

ENGLISH M.A. GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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COMMENCING STUDY

Graduate study demands intellectual ambition, critical reflection, and above all a creative engagement with your education. Our program has only one required course, ENG 500 “Theory and Practice of English Studies.” It is your responsibility to consult with your professors and choose coursework, projects, and an exit option that will best meet your particular intellectual, personal, and professional goals. Because our program is so flexible, it can provide a multitude of opportunities, but you must be actively engaged to make the most of these. **This handbook will outline fundamental things you need to know about the program and offer helpful resources and suggestions about how to make the most of your education.**

OVERVIEW OF THE M.A. IN ENGLISH AT WIU

The Department of English offers graduate-level study in literature, writing, and cultural studies.

You will take courses in traditional and emerging literature, professional writing and editing, composition, new media, film, and popular culture. Through your course work, you will explore a broad range of literature, rhetoric, theory, and criticism. As you progress through coursework, you will define your interests, master powerful theoretical perspectives and research methodologies, and develop your scholarly and professional identities.

In the final “exit-option sequence,” you will work under the direction of a faculty committee to develop, complete, and present an ambitious project that makes a significant intellectual contribution. In consultation with your committee, you can choose between three types of exit-option projects:

- **Thesis:** the Thesis is a sustained work of scholarly research and argument on a specific topic. This is the most sustained and demanding intellectual work you can undertake as a graduate student, and writing a successful thesis confirms your expertise in your chosen research subject. Typically, thesis projects are between 40-60 pages, often divided into two or three chapters. Writing for the thesis differs from other writing you will do in its scholarly rigor and professionalism. Generally, it takes two semesters to complete a thesis. If you choose to conduct human subjects research, you will most certainly need two semesters, and might consider using the summer as well. The advantage of writing a thesis is its form as a publishable and portable document. Especially for those considering further graduate work, the thesis grounds your scholarly identity in a document that can serve as a writing sample, especially for academic jobs.
- **Comprehensive Exam:** the Comprehensive Exam is organized for broad reading rather than in-depth scholarly writing, and instead of producing and defending a large written argument, this option culminates in a written and oral examination supervised by your committee that establishes your expertise in your area. Because of the extraordinary focus and writing commitment demanded by the thesis, in some cases the comprehensive exam might well be a better option. For instance, while a

thesis project might investigate a particular novel, or even several works by different authors, the depth of research and the time needed to write would not allow for the kind of broad reading that is the heart of the directed readings. If your goal is to become an authority on the nineteenth-century American novel, for instance, the comprehensive exam would allow you to read 20, 30 major novels and supporting criticism (with annotated bibliography of at least 25 secondary sources). For working teachers in particular, this can be a powerful option that immediately impacts classroom practice. The content and the parameters of the Comprehensive Exam are developed in consultation with your committee. While reading is at the heart of this, writing assignments are always a part of the process, and include annotated bibliographies as well as short essays, notes, or other forms of writing.

- **Applied Research Project:** For some students, the most effective way to bring together their intellectual interests and their professional goals is through an Applied Research Project. Applied Research Projects include a research-based content part with a reading list of at least 25 secondary sources and annotated bibliographies that supports the student's learning to complete the Applied Research Project itself. Past students have produced varied projects including: creating a comprehensive writing style manual for a business; reviewing, redesigning, and implementing new assessment practices in a high school; creating a website devoted to the history of animation; working with digital media or film to produce a research-based content project.

Many students also earn credits with internships in teaching, professional writing, library science and other fields, gaining hands-on experience and making valuable professional connections.

UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH STUDIES TODAY: LITERATURE, WRITING, AND CULTURAL STUDIES

English was once thought of as primarily the study of British and American literary traditions. Today, however, English Studies is a vast, anarchic field of intellectual inquiry that includes a dizzying array of possibilities: the novel, drama, poetry, the essay, the short story, film, new media, text/image theory, composition studies, technical writing, linguistics, literary theory,

cultural studies, gender studies, ethnic studies, disability studies, ecocriticism, queer theory, postcolonial literatures and theory, publishing, the history of the book, rhetoric, philology, and of course all of the national literatures written in English anywhere in the world. Even this partial list gives only a vague idea of the possibilities, and as a graduate student in English one of the great challenges and delights is exploring these areas and defining yourself as an intellectual within them.

Early in your program, you want to explore. Take coursework in different areas, and meet as many professors as you can. Find out what they teach and what they research. You don't need to make concrete choices about a focus until you approach 18 s.h. of coursework (see Timeline), but by then you should find yourself gravitating to a particular area of study. In our program, a coherent course of study could take many forms, but students usually focus their work on one of the following concentrations: literature, writing, or cultural studies.

LITERATURE

Intense study of the traditions, forms, and interconnections of literature, usually with an emphasis on a particular geographical place, time period, genre, or author.

Literature is most often understood primarily as imaginative writing: poetry, plays, short stories, and novels. These forms are at the heart of literary studies, but literature also includes many other forms, from non-fiction essays and philosophical arguments to works of history and biography that have become key to understanding a tradition. There are also emerging literatures, such as slam-poetry, flash-fiction, and even the interactive narratives of video gaming. In the M.A. program, you will explore both traditional and emerging literatures in your coursework.

The study of literature always means wrestling with questions of meaning and interpretation. Literary theory and criticism provide the conceptual and historical backgrounds you need to make sense of the forms and traditions you are reading. ENG 500 will introduce you to some of the most important theoretical and critical approaches, and as you move through your coursework you will constantly be learning more about theory and criticism while you develop your ability to apply theory in your own critical writing.

The literature faculty at Western have deep expertise in British, American, World, and Emerging literatures. You should familiarize yourself with the faculty and their work. You can find out more here: <http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/english/faculty-literature.php>

THEORY AND CRITICISM

Theory comprises many different conceptual frameworks for interpretation while criticism applies these interpretations to particular texts.

WRITING STUDIES

RHETORIC

Study of the history and theories of persuasion, argument, and human communication in visual, written, and oral form since ancient times and analysis of how particular texts (broadly defined) function within their discourse communities and contexts and how we construct our worlds and meaning through language; also includes modern subfields informed by various critical approaches such as feminist rhetoric, visual rhetoric, environmental rhetoric, and rhetoric of science.

COMPOSITION

Research and theory in the history and practice of writing and writing pedagogy, especially at the post-secondary level, with scholars focusing on the writing process, writing center studies, English Language Learners, writing across the curriculum, writing in the disciplines, basic writing, conventions and genres of writing, writing and technology, literacy studies, and more, as well as different critical approaches informed by such fields as ecocriticism, cognitive psychology, and feminist studies.

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

The study and practice of conveying written, visual, and oral information to a specific audience, including attention to usability, accessibility, style, conventions, genres, and media for delivery; areas of study in technical communication might also include internet studies, digital and new media studies, graphic design, visual rhetoric, etc.

CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches to interpreting the meaning of cultural phenomena, from the texts of popular culture to practices of everyday life. Cultural critics employ the sophisticated methods of literary analysis in concert with theories of power and the perspectives and techniques of other disciplines—particularly history and sociology.

Cultural critics often take as their subjects popular culture texts including music, film, and television. However, cultural critics might also write about architecture, fashion, food, emerging new media, etc. Cultural critics are often just as interested in the subcultures associated with particular texts, or with practices of everyday life.

Some of the graduate faculty specialize in cultural studies, and many of the faculty at Western have a secondary emphasis in cultural

studies: <http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/graduate/faculty.php>

INITIAL MEETING WITH THE DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN ENGLISH (DGSE)

After you have been accepted to the program, you must make an appointment to speak to your faculty advisor, who is always the Director of Graduate Studies in English (DGSE). Try to schedule this meeting via email during the first week of the semester. The Director will help you understand program requirements and help you develop choices of courses and options that will most help meet your goals for the degree. Throughout your time in the program, the DGSE's office is a resource to help you understand any aspect of your program. Feel free to email the Director anytime, or to drop by office hours as you have questions and concerns.

GRADUATE STUDENT LIFE

For more information and a list of resources and opportunities, visit http://www.wiu.edu/graduate_studies/programs_of_study/english_profile.php.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A GRADUATE STUDENT?

Acquiring the M.A. degree is arguably the most intellectually transformative experience you will ever have. In commencing graduate study, you become not a student but a scholar. You learn not only new materials and perspectives, but more importantly you learn how to produce new knowledge yourself.

Your expectations for yourself and your studies must be characterized by great ambition, seriousness, and depth. You should strive to transform yourself as a reader, writer, and scholar. At every moment, you should be working not to meet expectations, but to exceed them.

As a graduate student, you are no longer simply taking individual courses for grades and checking requirements off as you move toward the end of your program. More challengingly, you are now developing a coherent identity and skillset as an intellectual and scholar. As you move through the program, you are reading and writing your way into new futures.

Beyond excelling in your classes, you should be committed to contributing to the culture of the department with your professors and fellow graduate students by attending readings, lectures, colloquia, and presenting your own work along with your professors at the annual English Graduate Organization Conference (<http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/ego/index.php>).

READING AND WRITING AS A GRADUATE STUDENT

READING AS A GRADUATE STUDENT

Reading is the soul of English, and what distinguishes students of English from almost all other disciplines is our commitment to reading as a way of life. From your undergraduate degree, you

already have great skills as a reader. As a graduate student, you will develop your abilities as a critical reader, and you will also broaden your scope, taste, ambition, and habits of reading.

Reading assignments in an English graduate course can sometimes feel overwhelming. A literature course can often have weeks that ask students to read a novel that could run to six-hundred pages, in addition to the supporting critical articles. Then again, sometimes a reading assignment will be a short theoretical argument, but its difficulty will challenge your attention and demand new strategies of reading.

