

Department of English

In addition to this fact sheet, prospective students can find information about the department and its courses in the Course Catalog, available from the Office of Admissions, and on-line. Further information about English courses (including some online syllabi), faculty, and the various options for the English major are found at the department website:

www.oberlin.edu/english

English is the largest department in the college and enrolls more students than any other department. Each year about 100 students graduate with a major in English. However, there is no single profile of an Oberlin English major. Each student designs his or her own major within the department's flexible requirements with the help of a departmental advisor, making the best use of the department's varied course offerings according to his or her interests. All members of the department teach at all levels of the curriculum. The English Department at Oberlin is marked not only by a strong commitment to excellent teaching and scholarship within the traditional fields of English and American literature, but also by a strong involvement in **interdisciplinary study**. Many faculty are active in other departments and programs, such as Gender and Women's Studies, Cinema Studies, Comparative Literature, and Creative Writing; many courses in English draw widely for their content and pedagogy on these and other related disciplines such as cultural studies, art history, and linguistics.

First-year students interested in English normally take one of the many first-year seminars offered by the department on topics such as "Media and Meaning," "Fabulous Histories/Factual Fictions: How Literature and History Inform Each Other," "Crossing Borders: The Mysteries of Identity," "From Page to Stage," and many others. More titles and descriptions can be found in the course catalog, on the department website, or at the website for First-Year Seminars. First-year seminars focus on a wide range of genres, periods, and critical approaches, but they all hold in common certain features: close reading, analysis, attention to discussion and critical writing.

Other options for first-year students. First-year seminars in English are an excellent way to prepare for further work in the department, but there are other ways to begin. The English Department offers several lecture courses at the 100-level, larger than the First-Year seminars and geared primarily to non-majors, both first-years and others. For general knowledge of texts and culture, parallel to what students would get in English Department seminars, students might take introductory courses in related departments such as African American Studies, Classics, Comparative American Studies, Comparative Literature, Creative Writing, East Asian Studies, French and Italian, German and Russian, Hispanic Studies, Philosophy, Religion, Rhetoric & Composition, Romance Languages, or Gender and Women's Studies. Furthermore, to prepare for work in English beyond the 100 level, a student might take a course designated "Writing Intensive" or "Writing Certification" (there is a list of Writing Intensive and Writing Certification courses in the Course Catalog under "Rhetoric and Composition"; see the English Department section of the catalog for specific prerequisites for further work in English). Students with scores of 5 on Advanced Placement tests in either English Literature/Composition or English Language/Composition will receive 3 hours of credit and may enroll in 200-level English classes.

Courses beyond the first-year seminars are offered at three levels. **Introductory courses**, at the 200 level, are limited to 30 students and engage students in the discipline of English, including theoretical and methodological approaches to the processes of reading and writing. Some representative titles for these Gateway courses include "Contemporary Issues in Selected Shakespearean Drama," "Romantic Literature," "Approaches to African-American Humor and Irony," and "Coming to America."

Normally, a student will take two Gateway courses at the 200 level before moving on to **advanced** (300-level) courses, which are smaller (25 maximum) and more intensely focused. Some typical courses at the advanced level: "Domestic Violence in Early Modern Drama," "Technology and Contemporary American Culture," "Eighteenth-Century Fiction," "Contemporary Literary Theory," "Vladimir

Nabokov.” Courses at the introductory and advanced levels operate by a combination of discussion and lecture, depending on the instructor’s preference.

In their senior year, English majors must enroll in a **Senior Tutorial** (a small-group course focused on an individual project, leading to a substantial paper), a senior seminar, or the **Honors Program**. Honors involves a substantial research project culminating in a long essay (35 pages) and an oral defense. Recent honors students have written on such topics as Old English Riddles, Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1*, Native American narrative, language and value in Pound’s *Cantos*, Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, narrative structure in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, and Nabokov’s short fiction.

Members of the department also sponsor **Private Readings**, in which advanced students (juniors and seniors) can undertake study of an author or topic of their own choice, and **Winter Term** reading and writing projects of all kinds; in recent years, group projects have included “Grant Writing,” “Learning from Museums” and “After September 11th.” **The English major** takes a number of forms, but they all hold in common a basic concern with close reading, attention to methods of interpretation, effective critical writing, literary knowledge and breadth of experience with texts from a number of regions, periods, and genres. The standard English major comprises a minimum of 27 credit hours (about 8 courses) at the 200 level or higher, including at least 4 courses at the 300 level, and the Senior Tutorial. There are certain requirements for distribution of these courses by period (pre-1700, 1700-1900, and post-1900) and culture (American, British, and Diversity).

The department also offers **interdisciplinary majors**; based in the discipline of English, these **concentration majors** allow students to explore in some depth the relation of English with other fields. At present the concentration fields include African American Studies, Creative Writing, Theater and Drama, Gender and Women’s Studies, Modern Culture and Media, and American Literature and Culture. These programs require 21 credit hours in English and 15 credit

hours outside the department. Students can also use this model to design their own concentration majors.

