Professionalization in English

Senior Capstone Experience

OLD DOMINION
UNIVERSITY

Course Information

Professionalization in English
ENGL 490/590[1] | CRNs 32631/32633
Spring 2025
Thursday 4:30pm-7:10pm
Meeting Location: BAL 2019

Professor Information

Dr. Daniel P. Richards
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Office: BAL 5032 / Hours: Thurs. 12pm-3pm

Catalog Description

Advanced study of career opportunities and industry trends across a variety of fields, with a focus on reflection, synthesis, and professional development. Students will prepare a major project—as well as materials for career or educational advancement—and will discuss the nature, purpose, and value of an English degree.

Course Overview

In this course, students will bring together the skills, methodologies, and forms of knowledge they have acquired and developed within their English major. Students will: refine close reading skills, illustrate research competency, demonstrate negotiating of primary and secondary sources, develop and implement a sustained research plan, utilize analytic thinking and cultural understanding, and display effective communication and integrated reasoning. To accomplish these goals, students will:

Explore histories, industry trends, and career opportunities in the fields represented by the English degree program at Old Dominion: technical writing, creative writing, literature, linguistics, and journalism.

Revise in strategic ways various writing projects completed in previous courses for the purpose of developing a portfolio to share as part of job or graduate school applications.

Produce and present an original research project using theories and practices from one of the disciplines represented in the English department.

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[1] Students registered at the 500 level are expected to lead class discussion once in lieu of one of the five reading responses. Students registered at this level should contact the instructor as early as possible to make a plan.

Policies

Here are the policies governing the course.

Academic Integrity. Old Dominion University is committed to students' personal and academic success. In order to achieve this vision, students, faculty, and staff work together to create an environment that provides the best opportunity for academic inquiry and learning. All students must be honest in their academic studies. Academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct & Academic Integrity.

Accommodations. Old Dominion University is committed to ensuring equal access to all qualified students with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you experience a disability which will impact your ability to access any aspect of my class, please present me with an accommodation letter from The Office of Educational Accessibility (OEA) so that we can work together to ensure that accommodations are available to you (odu.edu/educationalaccessibility).

AI. You are welcome to use generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools such as ChatGPT for to help develop work in this course. Use of GAI tools for planning and drafting must be appropriately acknowledged and cited; GAI cannot be used to complete an entire assignment or paper. Any uncited use will be considered plagiarism.

Attendance. Missing a class without documentation affects your final grade (1/3 letter grade). If you anticipate being absent due to religious observances, please inform me.

Assessment. The standards for grading writing using the letter system are:

    A: Exceptional; professional and reflects careful consideration of audience and purpose; contains required elements; written in an appropriate and engaging style; arranged logically; and is free of mechanical errors.
    B: Strong; contains all required elements and reflects consideration of the rhetorical situation; generally above average, but falls short of excellence in one or more category; and has only minor mechanical errors.
    C: Competent; contains all required elements of the assignment; generally average in terms of the major criteria listed above; and has a few mechanical errors.
    D: Weak; does not include the required elements of the assignment; falls below average in terms of one or more of the major criteria.
    F: Fails or is incomplete in most of the above criteria.

Copyright. The materials used for this course may contain copyright-protected materials. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy or distribute these items.

Student Conduct. Old Dominion University is committed to fostering an environment that is: safe and secure; inclusive; and conducive to academic inquiry, student engagement and student success. Student members of the community are expected to uphold and abide by standards of conduct that form the basis of the Code of Student Conduct from the Office of Student Accountability & Academic Integrity (OSAAI). These standards are embodied within a set of core values that include integrity, fairness, respect, community, and responsibility.

Withdrawal. Participation in this course indicates a student's acceptance of its contents, requirements, and policies. If a student believes that the nature of this course does not meet their interests, needs, or expectations, they should drop the class by the drop/add deadline.

Course Objectives & Outcomes

The English program at Old Dominion has three broad learning outcomes that apply to all majors contained within the department. This senior capstone experience course is designed to measure these outcomes; as such, the materials you produce and/or revise in this course serve as the means of assessment for how we are doing as a department, and how well we're meeting our goals for our students. Here are the department's three undergraduate learning outcomes:

Outcome 1: Analyze
The ability to analyze and explain (or describe) the complex relationships among writers, spoken or written texts, and specific social, political, and historical contexts.

Outcome 2: Situate
The ability to close-read, to engage in critical analysis, and to make arguments based on a disciplinary understanding of argument and evidence.

Outcome 3: Create
The ability to create texts or works about discipline-specific subject matter using a writing style appropriate to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.

As you might imagine, given the diversity of majors, there are myriad ways students can display the abilities described in these outcomes. The assignments in this course are designed to align with these outcomes, allowing students an opportunity to reflect on their experiences as English majors at Old Dominion and to showcase the knowledge, skills, and abilities students have honed as English majors to faculty and potential employers. Therefore, you will keep the above three outcomes in mind as you will be asked to articulate and provide evidence for how and where you have achieved the learning outcomes during your studies. You will need to decide how the three artifacts you revise or produce this semester align with the three outcomes.

For example, students might choose to use their major research project to display the abilities described in outcome three and use their two revised pieces for their professional portfolio from earlier classes to display the abilities described in outcomes one and two.

Texts

While students will spend a good deal of time reading material for their own research project, we'll also spend a good deal of time in discussion speaking broadly about English as a discipline and and its various research approaches. The following four books are required. Those marked with an asterisk are available for free in Canvas.