DEVELOPING A READING LIFE

1. **Make reading an essential part of your everyday life practice.** The most effective readers are those that integrate reading into their life practice in pleasurable and sustainable ways. Instead of seeing reading as something that interrupts your life, talk to other readers about ideas to make reading an integrated part of your everyday routines. With the demands of teaching, writing, or working, this can be challenging, but it is essential.
2. **Develop strategies to focus.** Different kinds of texts, different goals, different classes, projects, or interests can all demand different approaches to reading. All of your professors and your peers have spent time developing self-conscious strategies to grow as readers. For instance, Dr. Mark Mossman recalls that as an M.A. student he developed a habit of “late night and sometimes all-night reading,” but as a doctoral student he would “read very early in the morning.” In both, reading was a way of organizing the day. Finding the right places that make you a stronger reader is also key. Dr. Banash recalls that in graduate school he “would spend every morning reading for two to four hours in a noisy coffee shop, and this was productive because alone at that table there were no distractions from the book. I was free from the demands of media and friends. I found that even the noise around me helped me focus.” You might find that different spaces help you focus differently, from the silences of a library to depths of a favorite chair.
3. **Experiment with techniques for engagement.** Professor Amy Mossman recalls that as a graduate student, “I sometimes set a timer to get through X pages in X minutes. When the timer went off, I would skim ahead and start the next section. I always wrote notes and questions in my books, no exceptions. For writing, I color-coded those notes.” While Mossman’s approach puts an emphasis on organization and the efficient use of time, Dr. Alisha White takes a different approach that is closer to a commonplace book, explaining that for all her reading, she “wrote notes for annotated bibliographies of each class. My notes were usually mind maps or quick sketches of understandings and associations connecting content from other readings, classes, and experiences.” While different ways of taking notes is one technique you can experiment with, these days, technology is changing reading radically. A computer or a Kindle can read a novel or a critical article aloud to you while you are driving or doing the dishes. Alternating between screens and paper can change your relationship to the text. There has never been more opportunity to experiment with techniques of reading.

4. **Join or make your own reading groups.** Every semester, students and professors create reading groups in which we read without the pressure of grades and other assignments. Find out about reading groups, join one or two, or consider creating your own and inviting your peers and professors to join. A reading group doesn't need to be big—even just two is enough. For your professors, reading groups beyond coursework were a key part of their graduate education. For instance, Merrill Cole recalls that when he was in graduate school, “students who shared an interest agreed to read material together and discuss it as a group. I participated in a Marxist study group, which meant I read a lot more of *Capital* than I would have on my own.” Reading groups can be a way of exploring new intellectual interests, taking on a difficult text that is too big for a class, or just experimenting and exploring.

READING BEYOND COURSES

Dr. Rebekah Buchanan often says that one “cannot teach writing well without cultivating a writing life of one’s own.” The same is true of reading. The goal of graduate education is to move from being a student to being a scholar, which is to say from primarily consuming knowledge to becoming a producer of new knowledge. Successful scholars are often identifiable by the originality and ambition of their reading, and Dr. Bill Knox recalls that as a graduate student working on his exams and thesis, he did not expect the professors to choose everything for him: “I was as proactive as possible developing my reading lists with my professors. By not leaving matters entirely to faculty, I demonstrated my background and developed a more personally satisfying set of readings.” Reading new forms and in new ways on your own can be transformative. Dr. Everett Hamner recalls that “after finishing my PhD dissertation, I went to Daydreams Comics in Iowa City and got the owner to spend a half hour giving me a tour of places in independent graphic narrative that race, sexuality, religion, and/or science were engaged with particular depth. I bought a bunch of things and then let myself have a couple weeks to explore it and other examples from the library before I did anything for immediate professional purposes again.”

WRITING AS A GRADUATE STUDENT

Graduate student writing is high-stakes. In a graduate class, a major portion of your grade may be dependent upon one seminar paper, which requires you to synthesize theory and scholarship to make an original, publishable contribution to English Studies. Much of the writing you will produce during your graduate career will serve as materials for future job searches. In other words, the seminar papers and conference presentations you produce during your time in the program will serve as the foundation for your career. Most important, learning to write as a scholar in English Studies involves taking on a new identity; thus, the writing you produce will often involve acts of negotiation and conflicts of identity as you take on a new way of being in the world.

Because graduate student writing is high-stakes, it is important for you to develop effective work habits to become a productive, scholarly writer. What follows are five habits of productive scholarly writers that will help you become a successful graduate student in this program if developed early in your graduate career. (Much of this material was taken from Robert Boice's "Work Habits of Productive Scholarly Writers: Insights from Research in Psychology.")

1. **Spend as Much Time on Preliminaries as on Writing.** Robert Boice notes that "Exemplary writers surprise their peers with their efficient solutions to finding imagination. They not only begin writing early and informally, they also work with an ever-higher level of planfulness: exemplars become active collectors and filers of information that could relate to their writing" (223). We cannot stress the importance of actively collecting and efficiently filing information that can relate to your writing and research interests. Because you will be doing an overwhelming amount of reading, both inside and outside your courses, you need to find a way to highlight how what you read may relate to your research interests and file it so that you can efficiently find it when you need it for your writing.
2. **Work in Brief, Daily Sessions.** Boice writes, "How can academics, who have many other responsibilities, manage to write more? Two factors are essential: working daily and keeping sessions brief. That fact is that *brief, daily sessions end up taking less time and producing more output* than sporadic outbursts of daily writing" (221). Do not buy into the belief that you will write over the weekend or during Thanksgiving break. You won't. Even if you do, the difficulties of trying to master a craft that is alien to you may stymie writing. We encourage you to work in brief, daily sessions. This may require you to carve out time to write each day. This can be extremely difficult, but if something is important, you will make time for it.
3. **Stop.** Boice highlights the detrimental effects of binge writing: "When writing sessions grow into marathons (or "binges"), writers are unlikely to work again for a while. When we have trouble stopping, we tend to tire ourselves out. Writing done under fatigue tends to be confusing and overdone for readers. . . . When writers binge, they not only run overtime (into time needed for other activities), they also work with a self-focus and rushed intensity that discourages rest or revision. With timely stopping, writers develop an important kind of tolerance: a tolerance for ambiguity." Binge writing the night before a paper is due will not work anymore. The demands of graduate student writing are just too complex. We encourage you to give yourself time to rest and think so that you can engage in the deep revision often needed in writing at the graduate level.
4. **You Are Not Finished Once You Turn It In.** Your writing should move beyond the boundaries of the classroom. That is, the writing you do for your instructors matters now, and you should seek opportunities to share your work at local, regional, and national conferences or to publish in appropriate journals. A seminar paper for a graduate class requires revision before it will be suitable for publication, so continue to work with your instructors in developing your writing projects and seek out professional development workshops sponsored by the department.

5. **Recognize That Writing Is a Social Act.** The image of an author writing alone is a romantic notion that will get you into trouble. Disciplinarity is socially constructed. By extension, writing is a social act. Seek out opportunities to talk often with your instructors during office hours or by appointment. Talk with your fellow graduate students formally or informally about your writing. Take opportunities to present your writing at department events, such as the EGO Conference. These opportunities to talk will help you work through the complex ideas you will be struggling with in your writing.

FULL-TIME STUDENTS

Full-time students can complete the degree in four semesters, generally taking 9 hours each semester. Teaching Assistants take only 6 hours a semester but are still considered full-time and can complete the degree in two years by taking advantage of summer tuition waivers (available to Teaching and Graduate Assistants) to complete some degree requirements during the summer.

PART-TIME STUDENTS

Over half the students in our program are part time, taking one or two classes per semester. By taking just one class each semester, a part-time student can complete the program in six years (the maximum time allowed). Typically, by taking an occasional summer course and doing the exit option in a single semester, part-time students can finish the program in four years.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students have additional requirements and forms to fill out. International students are also eligible for assistantships. It is *imperative* that international students attend the international graduate student orientation and work closely with the Center for International Studies as well as the DGSE. For more information, visit:

http://www.wiu.edu/international_studies/

ONE PROGRAM, TWO CAMPUSES

Faculty and students work hard on both the Macomb and Quad Cities (QC) campuses to exchange ideas and work together in a variety of ways. Courses are sometimes offered through CODEC, a distance learning technology that allows students on one campus to participate via live audio and television screen with classmates and faculty on the other campus. Thus, you may be taking a class with a professor and students in Macomb while in a QC campus classroom, or vice versa.

Faculty from both campuses are eager to work with students, regardless of physical location, and

make an effort to visit their non-resident campus for guest lectures and social events.

Thus, regardless of your resident campus, we encourage you to get to know the students and faculty to the north or south of you. You can find links to faculty bios from the department directory: <http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/graduate/faculty.php>.

ENGLISH GRADUATE ORGANIZATION (EGO)

The English Graduate Organization is, as the name indicates, an organization whose focus is on English graduate students. The organization meets once a week throughout the school year to plan and discuss upcoming events, allow students an opportunity to share thesis work with peers and faculty, and cater to other needs of the English graduate students. The EGO Conference is a graduate conference the English Graduate Organization plans and funds every fall semester during which students have the opportunity to present papers they have been working on and gain experience in the conference setting. Students are highly encouraged to take part in the conference. To learn more about the EGO and its collaboration with the WIU Sigma Tau Delta, visit the website: <http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/ego/>.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ENGLISH AND THE ARTS SOCIETY (IDEAS)

Like the Macomb students in EGO, QC campus students have a community for engaging with faculty and presenting their work. IDEAS is open to all students at the QC campus, including English as well as Liberal Arts and Sciences majors and others. IDEAS meets regularly and like EGO, is focused on facilitating opportunities for students and faculty to come together for the exchange of ideas and to share their work, as well as take part in other activities of interest to the humanities, such as creative writing workshops, study groups, and book clubs. It also collaborates with EGO for events, such as the EGO Conference, and with other outside organizations. To learn more, visit http://www.wiu.edu/qc/student_life/student_activities/ideas.php.

