

the golden guide to

The Honors Program in English at Cornell

Opportunities for independent critical and scholarly work

Completing the English major with Honors allows students to do independent study on a topic they choose, to work closely with a faculty adviser, and to write a researched, critical paper of at least 40 pages. Students almost always find the honors thesis an incalculably satisfying project and a

memorable achievement. Here and elsewhere, many graduate school applicants submit part of their Honors thesis as a sample of their critical, scholarly work and of their future promise as scholars. Students preparing for other career paths also write theses in their senior year. When combined with the opportunity to work closely with faculty, to get a real taste of the pleasures of advanced work, to discuss work with other honors students, work on the honors thesis places students in an intellectual community, the memories of which they may well carry into future work and into other intellectual communities

Successfully completing an Honors essay will require sustained interest, ability, diligence, and enthusiasm—all of which qualities are in large supply among Cornell English Majors.

Sophomore year

- If you have a strong record, apply to the Honors Program spring semester. Application forms and program information are in the department office. A minimum of 3.5 in the major courses is required.
- Confer with the Director of Honors and receive preliminary acceptance to the Honors Program.
- Pre-enroll for English 4910 or plan to take English 4920 in spring of junior year. If you plan to

study abroad one semester of the junior year, you should take 4910 or 4920 in the semester you are studying at Cornell. If you are spending the academic year abroad, you will need to take English 4910 or 4920 in one semester of your sophomore year or in the first semester of your senior year, keeping in mind that in your first semester of the senior year you will also be enrolled in English 4930.

Junior year


- Take English 4910 or 4920, the Honors Seminar. While the focus of the Honors Seminar is on the subject matter, one aim of the seminar is to acquaint students with methods of study and research to help them write their senior Honors essay. The seminar will require a substantial essay that requires knowing how to incorporate evidence and critical material effectively, how to quote and cite properly, and, of course, knowing how to develop an argument. Your choice of seminar need not determine or influence the topic of your senior Honors essay. Put another way, students need not take an Honors Seminar that applies directly to the subject of their Honors essay work.
- Look over the papers you have written in your English courses; identify your interests; think about work you have done well in the past and about what work you would enjoy pursuing for two semesters. These suggestions should help you identify your topic for the Honors essay and should help you think about the advisor with whom you would enjoy working. Some of the most successful

Honors essays have come out of course work—including the Honors Seminars.

- In April or early May, speak to faculty members who would be suitable advisors for your project, keeping in mind that your Honors essay advisor should be in residence both semesters. Ask for some suggestions for preparatory reading. Remember that when you pre-enroll for English 4930/4940, you must have the name and signature of your Honors essay advisor. (English 4930/4940 is a year-long, 8-credit course, for which you will get an “R” grade in the first semester and a letter grade for the 8 credits after the second semester.)
- Feel free at any time to consult the Director of Honors about appropriate advisors.
- Spend some time in the summer months reading primary texts and thinking about your topic, approach, and argument. If possible, be in occasional email contact with your advisor over the summer.

Senior year


- As soon as you return, consult with your Honors essay advisor about your topic, discuss requirements and procedures, and set up a schedule for regular meetings. If you have not yet pre-enrolled for English 4930—which should have happened already—you will need to do so with the name and signature of an Honors essay advisor.


 Set up and follow a schedule for your Honors essay work. Depending, of course, on

what you and your advisor agree to, it would be reasonable, for example, in the first semester (English 4930) to complete:


- a short prospectus or essay proposal
- a bibliography of available and relevant secondary or conceptual work on your topic;
- in some cases, an annotated bibliography of the work you wish to use, critique, and apply to your research.
- about 25–35 pages of writing which should be the basis of a draft

- If you have not already done so, peruse some of the past Honors essays available on the Department website.

 In the second term, while registered for English 4940, you will write the final draft. Your essay should be about 50 pages, but it can be a tad shorter or longer. Your advisor should see in chapter form at least a few drafts of the final version, and you should be submitting and revising under your advisor’s engaged supervision.

 Allow the last two weeks to edit and proofread your Honors essay. Please take care that it follows a style guide—either the MLA guide or the Chicago Manual of Style—in quotation, internal citation, footnotes or endnotes, bibliographical entries, etc. Please do not sabotage your own project by trying to do too much at the last minute and by not allowing time for refinement of ideas and execution.

- Have the Honors essay bound and submit it by the deadline in mid-April (or early November for those graduating in January). In determining honors (high honors, highest honors), the honors committee averages your g.p.a. in the major and the average of the two grades you receive from the readers of your Senior Honors Essay, one of whom will be your Honors essay advisor. The committee also considers your grades in other courses, especially in those related to your major. While applying to the honors program and writing an Honors essay is not a guarantee that you will be awarded honors in English, most of our students completing an Honors essay have been successful candidates for Honors.

 Enjoy the remainder of your final semester and graduate with Honors!

To make an appointment with the Director of Honors, please contact Darlene Flint at

dhf1@cornell.edu

or in the English Office 250 Goldwin Smith
9.00 am – 4.30 pm