THE CREATIVE THESIS PROJECT

OVERVIEW

One of your options for writing a thesis is to produce an original work or works of creative writing—poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, drama, or hybrid work. This is the work you will use as primary evidence of your abilities and your achievement in your master’s program.

Most theses fall between 45-90 pages, although the topic and scope of the project will determine the appropriate length for each individual thesis.

If you are interested in selecting the creative thesis project, you must begin by proposing a project to a thesis advisor/mentor. This person will ask to see a portfolio of creative work that you have composed in the past in order to determine where your talents lie and how best to shape your new project so that it draws on and develops those strengths.

PROSPECTUS (ENG 6700)

In much the same way that the non-creative thesis students write a prospectus, you will as well. Once you and your mentor have devised your thesis project, you will outline your plans for your creative work AND your craft essay in a written thesis prospectus (which is much like a proposal for the work you will do; your thesis advisor will have examples of previous successful prospectuses for you to peruse) that includes an appropriate working bibliography—your advisor may ask you for an annotated bibliography, though this is not required. The prospectus and bibliography will then be approved by all the members of your thesis committee. Most prospectuses run between 8-12 pages, though yours may vary depending on the needs of your project and advisor.

The formats of these prospectuses vary, though a lot of students have been successful using the following headers to help organize their prospectus, though these are merely optional and up to your, and your advisor’s, interpretation: Introduction, Format (how you will organize your craft essay AND your creative project), Example of Creative Project Already in Progress, Methodology & Timeline (this helps keep you and your advisor on task in ENG 6800), Expected Risks and Challenges, and Bibliography. Again, these are optional, but past students have found them, and other headers like them, useful in organizing their prospectuses.

CRAFT ESSAY (BEGIN IN ENG 6700 AND FINISH IN ENG 6800)

Once you and your mentor have shaped an appropriate prospectus, you will begin work on your creative project and the introduction to that creative work, your craft essay.

The craft essay—again, your advisor will have successful examples of these essays to share—should 1) illuminate via examples from your own work and the work of writers on your bibliography an element of literary craft, or 2) discuss how your work intersects with your literary mothers and/or fathers—i.e. how your work fits into a given genre, style, or mode—while discussing, again, some aspect of craft/technique being used in your own creative piece. There may be, as well, a combination of these two approaches that you and your advisor choose to pursue.
There are, as you might expect, myriad ways to further elaborate upon the above general guidelines for the craft essay. In collaboration with your faculty advisor, you will create this essay using some of the possibilities listed below:

The craft essay is a literary essay that often centers around an examination of a technique used in one’s own writing wherein said technique has been pilfered, learned, and perfected via a close-reading of one of more writers—say an essay on how you’ve come to use multiple points-of-view in your short stories because of your readings of Faulkner and Woolf, or maybe a discussion of how lineation works in your poems based on your readings of Anne Sexton and Anna Akhmatova. Another possibility is to define the genre in which you’re writing, especially if your creative work is an amalgamation of several genres, a hybrid work. And finally, you might choose a more historical approach wherein you discuss how your work fits into the canon (historical or contemporary).

In all of these instances, it is important to note that the primary research will come via a discussion of your own creative work; secondary, or historical, research will come, then, from outside sources, i.e. the works on your bibliography. Ideally, you will use between 8-10 sources.

The craft essay should be between 8-15 pages and will greatly depend on the approach you and your mentor take.

CREATIVE WORK/THESIS WRITING (ENG 6800)

Once you have written a prospectus and successfully passed ENG 6700, you will move into the craft essay and creative project part of the thesis process, also known as ENG 6800, which is taken during the last semester of your graduate studies.

In addition, of course, to writing the aforementioned and explained craft essay, you will be producing a substantial (45-90 page) creative project. Much of this project’s specifics, including length, scope, and other particularities, will be arrived at individually with your thesis advisor; however, the work will be a completed (or excerpted, perhaps, in the case of a novel or book-length project, should you decide to tackle such a project) work that satisfies one’s committee. This work will be original, excellent, and, finally, the result of the sum of its parts.

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