DEVELOPING YOUR PLAN OF STUDY

The Master of Arts degree in English requires individual focus. Students will write a “Plan of Study” when accepted to the program, and will work with their mentors and the DGSE to keep their plans up-to-date. The departmental Plan of Study will supplement other forms required by the School of Graduate Studies. A sample Plan of Study can be found in the appendix.

THE CATALOG AND THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES WEBSITE

Complete information about course requirements, exit options, and more is available in the Graduate Catalog. You can consult printed copies distributed by the School of Graduate Studies, or you can read it online at the School of Graduate Studies website along with forms and other vital resources: http://www.wiu.edu/graduate_studies/.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

I. Core Course: 3 s.h.

ENG 500 Theory and the Practice of English Studies (3)

II. Electives: 21 s.h.

Approved coursework in English to complement undergraduate courses taken, to cultivate the focus outlined in the Plan of Study, and to total at least 30 s.h.

It is recommended that no more than 9 hours of coursework be taken at the 400G level.

Up to 6 hours may be taken from ENG 620, 622, and graduate courses in other departments.

III. Exit option: 6 s.h.

- a. Option I: ENG 670 Applied Research Project (6)
- b. Option II: ENG 680 Comprehensive Exam (6)
- c. Option III: ENG 690 Thesis (6)

TOTAL PROGRAM: 30 s.h.

ENGLISH 500 THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ENGLISH STUDIES

ENG 500 is the only required course in our program. It seeks to provide context and preparation to excel in every other course you will take by grounding you in the norms of the discipline, particularly for writing and research. You should take this course as soon as you enter the program, and absolutely within your first 9 s.h.

CHOOSING YOUR ELECTIVES

Our program provides you with great flexibility in choosing courses. Making effective choices is largely a matter of clarifying your own intellectual and professional goals. During your first semester, you will work with the DGSE to choose courses. After this, you can largely make these choices yourself, but you should do so in light of your goals, and you must receive approval from the DGSE.

As a rule of thumb, the graduate faculty believe that you will have the most rigorous and transformative intellectual experiences in English courses at the 500 level. However, in some circumstances, you may find opportunities in other kinds of courses, including graduate courses in other departments, “G” courses, independent studies, and internships. Up to 6 hours may be taken from ENG 620, 622, and graduate courses in other departments.

400G COURSES

Often simply called “G” courses, these are 400-level undergraduate courses that you can take for graduate credit by doing work that rises to the level of graduate coursework—they require far more extensive readings and more ambitious writing than what is required of the undergraduates.

Though in particular circumstances you may need to take a 400G course, the graduate faculty usually will not sign off on a degree plan that includes more than 9 s.h. of 400G.

ENG 620 INDEPENDENT STUDY

In general, the graduate faculty feel that you will have a stronger experience in 500-level coursework with your peers. However, if your intellectual goals cannot be met through a regularly offered course, an independent study may be an option.

Once you’ve received approval from the DGSE, you will need to find a faculty member willing to work with you on your project. Together you and the faculty member will write the formal proposal for the independent study and submit the form to the DGSE.

ENG 622 INTERNSHIP

Developing your professional goals can be an incredibly important part of your degree, and the graduate faculty encourages students to find or create internships that develop your skills. For instance, internships that focus on professional writing, library sciences, or other subjects can be crucial to future success. Internships are especially recommended for those students interested in non-academic careers and require. To register, you must first complete an Internship Proposal (or “Plan”) (ENG 622 form) and it must be approved by the DGSE. Samples of Internship “Plans” can be found in the Appendix.

COURSES IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS

Given the particular focus of your project, in some circumstances a graduate course in another department can make a vital contribution to your studies. However, you should always consult the DGSE before you register for a course outside the ENG designation.

CHOOSING YOUR EXIT OPTION

The exit options represent the final and arguably most important part of your degree. They comprise the final 6 s.h. you will take as a student in the program, and they demand all the skills you have learned in your coursework. They represent a tremendous opportunity and challenge to focus, specialize, and develop substantial scholarly expertise in a particular topic. The exit option can take three forms: thesis; comprehensive exam; or an applied research project.

THE THESIS

The thesis is a sustained work of scholarly research and argument on a specific topic. This is the

most sustained and demanding intellectual work you can undertake as a graduate student, and writing a successful thesis confirms your expertise in your chosen research subject.

Typically, thesis projects are between 40-60 pages, often divided into two or three chapters. Writing for the thesis differs from other writing you will do in its scholarly rigor and professionalism. Generally, it takes two semesters to complete a thesis. If you choose to conduct human subjects research, you will most certainly need two semesters, and might consider using the summer as well. The advantage of writing a thesis is its form as a publishable and portable document. Especially for those considering further graduate work, the thesis grounds your scholarly identity in a document that can serve as a writing sample, especially for academic jobs.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

The Comprehensive Exam option is organized for broad reading rather than in-depth scholarly writing, and instead of producing and defending a large written argument, this option culminates in a written and oral examination supervised by your committee that establishes your expertise in your area. Because of the extraordinary focus and writing commitment demanded by the thesis, in some cases the comprehensive exam might well be a better option. For instance, while a thesis project might investigate a particular novel, or even several works by different authors, the depth of research and the time needed to write would not allow for the kind of broad reading that is the heart of the comprehensive exam. If your goal is to become an authority on the nineteenth-century American novel, for instance, the comprehensive exam would allow you to read 20, 30 major novels and supporting criticism (with annotated bibliographies of at least 25 secondary sources). For working teachers in particular, this can be a powerful option that immediately impacts classroom practice. The content and the parameters of the Comprehensive Exam are developed in consultation with your committee. While reading is at the heart of this, writing assignments are always a part of the process, and include annotated bibliographies as well as short essays, notes, or other forms of writing.

THE APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT

For some students, the most effective way to bring together their intellectual interests and their professional goals is through an Applied Research Project. The Applied Research Projects includes a research-based content part with a reading list of at least 25 secondary sources (and annotated bibliographies) supporting the student's learning to complete the Applied Research Project itself. Past students have produced varied projects including: creating a comprehensive writing style manual for a business; reviewing, redesigning, and implementing new assessment practices in a high school; creating a website devoted to the history of animation; working with digital media or film to produce a research-based content project.

FORMING AND MANAGING YOUR EXIT-OPTION COMMITTEE

It is the student's responsibility to form a committee, and there are many issues to negotiate that can impact the success of your exit option. For any of the options, you will need a faculty director and two faculty readers. This committee will guide your work along the way, suggest resources, and ask for revisions; at the end of your project you will defend your work before this committee. Signatures from all committee members are required on an approval page to indicate you have passed your defense and completed your exit option. The forms can be found here: <http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/grad/resources.php>

The faculty director is the most important member of the committee, and the first person you need to identify. Your director should have expertise in the field you will research and should also be a faculty member with whom you work well. To find the right director, you should get to know the entire faculty well, talk with them about their research, and tell them about your own interests and goals.

Once you have identified the faculty member you feel would be the best director, you need to ask them to direct your work. This usually involves scheduling a meeting and having a lengthy conversation (though for students at a distance, email exchanges and phone calls can work as well). Your potential director needs to assess their own expertise in relation to your project, their other teaching, research, and advising commitments, and how they feel about working with you. If a faculty member cannot work with you for any number of potential reasons, they will often suggest another likely director.

Once you have a director, discuss with them the constitution of the rest of the committee. Their input is vital to creating a cohesive and effective committee that can best help you succeed. At that point, you can approach other faculty members about serving as readers.

As you work on your exit option, be sure that you have clear expectations about assignments, drafts, and other matters with your committee. Be sure to meet with your director regularly, and provide your readers regular updates about your progress.

THE EXIT-OPTION PROPOSAL

In consultation with your director, you will need to write and file a proposal before you can register for hours in the exit-option you have chosen. This document (Exit Option Proposal form for ENG 670, 680 or 690) will define your topic, timeline, expectations, and more.

THE THESIS AND DEFENSE

The thesis defense comprises a presentation of your project followed by questions about your thesis work. The committee may ask you about any aspect of your work, and will particularly hope to see that you speak about your project with depth, confidence, and authority.

For guidelines on preparing your thesis, visit the School of Graduate Studies website and download their “Guidelines for Preparation and Submission of Electronic/Non-electronic Theses and Electronic Dissertations” at http://www.wiu.edu/graduate_studies/thesis_and_dissertation/thesis_dissertation_guidelines.pdf

THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

This is a written exam followed by an oral exam. You will work with your committee on a reading list and on developing exam questions.

THE APPLIED PROJECT

For the applied research project, there is an oral “defense” following the written section.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

FILING THE DEGREE PLAN

The official degree plan is not the same thing as the Plan of Study you will work out with the DGSE. The degree plan is one of the official exit documents required by the School of Graduate Studies for your graduation. You can see the blank form in the appendix or download it here: http://www.wiu.edu/graduate_studies/current_students/forms/dp.pdf

The School of Graduate Studies likes to see a degree plan filed when you have taken between 9 and 15 hours of credit, but **we suggest that you wait until the semester you plan to graduate.** This is because you must file a petition for every change you want to make on your degree plan, and the Master's degree in English at WIU is so flexible that it is extremely difficult to map out your degree so early in your program.

