kind of photo-essay that includes not just images but textual reflections as well). Another iteration of this project could be some kind of multimedia web-based project.

Dr. Marchbanks (pmarchba@calpoly.edu):
Edith Wharton's Fiction (Winter 2015): students will read 4-5 core novels and some short stories by Edith Wharton, and consider her sustained engagement with such issues as romance, sexuality, and commerce of the body. Titles will include but are not limited to: *The House of Mirth* (1905), *Summer* (1917), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920). Assignments: two short essays, one term paper, and weekly discussion grades.

Novels of the Brontës (Winter 2015): students will read 4-5 core novels by Anne, Emily, and Charlotte Brontë, exploring such Victorian-era concerns as "The Woman Question," the purposes of art, and representations of the governess. Titles will include but are not limited to: *Agnes Grey* (1847), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and *Jane Eyre* (1848). Assignments: two short essays, one term paper, and weekly discussion grades.

Lars Von Trier's Filmography (Spring 2015): students will wrestle with the provocative aesthetics and themes of this Danish auteur's oeuvre by viewing and discussing a film week. Titles will include but are not limited to: *The Element of Crime* (1984), *The Idiots* (1998), *Dogville* (2003), and *Melancholia* (2011). Assignments: two short essays, one term paper, and weekly discussion grades.

Dr. Rummell (krummell@calpoly.edu):
Projects in 18th century British literature or African-American literature. The possibilities are limitless—produce a graphic novel of *The Rape of the Lock* or other text; modernize and adapt an 18th century text into a blog, a vlog, or film; study and compare print and filmic neoslave narratives; etc.

Portfolio and Revision Projects: Create a portfolio of original and substantially revised work. One of the frustrations of the ten-week quarter is that there is never enough time to think carefully and at length about a given issue or to revise thoughtfully. This project provides students the opportunity to do both. This project is ideal for students who want to polish a writing sample for graduate school or who wish to leave Cal Poly with a portfolio of polished work they can show to future employers. Also, the project affords them time to focus on improving their writing and revision skills, important skills for most careers.

Dr. Schwartz (dschwart@calpoly.edu):
1) Explore how a medieval story, character, plot element or concept/idea has been renewed, used or retold in one or more works of a later era (which could include e.g. artwork, music or film as well as literary works). Examples: Chaucer's Wife of Bath; Chaucer's Patient Griselda; Dante's Inferno; the love affair of Lancelot and Guenevere; a character from the Tristan legends; Merlin; Morgan la Fee; the Grail Quest (or the Holy Grail itself); medieval fairies; medieval sorcererers/sorceresses; medieval dwarves; the figure of the court jester/ fool; the cross-dressing woman.

This kind of project would involve choosing readings to consider, researching the character/story/motif, and writing an essay about the original figure/work and its reinterpretation in the work(s) of your choice.

2) A creative project beginning with researching how a medieval or Shakespearean story/play, character, plot element or concept/idea has been understood over time and culminating in writing or creating your own version of the story, character or idea, along with an introduction explaining what medieval elements you decided to keep, what changes you made, and why.

3) A creative project exploring how a Shakespearean character or play has been interpreted over time (whether by readers and critics, in performance, or both) and culminating in a performance (scenes or monologues which you may perform or direct). This sort of project would involve drawing up a reading / viewing list; researching the character/play; and writing a paper outlining some of the ways in which the play/charater has been interpreted and explaining the choices YOU are making in your interpretation of the play.

4) An Independent Study medieval literature project on a mutually agreed upon topic that you have not been able to explore in one of our 400-level course offerings. I would be willing to talk to you about virtually any topic in medieval literature, but I have the most background in medieval Arthurian tradition, the treatment of gender and gender-related issues, and Chaucer.

Dr. Stegner (pstegner@calpoly.edu):
1. Early Modern Text Project – Are you interested in editing and publishing? This senior project begins with selecting a sixteenth-century text that has never been published in a modern edition and culminates with publishing it as a fully edited book on Amazon.com. This project provides hands-on experience with transcription, textual editing, layout, cover design, and digital publishing. It offers an excellent experience to work at any stage of the process and to see your senior project in print and available to the public. Here are some examples of previous senior projects from the past few years: *The Schoolmaster* (http://www.amazon.com/The-Schoolmaster-Teacher-Table-Phylosophie/dp/1481098357/) and *The Castel of Memorie* (http://www.amazon.com/The-Castel-Memorie-William-Fulwood/dp/1492972002/)

2. Shakespearean Adaptations – This senior project offers a capstone experience where students apply their experiences in the Core sequence and literature seminars to consider the relationship between dramatic literature and contemporary performance. Over the course of the spring quarter, we will meet in a small group to discuss three or four Shakespearean plays, one or two modern dramatic works, and a range of critical and

theoretical texts on dramatic performance. The senior project will involve adapting and appropriating a Shakespeare play in a twenty-first century context. The culminating experience of the project will be to travel to the Ashland Shakespeare Festival the week after the examination period in order to compare your dramatic adaptation with the performances we attend. To give you a sense of the type of plays being performed at the Ashland Shakespeare Festival, for 2014 they performed *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, *Into the Woods*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Wrinkle In Time*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. Because of the visit to Ashland Oregon, this project will involve a fee for travel, lodging, and performance tickets.

Dr. Waitinas (cwaitina@calpoly.edu):

- a Whitman Archive pedagogical project and/or Whitman manuscript work
- a Lake District trip during spring break (followed by creating a new *Literature of the Lake District* book--a sample is available in the department office)
- an extended field trip back east to NYC/Brooklyn/Long Island to see Whitman sites, again followed by some sort of literary-creative written project
- a promotional event of some kind on campus and/or in SLO to get literature some visibility and excitement on campus

Please note: Just because a faculty member hasn't listed any options for senior projects next year doesn't mean s/he isn't interested in supervising any. If you have someone you'd like to work with, please approach him/her to discuss possibilities.