What can you do with an English major? About 15-20% of Oberlin English majors go on to take Ph.D.’s and become college and university professors. In recent years Oberlin English majors have done graduate work at Yale, Virginia, Berkeley, Chicago, Cornell, Brown, Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Harvard, among other places. They have also gone on to teach at Chicago, Yale, Vassar, Williams, Tulane, and Michigan. Oberlin English majors also often go into secondary school teaching, both public and private. But English isn’t just for those who want to be English teachers. Oberlin English majors are accepted into advanced programs in other fields at a rate far above the national average. Recent Oberlin English majors have gone on to study business at Northwestern’s Kellogg School, East Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Public Health Administration at the University of Michigan, Political Theory at the London School of Economics, law at the University of Michigan, and medicine at the University of Minnesota. Oberlin English majors have gone into journalism and worked at the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, *Harper’s*, and *Time*, and they have also entered into publishing for companies such as Little, Brown. They have joined the worlds of electronic communications and software, public relations, business administration, and many fields of performing and creative arts. All of these students report that the creative and intellectual discipline, informed curiosity, and cultural understanding developed through the English major have stood them in good stead in their work after college, whatever field they have gone into.

English Department Faculty

JENNIFER BRYAN

(B.A. Williams College, 1992; Ph.D. UCLA, 1999) teaches courses in medieval literature and culture.

MARTHA COLLINS

(B.A. Stanford, 1962; Ph.D. Iowa, 1971) teaches courses in Creative Writing.

JAN COOPER

(B.A. Auburn, 1976; Ph.D. Iowa, 1986) teaches expository writing, southern U.S. literature, and issues in sexuality and language.

PATRICK DAY

(B.A. Oberlin, 1971; Ph.D. Chicago, 1976) teaches literary theory, film studies, 19th and 20th-century English and American fiction, and popular culture.

JED DEPPMAN

(B.A. Amherst, 1990; Ph.D. Wisconsin 1998) teaches courses in comparative literature and modernism.

PHYLLIS GORFAIN

(B.A. Butler, 1965; Ph.D. Berkeley, 1973) teaches Renaissance literature, especially Shakespeare, women's studies, and folklore.

DESALES HARRISON

(B.A. Yale University, 1990; M.A. Johns Hopkins University, 1991; Ph.D. Harvard University, 2002) teaches modern and contemporary poetry, and theories of mind.

JOHN HOBBS

(B.A. Carleton, 1962; Ph.D. Yale, 1967) teaches modern British and American literature, contemporary American poetry and fiction, poetry and mysticism.

GILLIAN JOHNS

(B.A. Slippery Rock, 1984; Ph.D. Temple, 2000) teaches African-American literature and topics in American cultural history and American regional and popular literature.

PAUL KELLEHER

B.A. Duke University, 1994; M.A. Princeton University, 1998; Ph.D. Princeton University, 2003) teaches 18th century British literature.

NICHOLAS JONES

(B.A. Harvard, 1967; Ph.D. Harvard, 1973) teaches British Romantic literature, Shakespeare, Milton, and topics in women's studies.

KATHERINE LINEHAN

(B.A. Chicago, 1965; Ph.D. Stanford, 1973) teaches the 19th-century English novel, women's studies, and children's literature.

WARREN LIU

(B.A. Berkeley, 1993; Ph.D. U Cal Berkeley, 2004) teaches courses in Comparative American ethnic literatures.

SCOTT MCMILLIN

(B.A. Michigan, 1983; Ph.D. Syracuse, 1992) teaches 18th- and 19th-century American literature and environmental studies.

ANURADHA NEEDHAM

(B.A. University of Delhi, 1971; Ph.D. Penn State, 1980) teaches Third World and postcolonial literature.

JOHN OLMSTED

(B.A. Western Ontario, 1964; Ph.D. Harvard, 1972) teaches 19th-century English literature, and interdisciplinary studies in 19th-century British art and literature.

JEFFREY PENCE

(B.A. Oberlin, 1988; Ph.D. Temple, 1998) teaches contemporary American literature, film studies, and literary theory.

GEOFFREY PINGREE

(B.A. Brigham Young, 1984; Ph.D. Chicago, 1996) teaches film history, theory, and production.

LEONARD PODIS

(B.A. Case Western, 1970; Ph.D. Case Western, 1975) teaches expository stylistics, linguistics, and modern American literature.

MAYUMI TAKADA

(B.A. Berkeley, 1994; Ph.D. U Cal Berkeley, 2004) teaches Asian-American literature and American ethnic literatures.

ANNE TRUBEK

(B.A. Oberlin, 1988; Ph.D. Temple, 1998) teaches courses in expository writing, American fiction, and the history of writing.

CAROL TUFTS

(B.A. Queens, 1968; Ph.D. Brown, 1975) teaches modern drama, comparative dramatic theory, and creative writing.

DAVID WALKER

(B.A. Oberlin, 1972; Ph.D. Cornell, 1979) teaches modern British and American poetry, drama, and fiction, creative writing, and such special topics as a course on Vladimir Nabokov.

SANDRA ZAGARELL

(B.A. City College of New York, 1965; Ph.D. Columbia, 1976) teaches Victorian literature, 19th- and 20th-century American literature, women's studies, and children's literature.

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