When it's time to submit your degree plan, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- You must list all courses you've taken, with the instructor and the grade. Don't worry about grades for courses you are currently taking; the School of Graduate Studies will fill them in at the end of the semester.

- Check the requirements for your degree in the catalog that was current when you began taking graduate classes to be sure you have met all requirements.
- Requirements change from time to time, and when they do, you have the option to fulfill the requirements of either the catalog you began with or the catalog you're finishing under. Be sure to consult your advisor if you have any questions about this.
- Fill in all the information requested at the top of the form.
- Fill in the Total Semester Hours box.
- The form does *not* require your thesis director's signature, merely his or her name.
- The form *does* require your signature.
- When you've completed the form, **make a photocopy for your files**. Then give it to the DGSE, who will pass it along to the Graduate Committee for their signatures. The DGSE will then forward it to the School of Graduate Studies.

If at any time during this process you have questions, please consult the DGSE.

APPLYING FOR GRADUATION

- During your final semester, you will need to file an Application for Graduation with the School of Graduate Studies. This form can be found on their website: http://www.wiu.edu/graduate_studies/current_students/forms/clear.pdf. A copy is also in the appendix. You must submit your application to the School of Graduate Studies by **March 10** for spring graduation; **June 10** for summer; and **October 10** for fall. Also remember to fill out the [Alumni Register Form](#) (located in dropdown box on STARS).

If you are a thesis student, please upload your thesis to ProQuest no later than Friday before finals. For electronic submission instructions, please visit:

http://www.wiu.edu/graduate_studies/thesis_and_dissertation/submission.php.

If have indicated that you will be participating in the Spring Macomb commencement ceremony, find information about the ceremony here:

http://www.wiu.edu/graduate_studies/commencement/

TIMELINE

Below is a timeline to help you track your progress through the program. While you may not meet each requirement or goal as it is outlined below, this suggests what you should hope to accomplish at each stage of your studies.

Hours	Requirements	Goals
0-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meet with DGSE ● Take ENG 500 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meet as many faculty as possible ● Join EGO ● Define your intellectual goals ● Define your professional goals
9-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue regular coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Present a paper at the EGO Conference ● Discuss possible exit options with faculty ● Apply for awards to travel for conference presentations or research
18-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Choose faculty director for exit option ● Assemble exit-option committee ● Write exit-option proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assemble Job Search Materials or Applications for further Graduate Study
24-30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● File degree plan ● Apply for Graduation ● Complete and defend exit option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Publish a section of your thesis ● Give a talk based on your projects

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

For complete, up-to-date information on assistantships, visit the School of Graduate Studies website at: http://www.wiu.edu/graduate_studies/prospective_students/gainfo.php. Graduate Assistants receive a waiver of tuition (upon receipt of a signed contract) for the period of appointment plus a maximum of one summer session adjacent to (preceding or following) the employment period. If eligible, the summer tuition waiver is automatically applied for the summer following the end of the contract period; students must notify the School of Graduate Studies at the time of signing a fall contract if they choose to use it the preceding summer. The waiver does not include insurance costs or student fees. Tuition waivers may be revoked if the assistant does not fulfill at least two months of the regular contract.

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS (TA) and TEACHING SUPPORTING ASSISTANTSHIPS (TSA)

Teaching Assistantships (TA) and Teaching Support Assistantships (TSA) are available to full-time Macomb campus students on a semester-by-semester basis. The TA work involves teaching one or two sections of English 180 (the basic first-year writing course at WIU) per semester. New TAs are required to take English 580, Teaching Assistant Colloquium, the first semester of their assistantship. TAs are required to attend orientation the week before fall classes begin. The TSA work involves working in the University Writing Center as a writing consultant with students across a variety of disciplines and academic levels. TSAs are also required to attend orientation the week before fall classes begin.

ASSISTANTSHIP ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Students must meet all of the conditions listed below in order to hold an assistantship position:

1. Must have a Graduate Assistantship application, personal statement of goals, and three letters of recommendation on file in the School of Graduate Studies.
2. Must be a degree-seeking graduate student regularly accepted into a master's program. Probationary students, non-degree students, and second bachelor's degree students are not eligible to hold assistantship positions.
3. Must have a graduate GPA of at least 3.0 if graduate courses have been completed at the time the contract is initiated.
4. Must be enrolled in at least 9 s.h. of graduate coursework or undergraduate deficiencies if holding a Graduate or Research Assistant position for fall/spring; or at least 6 s.h. if holding a Teaching Assistant position for fall/spring; or 3 s.h. for summer (any position).

If it is the assistant's last semester of coursework (as verified by the degree plan), it is acceptable to be registered for only the remaining required courses.

5. Sign an assistantship contract and complete all required employment paperwork.

APPLYING FOR UNIVERSITY GRANTS

Full-time and part-time graduate students from Macomb and the Quad Cities may apply for a Graduate Student Research and Professional Development Award. This is designed to support student research projects and presentations, scholarly activities, and professional development opportunities. For more information, visit:

http://www.wiu.edu/graduate_studies/current_students/studentfund.php

DEPARTMENT AWARDS

There are a number of scholarships and awards available to full- and part-time graduate students from Macomb and the Quad Cities each year. These include:

Alfred J. Lindsey Memorial Scholarship	Graduate or undergraduate English major; 3.0 GPA undergraduate cumulative, major and minor/3.5 GPA graduate; at least junior standing; exceptional interest & skill in writing; must submit writing samples (10-page maximum)	\$1000
John Merrett Scholarship in British Literature	Graduate or undergraduate English major; at least junior standing; must submit an essay from WIU British Lit. course	\$750
Nai-Tung Ting English Scholarship	Graduate or undergraduate English major; 3.0 GPA undergraduate/3.5 GPA graduate; at least junior standing; preference given to a student from mainland China	\$750 renewable
The Wanninger Foundation Scholarship	Graduate or undergraduate English major whose education was interrupted by at least two years; 2.5 GPA undergraduate/3.0 GPA graduate	\$500 renewable

To apply for any of these scholarships, visit the Department Advising Office (Simpkins 130) or go to http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/scholarships_awards/scholarships.php to download the scholarship application form. Applications are accepted in Spring, usually early March.

The following departmental awards are for full- or part-time Macomb or Quad Cities graduate students only.

Walker Fellowship	Two awards which provide a summer stipend. Further information about the Walker award can be found at: http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/graduate/walker.php
Mahoney Research Fellowship	Awards which support travel for research. Further information about the Mahoney award can be found at: http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/graduate/mahoney.php
Conger Essay Award	Given to the best essay written by a graduate student in each academic year. Further information about the Conger award can be found at: http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/graduate/conger.php
Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award	Award for outstanding work as a graduate teaching assistant. Further information can be found at: http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/graduate/awards_aid.php

AFTER THE M.A.: CONSIDERATIONS, RESOURCES, ADVICE

Whether you are applying for jobs or further study, check out the Department's Student Resource page: <http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/graduate/resources.php>.

APPLYING FOR JOBS

One of the biggest misconceptions held by many graduate students is that an M.A. in English can only lead to a PhD, or at least that any other path is somehow less dignified or worthy. The reality is quite the opposite: English M.A.s are often well-qualified for work in publishing, journalism, advertising, government, social work, business communications, and other fields. Two of the best starting points for exploring such possibilities are found in the online versions of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Education*. For instance, at <http://chronicle.com/> it may be worth a regular glance at the "Job Center," and specifically the "Organizations Other Than Colleges" section. There is also a recently-discontinued but still invaluable blog by Sabine Hikel that deals with life after the ivory tower called "Leaving Academia" available here: <http://www.leavingacademia.com/>

Secondary teaching is another option worth considering. While this field involves its own hurdles—certification, ongoing professionalization requirements, etc.—the need for strong readers, writers, and communicators in U.S. and international classrooms is not going to disappear anytime soon. While doing an additional education degree or certificate may not be viable for everyone, it is not always necessary, either. Private schools often hire English teachers who already hold an M.A. but lack public school certification, particularly when they have had experience as university teaching assistants and can demonstrate professionalism and strong

personal communication skills. (See, for instance, the National Association for Independent

Schools website at <http://www.nais.org/>) Such a position can then provide opportunity for further certification that can open up public school options as well. Lastly, it should be noted that programs like Teach for America enable strongly qualified graduates—even people without M.A. degrees—to enter public school classrooms immediately and then earn the necessary certification over time.

APPLYING FOR FURTHER STUDY

For M.A. students who still believe that their vocations may lie within the academy, the most important advice we can offer is very simple: get informed, *very* informed. Even in those cases where a student's work is absolutely stellar, the life circumstances are right, and PhD program acceptances are forthcoming, the student needs to understand that the chances of coming out on the other end with a completed PhD and eventually a tenure-track job are very low. The average time to earn a degree for a PhD in English is around 8.5 years nationally, and although many departments are working to significantly lessen this total, the numbers are barely any better when individuals have completed a prior M.A. Presently less than half of the nation's *PhD graduates* succeed in finding a tenure-track job within two years of graduation—and the percentage is much worse in some subfields.