Ball, Cheryl E., and Drew M. Loewe (Eds.). *Bad Ideas About Writing*. Digital Publishing Institute, 2017.*

Booth, Wayne C., et al. *The Craft of Research* (4th ed.). University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Eaglestone, Robert. *Doing English: A Guide for Literature Students*. Routledge, 2017.*

McComiskey, Bruce (Ed.). *English Studies: An Introduction to the Discipline(s)*. NCTE, 2006.

Assignments: Overview

Here is the weighted breakdown of each major assignment and their subcomponents in the course:

Reading Responses   **25%**

    Response 1: 5%

    Response 2: 5%

    Response 3: 5%

    Response 4: 5%

    Response 5: 5%

Professional Portfolio Project   **25%**

    Statement of Identity: 3%

    Revision Plan: 7%

    Two Revised Papers: 8%

    Résumé/CV: 5%

    LinkedIn Profile: 2%

Research Project   **50%**

    Research Proposal: 5%

    Research Outline: 5%

    Final Research Project: 25%

    Presentation: 15%

Assignments: Descriptions

All major assignments must be submitted in order to pass the class.

Reading Responses. There will be five equally-weighted reading responses throughout the course that involve response to and reflection on the readings. These responses will be a minimum of 500 words each and uploaded to Canvas; prompts will be given in class.

Professional Portfolio Project. Students will create a portfolio with the instructor's guidance that includes examples of work they have completed in their English courses. At the end of the semester, students will have a final online portfolio that will be ready to serve them as they depart Old Dominion and pursue further goals–whatever they may be. All portfolios should contain:

1. Statement of your professional or academic identity and career goals (250 words, to serve as the home/about page).
2. Revision plan, submitted directly to the instructor, outlining the rationale behind the two papers or projects being selected and how the revisions being made are directed at a specific audience or with a specific purpose in mind (500 words).
3. Two revised papers or projects from your undergraduate coursework that are relevant to your career goals. Each paper or project should be foregrounded with a 250-word overview of its relevance and/or features written for a public audience.
4. Updated résumé or curriculum vitae (CV), embedded into the website.
5. Link to a LinkedIn profile, which should be filled out with educational, volunteer, and workplace experiences as well as an up-to-date photo and contact information.

Research Project. The goal of this research project is for students demonstrate their comprehensive understanding of a field by completing a substantial project that showcases their ability to conduct in-depth research and/or apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations. This project could be a(n):

- comparative analysis of two major authors from different literary periods
- critical examination of a specific literary genre or movement
- rhetorical analysis of a social or political issue
- creative writing project with a thematic focus
- journalistic investigation into a local issue
- research paper using archival methods on a lesser-known text or author
- community-based research project involving rhetoric and/or technical communication
- user experience design research solving a specific communication problem
- oral history research project on a topic relevant to the region or a community
- classroom-based or pedagogical research on curriculum and instruction
- corpus-based linguistics research around a particular genre, topic, or community

This is not an exhaustive list, of course. Just know that the topic should align with your goal after graduation (e.g., applying to graduate school for literature or linguistics, seeking a technical writing job, etc.).

This original research project might build off of or extend research you've done in a previous class. The type of research you'll be doing will depend on your disciplinary home and projected professional identity. Ideally, this research project will have you solve or address a problem in your field of study. All research projects will be scaffolded, with the assignment broken down into the following components:

1. Research proposal: 500-word proposal of your project to include your research question, your intended methods, your rationale for selecting the topic, and three relevant sources.

2. Research outline: Two-page outline of the nature, structure, and approach to the research project. This could be an organization to a formal paper, an overview of a piece of nonfiction, or an outline of a more empirical research study.

3. Final research project: This can take more forms. The key here is to generate at least 12 pages of high-quality content. For a literary analysis, this means that the paper would be 12 pages in length. For a user experience research project, this means that the final recommendation report and methods should total 12 pages. For a poetry collection, this means that for 2 pages of poetry there should be 10 pages outlining the research that went into the composition. And so on.

4. Presentation: On the final day of the semester, students will participate in a public symposium open to any and all English students and faculty. Students' presentations could take the form of a poster, a paper read aloud, a poetry reading, or a formal PowerPoint presentation. The presentation format should be fitting for the type of research being presented.

Schedule

Readings and due dates are subject to change.

Date	Topic	Readings	Due
1/16	What Can I Do With This Major?	——	——
1/23	What is the History of "English" Studies?	*ES*[2] (pp. 1-26)	Response 1
1/30	How Do We Integrate English Studies?	*ES* (pp. 26-52)	Response 2
2/6	How Should I Prepare for the Market?	*ES* (choose one of Chs. 1-6)	Response 3
2/13	How Do I Curate a Portfolio?	*BIAW* (pp. 104-109)	Revision Plan
2/20	What Problems Can I Help Solve?	*CoR* (pp. 1-8, 27-64)	Research Proposal
2/27	How Can I Enter a Conversation?	*CoR* (pp. 105-140)	Research Outline
3/6	How Do I Write a Cover Letter?	——	Response 4
3/13	*No Class*	——	——
3/20	What Is Guiding My Revision?	*DE* (pp. 129-156)	——
3/27	What Is My Identity?	*CoR* (pp. 173-213)	Response 5
4/3	"Can You Add Me to LinkedIn?"	——	Professional Portfolio
4/10	What Have We Not Talked About Yet?	——	——
4/17	How Can I Best Present My Research?	——	Research Project
4/24	What Am I Doing Here?	*CoR* (pp. 214-268)	Presentation

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[2] *ES*: English Studies: An Introduction to the Discipline(s).
BIAW: Bad Ideas About Writing.
DE: Doing English: A Guide for Literature Students.
CoR: The Craft of Research.