How to get informed? One of the best, most honest and direct series of recent columns on the prospects of getting a PhD in the humanities comes from the pen of William Pannacker (pen name Thomas H. Benton). His series of articles in *The Chronicle* have been somewhat controversial for their seeming cynicism, but he isn't making this stuff up. For starters, see the following:

- “School of Graduate Studies in the Humanities: Just Don't Go”
<http://chronicle.com/article/Graduate-School-in-the/44846>
- “Just Don't Go, Part 2” <http://chronicle.com/article/Just-Dont-Go-Part-2/44786/>
- “Dodging the Anvil” <http://chronicle.com/article/Dodging-the-Anvil/63274>
- “The Big Lie About ‘The Life of the Mind’”
<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Big-Lie-About-the-life-of/63937/>

For another perspective, check out James Mulholland's “Neither a Trap Nor a Lie”
<http://chronicle.com/article/Neither-a-Trap-Nor-a-Lie/64535/>

It's also worth understanding that the current absurdities of humanities PhD education and the humanities job market are part of larger transformations taking place in the academy. In some ways, it would appear that the humanities are *always*, perhaps even *intrinsically*, in a “state of crisis.” One can find apocalyptic rhetoric about the end of English departments stretching back decades. But the threats of chaos have become increasingly real in recent years, both for English as a discipline and the humanities more broadly.

For an introduction to some of the larger issues at play, see the following:

- William Chace’s article, “The Decline of the English Department”
<http://www.theamericanscholar.org/the-decline-of-the-english-department/>
- Scott Jaschik’s *Inside Higher Ed* summary of a 2010 report about the “State of Humanities Departments” <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/03/01/humanities>
- Frank Donoghue’s *Chronicle* article inquiry, “Can the Humanities Survive the 21st Century?” <http://chronicle.com/article/Can-the-Humanities-Survive-the/124222/>
- Mary Crane’s article, “Stop Defending the Liberal Arts”
<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/01/17/stop-defending-liberal-arts>

The many articles listed here are recent as of this writing, but as this handbook ages, undoubtedly new ones will appear that are more helpful. Reading publications like *The Chronicle* and *Inside Higher Ed* on a weekly basis is a very good idea. It’s also worth turning to several more general guidebooks, though, which themselves may continue to be published in revised editions. Some of these are focused on later stages of PhD study and even one’s approach to the job market, but the sooner students can gain a sense of the big picture, the more strategic they can be about the smaller decisions along the way—indeed, even about whether the offer one receives from a program is sufficient to justify the risk. Here are several of the better volumes to look for: Goldsmith, Komlos, and Gold’s *The Chicago Guide to Your Academic Career*; Hume’s *Surviving Your Academic Job Hunt*; and Heiberger and Vick’s *The Academic Job Search Handbook*.

APPENDIX

The following pages contain resources meant to help you at different stages in your program. Many of these documents can be found online at the Department or School of Graduate Studies websites.

- Degree Plan of Study
- Sample Plans of Study
- Sample Internship Plan: Teaching Writing
- Sample Internship Plan: Professional Writing (1)
- Sample Internship Plan: Professional Writing (2)
- Sample Thesis Proposal
- Sample Comprehensive Exam (former “Directed Readings”)
- Sample Applied Research Project Proposal (Former “Applied Project”)
- Sample Applied Research Project Proposal and Finale Project (former “Applied Project”)

DEGREE PLAN OF STUDY

(to be determined in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies in English)

Master of Arts in English

Core Course (3 cr)

Semester

ENG 500 Theory and Practice of English Studies	
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Electives (21 cr)

Semester

Exit Option (6 cr):

Semester

SAMPLE PLANS OF STUDY

Plan of Study: MA with emphasis in Professional Writing*

Semester 1: ENG 500 ENG 589* ENG 480G*	Semester 2: ENG 483G ENG 574* ENG 549
Semester 3: ENG 580 ENG 680	Semester 4: ENG 680 ENG 622*

Plan of Study: MA with emphasis in Literary Studies*

Semester 1: ENG 500 ENG 494G ENG 532*	Semester 2: ENG 536* ENG 549* ENG 653*
Semester 3: ENG 580 ENG 690	Semester 4: ENG 530 ENG 690

Plan of Study: MA with emphasis in Teaching Writing*

Semester 1: ENG 500 ENG 570* ENG 589*	Semester 2: ENG 574 ENG 536 ENG 484G
Semester 3: ENG 580* ENG 690	Semester 4: ENG 622* ENG 690

*=Course fulfills an MA elective

ENG 622, SAMPLE INTERNSHIP PLAN: TEACHING WRITING

The intern will be added as an "instructor" to the instructor's online Eng 381 course.
The intern will attend all class meetings of the instructor's face-to-face GH101 course.

For ENG 381 the intern is expected to do the following:
participate in 3-5 required online student discussions by posting responses to their responses
parallel grade 2-3 assignments for 5 students (intern will meet with instructor to discuss his/her
evaluation of the students, how to use track changes to write comments, etc.; instructor will still
be the actual evaluator for student papers)
craft responses to some of the email questions the instructor receives from students (the intern
won't actually send his/her responses, but will talk with the instructor about responding to
students' personal and technical questions in an online course)
develop a web resources page for students that includes links to helpful, relevant sites

For GH 101 the intern is expected to do the following:
attend each class meeting
parallel grade 2-3 assignments for 5 students (intern will meet with instructor to discuss
his/her evaluation of the students; instructor will still be the actual evaluator for
student papers)
present material on some aspect of writing 3 times during the semester (the intern will develop a
lesson plan and rationale for each lesson)

In addition, the intern will do the following:
keep a teaching journal with a minimum of weekly entries (observations, reflections, questions)
meet with the instructor weekly
develop a teaching philosophy
read and write responses weekly or biweekly to theoretical and practical readings
in composition/writing studies theory

ENG 622, INTERNSHIP PLAN: PROFESSIONAL WRITING (1)

The goals of the internship are to hone and apply professional writing skills through work on a variety of documents pertaining to sustainability at Western Illinois University. The intern's site supervisor will be the sustainability coordinator at the WIU Physical Plant.

The intern will gain experience with the following:

- Conducting interviews
- Writing profiles
- Writing articles for websites and print
- Writing reports
- Researching and compiling information for reports and grants

Competencies to Be Gained

- Conducting interviews and gathering data and other information
- Writing about sustainability, including technical-related topics, for the general public
- Experience with creating technical and professional documents including institutional reports

Responsibilities and Assignments

- Interviewing subjects for information on sustainability initiatives at WIU;
- Interviewing subjects to write profiles and guest editorials for university, local, and regional publications;
- Assist the sustainability coordinator in researching and compiling information for the WIU sustainability report submitted to AASHE (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education);
- Developing and writing content for a WIU sustainability newsletter aimed at WIU faculty, staff, students, and alumni;
- Producing documents for the WIU sustainability website;
- Attending sustainability-related events, helping to coordinate these events, and reporting on them for the newsletter, website, and local and regional publications;
- Attending meetings of the sustainability committee and other meetings as appropriate.

ENG 622, INTERNSHIP PLAN: PROFESSIONAL WRITING (2)

1. State the goals and objectives that this internship will help you realize.

This internship with the Macomb Arts Center provides an opportunity to learn about researching and writing grants as an area of professional writing, and to gain experience working with a local not for profit organization. My goals for this internship experience are to 1) become familiar with the basic concepts and constructions of grant writing through my own readings and research pulled from past course syllabi, 2) gain experience working with an organization researching funding opportunities and assisting with drafting proposals, and 3) create several potential pieces for a portfolio of projects I have worked on.

2. Describe what competencies you hope to gain during the internship.

During this internship, I hope to become familiar with the terminology and structure of writing common in grants, as well as learn about the resources and search tools used to find foundations and opportunities for funding. Another main goal is to gain hands-on experience with the process of researching and writing a proposal, as well as potentially networking and fostering relationships with funding agencies. I also hope to learn the style of writing which is used in proposals and how my own existing writing skills can be used in this new area. In addition to writing the actual proposals, I plan to apply my organizational abilities to create and compile useful resources on past applications and foundational information for future grant proposals.

3. List the responsibilities and assignments you will be given during the internship.

Compiling materials with background information required for any grant process for easy future reference; organizing and updating information about events and activities the Macomb Arts Center offers to the community; drafting basic boilerplate descriptions of the organization's history and goals that can be tailored to fit various purposes; researching funding that would be a good match for the goals and services of the Center; writing and submitting proposals to appropriate grant opportunities.

4. How many hours a week will you be working for how long?

My schedule will depend on the availability and needs of the Macomb Arts Center and might change week to week. For 2 credit hours (100 hours), during the 15 weeks of the semester I plan to work 6 hours a week (90 hours), with the remaining 10 hours completed in the two or three weeks after the end of the semester. To begin, I will spend three hours a week (10 am - 1 pm) on Thursdays on-site at the Arts Center, as well as attending various events in order to gain familiarity with the services and activities the Macomb Arts Center provides for the community. This will also be supplemented by outside research and meetings with WIU faculty and staff with experience in the area.

Sample: Thesis Proposal (ENG 690)

Thesis Director:

Thesis Readers:

Working Title: Saving Worlds, Sustaining Ourselves: Sustainability and Speculative Fiction

Thesis Prospectus:

Ecocriticism, as described by noted ecocritic Cheryll Glotfelty in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (2006), explores literary use of the environment as well as ecological issues expressed in texts (xviii). At first, ecocriticism seemed limited to discussing what is typically known as “nature writing”; works by writers like Thoreau and Aldo Leopold were generating much more discussion as a result of the interest in ecocriticism. However, just as environmentalism has broadened to encompass issues beyond “nature,” ecocriticism has begun pushing into other realms of literature.

In an essay published in *Beyond Nature Writing* (2001), Patrick Murphy explores an ecocritical analysis of what he calls “nature-oriented science fiction” (263). While this is an excellent and intriguing piece, it stops short of a much larger possible argument in two ways. The most notable is the limitation inflicted by the use of the term science fiction (sci-fi), rather than the umbrella term speculative fiction (sf), which is defined by the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1995) as having “com[e] to include not only soft and hard sf but also fantasy as a whole” (1144). The other limitation is in the use of the term “nature-oriented,” which implies that only sf texts that pointedly address ecological issues are to be evaluated with an ecocritical eye.

With Murphy’s essay as inspiration, I hope to push ecocriticism beyond nature writing even further by making the argument, first, that there are aspects of speculative fiction that lend the entire genre to ecocriticism, and second, that with the growing interest in sustainability, speculative fiction becomes an especially valid realm of study for the ecocritic and can offer interesting insights for the field of sustainability. The focus of this thesis will be on the analysis of two sf trilogies that are considered seminal works in the genre: J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (*LotR*) (1965)—the persistently popular and critically acclaimed fantasy epic—and Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* (1951)—a work that, while not as popularly read as it originally was, has been recognized as “the best sf series ever” and still manages to generate a fair amount of scholarly criticism.

These two texts are most suited for this analysis because they are considered representational or foundational, if you will, of their respective genres. Orson Scott Card, a current sf writer and critic, references both works as influences on his own work and even states that much of the work in the fantasy genre is essentially Tolkien rewritten (xxii). More recently, Tom Shippey has proclaimed Tolkien as the “*Writer of the Century*” in the title of his latest book. James Gunn, a noted sci-fi critic, thinks so highly of Asimov’s *Foundation* that he subtitled his book on Asimov, *Foundations of Science Fiction*. Since it would be impossible to analyze all works of sf in order to make a generalization about how sustainability applies to the genre, analyzing two such influential texts provides a good starting point for such an argument.

Also, the decision to use these two texts is because they are very different from each other: *LotR* exhibits very clear environmental themes and has generated a fair amount of ecocriticism already, whereas *Foundation*, while it is still frequently discussed, has not been examined for ecocritical significance, largely because “nature” hardly seems to have a presence and, unless one is looking for environmental themes, it can be easy to overlook them.

However, ecocriticism of these two texts that is informed by sustainability discourse shows that, while there are many important differences between the two works, there are many similarities as well. For example, while it is clear that human superiority becomes problematic in Tolkien’s world, where humans must share the land with many other different creatures that are just as, if not more intelligent than humans, human superiority in Asimov seems to go fairly unquestioned since humans are undoubtedly the only active presence in the trilogy. However, the presence of a powerfully mutated human (the Mule) and humans with extraordinary powers (the Second Foundation), while still recognizably human, operate in the narrative to question human superiority. Similarities such as these provide the core of my argument for the applicability of sf as a whole to ecocriticism.

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Sample, Questions “Directed Readings” (former exit option) (ENG 680): Shakespeare Adaptation.

Please answer/complete three of the following questions/essay topics. You must answer one question from section 1, one question from section 2, and one of your choice from either section. Each answer should be 4-5 pages in length, typed and doubled spaced.

Please also remember that questions you choose not to answer in writing may be posed to you in the oral portion.

Your written exam should be submitted to the exit option’s director by Sunday, December 4th, at 5:00 pm. Please email me if you have any questions.

Section 1: Adaptation and Medium

- 1) Throughout your capstone you have examined Shakespearean adaptations in many different mediums (film, fiction, and comic) and genres (Young Adult, literary fiction, manga, dark comedy, science fiction, etc.). Using at least two mediums and two genres, explore the challenges and opportunities that these new forms offer to works of Shakespeare. How are Shakespeare’s works particularly well- or ill-suited to the selected mediums and genres?
- 2) Drawing on the readings done and the films you have looked in your research, discuss some of the limitations adaptations present for both readers and viewers. In your answer, consider the works of two authors and two films.
- 3) By focusing on two works, compare television adaptations and film adaptations. Consider the aspects of fidelity and intertextuality in your discussion.

Section 2: Adaptation and Pedagogy

- 4) Articulate a rationale, supported by both primary and secondary readings, for including graphic novel and Manga adaptations of Shakespeare. Consider them as vehicles for exploring Shakespeare but expand beyond Shakespeare to explore other ways in which they are appropriate for this context. How are they valuable beyond serving as “gateways” or supplements? Be sure to consider the pros and cons and to ground your answer in secondary research as well as in at least three different specific comics.
- 5) What would be the value in pairing *Macbeth* with *Enter the Three Witches* or *Lady Macbeth’s Daughter* in your curriculum? How would you organize the unit (in terms of order of texts to be studied and how would you have students work with the texts)? How would you include/introduce critiques of Lady Macbeth and the three witches? What constraints might you anticipate?
- 6) Considering your reflections on YA adaptations *Anyone but You* and *Juliette Immortal*, articulate your reasons for why and how you would teach them.

Sample # 1, Applied Project Proposal (former “Applied Project”) (ENG 670)

Topic: An Ideological Hierarchy of Empathy

I am a firm believer that reading makes people, individually and collectively, better. I love the Western trope of the cowpokes trading old newspapers and magazines out on the trail just to have something to read; the literate among these rugged workers would read to the illiterate. In my experience as a Western fiction consumer, the heroes would love reading while the villains of these tales would treat literacy with scorn. In my experience as an educator, these tropes do not hold. I have many students who are resistant to reading at all and always a few who revel in the fact that they do not read and when forced will only read poorly. I understand the myriad of reasons students would rejoice in their illiteracy; the jovial approach is an easy mask for discomfort for one reason. Still, I worry about the devaluation of reading, especially reading fiction, I witness my students exhibit.

Probably most simply, reading is linked to improved vocabulary. An improved vocabulary helps a person navigate the world, rapidly decoding signs, and generating best ways to express what they want. Understanding precise word choice leads not just to good speaking and listening or reading and writing. More importantly, precise word choice provides insight to communication and critical thinking.

But in my mind, the skills correlated to regular fiction reading, such as empathy and self-reflection, are more important than an increased vocabulary, even as my preferred skills are more difficult to assess. Regular readers seem to understand unique perspectives and nuance better than non-readers. However, this understanding does not always bear obvious fruits as avid readers can still be jerks. I assume this disparity between empathetic skill and willful application is a place where ideology comes to play. In our country, we claim an egalitarian society. At Bettendorf High School, we claim to work to provide a place for all students to reach their highest potential. However, I recognize that such equality is not extended to all, either nationally or in our school community. As a professional educator, I want all of my students to be able to understand nuance, to empathise, and to improve on the person they were before. As I encourage my students to consider multiple points of view as being legitimate, even as our culture devalues some points of view, I will also be asking them to reflect on how they fit into these segregating ideological structures.

Further, I want to help my students develop a framework with which they can take on the difficult work of decoding the ideology they inhabit. Central to this goal, I hope to develop a curriculum that helps the students recognize which texts, if any, exemplify an egalitarian ideal, or which texts allow some to be more equal than others. Still, my students often do not bother to read; a common complaint among my professional peers is that their students do not read. Even as they are assessed with quizzes, tests, and essays, the students are not reading the fiction that has so much potential to help them become more understanding and insightful human beings.

Many education scholars advocate letting students choose what they read as the first step to get them reading. There is a level of discomfort in giving up the structure and predictability of studying novels in whole class sets. Still, I am willing to take the leap of faith, invest the hope and trust that if the students are reading then they are becoming better people with improved empathy

and critical thinking skills. Embracing student choice removes me as a teacher from being the expert in a text and positions me as an expert reader. While I am great at reading prose and skilled at poetry, a problem I already see in this approach is my weakness as a reader of comics/manga and I know a large minority of my student population is going to be interested in engaging that form. Note in the Secondary Texts a section dedicated to helping me improve as a graphic novels reader.

Another point of friction already mentioned is the unclear connection of student choice to how the texts that will help them grow. I can trust that more reading leads to increased empathy skills, but as text also indoctrinates an ideology, the students will be invited to apply their empathy skills within a framework of multiple invisible systems of oppression. Over the past year, the English 10 team has been looking to adopt a new class novel to replace Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*, and we have considered titles such as *All American Boys* and *The Hate You Give* to help our students have a more empathetic and nuanced understanding of social tensions in America. Several of the mini-lessons I develop will need to focus on having the students build a lens to apply to whatever they are reading through which they can see what ideological power structures are being supported or challenged.

The curriculum I will be building is for BHS's Introduction to Literature 11th grade elective. Every 11th grade student has to take one literature based class: British Literature, American Literature, Contemporary Literature, or Intro to Lit. Intro to Lit is only available at teacher recommendation to students who score below the 40th percentile on their Iowa Assessments. Intro to Lit catches many resistant readers, and a few students who have outright refused to read in the past. Applying the principles of choice based reading will test the claims that when given choice all students pick up reading. Further, as BHS does not offer Intro to Lit until quarter three of the 2018-19 school year, I will have the Fall Semester for developing curriculum, the first half of the Spring

Semester for implementing the curriculum, and the second half of Spring for reflection/assessment on how the implementation went.

Questions

1. How can I cultivate habitual readers?
2. How can I jump-start student empathy in their reading?
3. How can I help students transfer their empathy from text(reading experience) to life(lived experience)?
4. How can I help these high school students begin to grasp the implications of ideology?
5. How can I, or should I, help students understand if/when the stories they are reading are reproducing or challenging systematic forms of oppression?
6. How do I build a standards based curriculum that still focuses on decoding ideology, and can be applied to any chosen text?
7. Considering my reading list, how can I transition a racism lens to other systems of oppression: misogyny, ableism, etc.?
8. How do I know if students have critically engaged their literacy?

Primary Texts

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Schedule:

1. Foundational reading through Early Nov.
 - a. Meet with Readers in Late November
2. Turn to curriculum development in earnest Nov. - Early Jan.
 - a. Meet with Readers in person or online Early Jan.
3. Teach and reflect Late Jan - March
4. Reflect Finalize Apr - MaY

Sample # 2, Proposal Applied Project (Former exit option) (ENG 670)

ENG 670 – Applied Project
Exit Option Proposal

For my applied project I would like to focus on the Malpass archives collection of Decker Press materials, creating and expanding online information highlighting details of the collection. The collection held by the library includes photographs, newspaper clippings, correspondence from contributors, copies of published editions, and several articles written by previous scholars on the history of the press. My goal in working with these materials is to create a useful resource for a variety of audiences, increasing awareness and ease of access.

I've always been interested in publishing in general, primarily contemporary commercial trade publishing, and I would love the chance to expand my knowledge to learn about small independent presses through the historical examination of a regional publisher. By exploring this collection, I also hope to learn more about how publications are created, communicated to audiences, and collected for future preservation. Especially this year, in light of COVID-19, accessible online information is more important than ever, as this type of communication is essential when in-person activities are not possible. How information is transformed and translated to the digital space is a fascinating process and a vital area of learning. I want to help connect people to useful and interesting historical details, enabling learning motivated by both personal interest and academic scholarship.

To begin, I seek to piece together a history of the press and the Decker family involved in its founding. Started by James A. Decker in Prairie City, Illinois, the small press published over a hundred volumes between 1938 and 1948, primarily focused on poetry. The press operated out of the back of the family drugstore, with the help of James' sister, Dorothy Decker, and published the writing of notable authors including Edgar Lee Masters, William Everson,

and other poets. Despite Decker's passion and a growing national reputation as a venue for promising new voices, the press faced financial difficulties. Ownership passed from James Decker to Harry Denman and then Ervin Tax, but the business struggles continued, until the press came to a sudden end in 1950 with a murder-suicide case in which Dorothy Decker killed Ervin Tax and then herself. This is a historical overview painted in broad strokes, and I would also like to investigate the smaller details of how these events unfolded and what impact they had on the larger literary community.

Furthermore, I would like to examine the Decker Press as a case study of the small Midwestern press, situating its effects within the larger literary context. What other presses were active at the time or in nearby areas? How was the Decker Press similar or different than others publishing materials at the same time? What was the impact of such presses? Which authors were published, and what was the influence of their writing? By answering these and other questions that emerge, I ultimately hope to explore the impact of the press and how its publications remain relevant today.

Another component I hope to pursue in my project is the question of the best methods of presenting archival materials in a digital space. It is incredible that Western Illinois University has so many of these materials that have been preserved, but how might they be better showcased? What is the best way to make such information more accessible to a wider audience, so it can be better appreciated? Possessing materials is only the first step in encouraging communication, and I hope that through exploring best practices and procedures in digital archives I can create a project that continues to foster an online atmosphere conducive to learning and sharing literary history.

In determining how to present materials in a digital format, I also plan to carefully consider who the audience is, and how different presentations might be beneficial to various demographics. For example, fleshing out the Wikipedia page on the Decker Press will provide an easily accessible introduction for general audiences, and as an online collaborative resource

this offers the opportunity to link new information to other existing sources so that it can become part of a larger web of information across the internet. A more academic audience will benefit from the creation of a dedicated online space with historical details. Academic researchers overlap with the audience of library patrons, who will profit from the creation of detailed finding guides that outline the contents of the collection. Although the pieces published by the Decker Press are still under copyright and cannot be reproduced, a digital version of the tables of contents or a more detailed description of what each item is about would assist more specific research. Audiences could decide which materials would be useful or interesting to them, and then coordinate a visit to the library to see the relevant physical documents.

In terms of my goals and outcomes, I have several outlets in mind in terms of showcasing this information in a digital space. First, I hope to contribute to the Wikipedia article on the press, which already exists but is only a small stub with no sources cited. Second, I hope to create or curate a digital space to share information about this collection, including items such as a timeline of events, biographies of authors involved, and a list of titles published by the press. Third, I would like to investigate the options for what I can include as part of a finding guide that would give audiences searching online a better idea of what the collection includes and how to find an item in the physical collection housed in the Malpass library archives.

Project components & deliverables:

1. Fleshing out the Wikipedia article on the Decker Press and adding sources
 - a. Linking other Wikipedia articles back to the page on the Decker Press (for example, adding information on the pages of notable poets who were published by the press) in order to increase web traffic, reach a larger audience, and connect this information to a larger web of online research and historical information

2. Creating a website or webspace to showcase this collection, with pages/component that might include:
 - a. Historical overview of the press
 - b. Timeline of events in its creation, publishing history, and ultimate demise
 - c. List of authors and titles published
3. Finding guides that outline what is included in the collection, so audiences searching for information online can see an overview of specific items
 - a. Tables of Contents scanned for online viewing

The format and fine details of how this information would be presented is a component I would develop depending on what I find in my research. I would love to create something that would be hosted by WIU or possibly affiliated with the library, so that it would be preserved and easily accessible for researchers. I would also want to create a foundation that could be expanded upon by future researchers.

In terms of a timeline, I plan to meet with project director Dr. Buchanan at the beginning of each month, to discuss my progress and address any issues that have arisen. My expected date of completion is March 2021, so my committee will have time to give feedback before defense.

Preliminary Bibliography

Publishing & Small Presses

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Sample # 3, Applied Project

Presentation

Maureen Sullivan

April 5, 2021

Applied Project Reflection

My inspiration for this applied project was the Decker Press Collection held by the Malpass library archives. The collection consists of numerous folders, including materials such as articles, photos, newspaper clippings, manuscript drafts, and correspondence between various authors, scholars, and individuals connected to the press. My goal for this project was to create a practical, useful resource that would be both interesting and helpful to a variety of audiences, and I also wanted this information to be available online. The Malpass library website did include a brief summary of the history of the press as well as a complete bibliography of the titles published, but for the focus of my project, I wanted to create more detailed online resources that would increase the visibility and accessibility of information in the collection. Especially with the ongoing pandemic, visits to the library archives can be difficult and access to the physical collection can be limited, so my project was centered around the goal of creating online resources that would allow a variety of audiences to learn more about the history of the press and the collection itself.

A key part of my initial vision for the project was considering how best to meet the needs of various audiences. Different demographics might have different interests or viewpoints, and I wanted to make sure that was reflected in the digital information I was providing. For example, in my work on expanding the Wikipedia articles on the press, my goal was to provide an easily accessible introduction for general audiences. Within this general overview, I also tried to use the collaborative network of information to my advantage, by considering which other topics might be linked to help readers find the page about the Decker Press and then the cited sources with more in-depth information. A fundamental part of expanding Wikipedia is thinking carefully about what audiences already know, what might be helpful in augmenting their understanding, and how to connect each new fact or detail to a larger network of information.

For the finding guide that I created for the archives website, the intended audience was academic researchers or other library patrons who would benefit from additional historical details. Although the finding guide is a condensed summary, I thought carefully about which names, titles, and other information might be useful for keyword searching, with the intention of reaching anyone searching library catalogues or the internet at large. While I might not be aware of

the significance of a certain detail, a researcher with more specialized knowledge might be able to use my general guide as a starting point for more detailed analysis. In this way, I hope to facilitate further study and connections to related topics.

As I worked on this project, there were inevitable changes and adjustments to my plan. Part of my initial interest in this project was the publishing aspect, and one question I wanted to investigate was the stigma of vanity presses and whether the Decker Press would fall under such a label. From my preliminary readings I learned more about the definition and negative connotations of vanity presses, which reverse the usual publishing model by changing authors to have their work printed rather than paying the writer an advance. Discussions of whether the Decker Press should be qualified as a vanity press come up several times in a few articles and letters in the archive collection; and while in the strictest sense the Decker Press might be considered a vanity press, this flattens the nuances of the situation. As author Timothy Laquintano notes in the article “The Legacy of the Vanity Press and Digital Transitions,” vanity presses have acquired negative connotations as it became “mostly taboo for authors to invest in publication and for publishers to charge authors for services.” However, in the case of the Decker Press, publications were made possible only because of author contributions. While an established publishing house will have the money to pay authors’ advances, James Decker started the press using his personal funds and his grandfather’s back room. The collaborative financial structure that included author contributions allowed new or unknown poets to publish their work, sharing the cost of printing and production in order to gain exposure. While this element didn’t make it into any of my online overviews, it was still an interesting point to discover in my research that only furthers the importance of understanding the circumstances of small presses.

Additionally, as part of my original idea for creating online resources, I had hoped to scan items or documents from the Decker Press collection so that audiences could see a sample of some of the materials without having to visit the library in person. However, in consulting with the archives staff, I discovered that this was not feasible due to copyright reasons. None of the volumes of poetry published by the press are in the public domain, and I was also advised against using things like personal correspondence because determining the copyright holder would be too difficult. However, I hope that the work I have done has increased the possibility for discovery of this fascinating topic and laid the groundwork which could be expanded by someone in the future, perhaps someday when the books are out of copyright.

Another change in my project was an expansion of the sources I used to inform my archival approach. Originally, I had compiled a reading list of articles and chapters from books. Many of these readings proved useful as an introduction to archival work, such as *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, which offered not only detailed definitions of

various terms but also related words and broader or narrower concepts in the same category. For example, a guide in the broadest sense could be broken down into a calendar that offers a chronological inventory of materials, a summary guide that provides a brief description of the archive's holding, or scope and content note that summarizes the contents of the materials. These definitions were both informative and validating, as I saw my own vision for my project described in the definition of a finding aid as "a tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection of records" which also "assists users to gain access to and understand the materials" (168). A key component in the definition of cataloguing, for example, was the intent to "connect user queries with relevant materials" (63). These formal definitions helped me gain a fuller understanding of all the possibilities of archive resources and plan my own version for the Decker Press collection.

As I continued in my research, I discovered new sources that were also extremely relevant. Some of the most inspiring articles that I read during my research for this project included discussions on how to use new digital technologies to adapt traditional archival goals and distribute information to virtual users. Another subject that was fascinating to me was the exploration of audience engagement, as some online formats allow users to contribute to databases, assist in digitization efforts, or contribute information, in addition to simply viewing the preserved records. This theme of interactivity also came up in several articles using a pedagogical approach, in which instructors encourage students to develop collaborative communication skills as they work in these online archival spaces. This selection of readings provided useful illustrations of theoretical concepts as well as numerous case studies showing the many applications of archival philosophies.

Since online archival processes continue to develop so quickly and differ so widely, I also consulted a variety of other sources for creating a unique project. Without an official procedure or style to follow for creating an online resource, I first investigated what information was presented about other WIU collections. This varied greatly, from the 280-page guide to the [Congressman Lane Evans Collection](#) to the shorter, more narrative summary of [Icarian Studies](#) collections. I also spent time examining the finding aids from institutions mentioned in the Decker Press collection, including the University of Chicago and the University of Kentucky, to get an idea of how other libraries structured elements such as contents, dates, descriptions, and so on. In addition, I looked at a sampling of collections from the Library of Congress to get additional ideas about typical conventions for online archives. These examples varied as well, but seeing the variety in style, form, and organization gave me ideas to incorporate into my own draft. Exploring these real-world examples gave me a practical understanding to complement the formal definitions.

Finally, as a type of meta-document related to my own process creating this project, I compiled both the readings and other resources into a guide serving a purpose similar to an annotated bibliography. This guide offers a selection of sources and sites pertaining to online archival topics that I found helpful during my own work and that I hoped might be a good starting point for anyone interested in learning more. These articles, online tools, and links to various websites could be useful for others working on similar archival projects, or anyone applying these concepts in a new area, such as the classroom. As with the rest of my project, I hope that this document could be a foundation for further expansion, as readers could add their own findings or adapt my guide for a related purpose.

While there are still many more ideas that could be developed for this project inspired by the Decker Press collection, the work I have done allowed me to develop skills of research, writing, and digital communications, and gain a more detailed understanding of online resources for preserving archival information. For example, one small detail in my process was the feedback from the archives staff after I sent a draft of my finding guide outline. I had included hyperlinks to several articles available online and pages with collection details at other institutions, but I wanted to ask whether external links would be too difficult to maintain on the website. As URLs change and pages move, the links can become nonfunctional, but the archives staff suggested that to avoid link rot, I use a stable link from the Internet Archive's [Wayback Machine](#). This site archives snapshots of webpages, allowing users to see a page as it appeared at a given point in time, and thereby serves as a more permanent option for hosting links. Although I've used the Wayback Machine a few times before, it hadn't occurred to me as a solution for this problem; creating my own archived pages was a learning experience that expanded my arsenal of tools and broadened my understanding of contemporary archival practices. This project is the type of operation which seems never fully completed, and there were many ideas and avenues for expansion that I thought would be fascinating to explore further. However, I hope that the elements I have addressed for this project have laid the groundwork for future growth and ongoing scholarship.

Decker Press Finding Guide

2 boxes, 31 folders

Contents List:

Box 1

Bibliography, catalogue

- List of titles held by the WIU special collections unit, with years of publication and some original prices noted
- Catalogue from 1942 of the items published by the Press of James A. Decker. Catalogue lists titles, authors, and prices of books along with blurbs from reviewers or other writers

Family biographical information

- Marriage, birth, and death certificates for members of the Decker family, beginning with the marriage of James Decker's grandfather E. E. James to Viola Singleton in 1889
- Announcements in the newspaper mentioning births, deaths, or other events involving members of the Decker family
- Brief biographical entry on James Decker from *Who's Who in the Midwest* publication, 1975
- James Decker's biography blurb from when he worked as an editor at Unity School in Lee's Summit, Missouri, 1975
- Bronze star certificate awarded to James Decker in 1945 for his military service in the Philippines

Correspondence with Sherry Swearngen (Decker's daughter)

- Letters and emails between Sherry Swearngen and Marla Vizdal (an employee at the WIU archives) discussing details of James Decker's life and the press, dated 2004–2007
- Letters and emails between Swearngen and John Hallwas regarding a list of her father's books she had discovered in his belongings and then donated to the archives, dated 2001–2002
- Emails between Sherry and Jim Ballowe discussing his article "Little Press on the Prairie," which was first published in the *Chicago Reader*, May 3, 1996 [see folder **James Ballowe: "Little Press on the Prairie"**]

Correspondence, miscellaneous

- Letters from Marla Vizdal to Celeste Benkendorf about titles she owned and about possibly donating them to WIU, dated 2005
- Correspondence between Marla Vizdal and people who have made donations to the collection
- Marla Vizdal discussing a talk she gave at the McDonough County Historical Society in November of 2004 [see folder **Historical: Talks**]
- Marla Vizdal's responses to various inquiries from scholars about the press
- Correspondence between Marla Vizdal and Jim Ballowe [see folder **James Ballowe: "Little Press on the Prairie"**]

Collection publicity

- Articles about the collection itself held at Malpass in the Archives Special Collections Unit, including:
 - [News release from WIU about donation from Eisner to the archives](#) [see folder **Eisner, Steve: Collection development**]
 - Article in the *Macomb Journal*, dated September 10, 2003
 - Article in the *Macomb Eagle*, dated October 31, 2003
 - Article in the *Western News*, winter 2003

Book publicity

- Newspaper clippings and reviews, primarily from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* via ProQuest, on books from various authors published by the Decker Press, dated from 1940–1948

Books, searches and prices

- Online searches for Decker Press titles with prices from various websites and databases including AbeBooks, ILAB-LILA, Alibris, WorldCat, BookFinder, etc.

Court documents

- Legal documents concerning the ownership of the Decker Press, the purchase of the press by Ervin Tax, and the ownership of the estate of Ervin Tax after his death, from the County Court of McDonough County, dated 1949–1950

Historical: Writings

- Newspaper clippings of articles on the history of the press, including:
 - “Our Regional Heritage – Poetry and Murder: Prairie City’s Decker Press” by John Hallwas
 - “Correspondence” by [Will Wharton, from *Poetry* magazine in October of 1950](#)
 - Numerous articles from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the *Macomb Daily Journal*, and other papers about the murder-suicide case, with information about the trial, description of the crime scene by witnesses, and photos of the scene, dated 1950
 - Articles about the publication of *Illinois Poems* (1941) and *Along the Illinois* (1942) by Edgar Lee Masters, and a few other articles about the press
 - Articles about the charges of embezzlement against Decker, dated 1949
 - Article from the *Prairie Citizen* [see folder **C.R. Crabb: *Prairie Citizen***]

Historical: Talks given

- Copies of a talk about the history of the Decker Press, given by Marla Vizdal on several occasions:
 - September 19, 2005, for the McDonough County Genealogical Society
 - April 8, 2005, for the Retired Teachers of McDonough County
 - January 17, 2005, for the Industry Kiwanis Club
 - November 9, 2004, for the McDonough County Historical Society

Historical: Miscellaneous

- Interview with Zelma and Gilbert Dixon of Colchester (who had lived in the upstairs apartment of the Decker house in 1948) by Marla Vizdal
- Contract selling press from the Decker siblings to Harry Denman, dated 1946
- Employment contract between Ervin Tax and James Decker, dated 1948

Miscellaneous

- Materials about William Moon, possible binder for the press
- Miscellaneous papers

James Ballowe: “Little Press on the Prairie”

- Copies of Ballowe’s article [“Little Press on the Prairie”](#) which appeared in the *Chicago Reader* in 1996, and in the *Illinois Times* in 2003
- Autographed poem “Blue Heron” by Martha Graham for James Ballowe

C.R. Crabb: *Prairie Citizen*

- Materials related to the *Prairie Citizen*, Decker’s newspaper, which he started in May of 1941 and sold to Crabb in September of 1941
- Agreement selling the *Prairie Citizen* and its mailing list and subscribers to C.R. Crabb, dated September 6, 1941
- Subscriber list

Authors: Sylvia Auxier materials copied from University of Kentucky

- Copies of materials from [the Sylvia Trent Auxier papers from University of Kentucky](#)
- Manuscripts and correspondence about books of poetry
- Auxier’s correspondence with James Decker and Ervin Tax, including inquiries about publication details for her book *Meadow Rue* (1948), dated 1946–1950
- Several notices to Decker authors with news and administrative updates, including:
 - Letters from James and Dorothy Decker, dated 1947

- Letters from Ervin Tax explaining his own involvement in the press and discussing the financial and technical struggles of the press, dated 1947
- Letter from Tax announcing Decker's departure from the press, dated July 20, 1949
- Notice from Lyle Robbins (administrator of Ervin Tax's estate) announcing Tax's death and discussing how the authors' contracts and books would be handled, dated August 11, 1950

Authors: Edgar Lee Masters materials copied from Indiana University

- Copies of materials from [the Valentine–Masters Mss., 1915–1944, from Indiana University](#)
- Correspondence between Masters and Decker about publications

Authors: Ervin Tax materials copied from University of Chicago

- Copies of materials from [the Sol Tax Papers 1923–1989 from the University of Chicago](#)
- Letters and correspondence from Ervin Tax to his brother Sol Tax, who was a professor at University of Chicago, about the press, business, and finances, dated 1948–1950
- Letter from Burton Frye about his paper, dated May 23, 1950 [*see folder Eisner, Steve: Writings about the press (A. Derleth, B. Frye, R. Leekley)*]
- Letters from Lyle Robbins about the late Ervin Tax's estate and press, dated 1950–1952
- Editorial report about Tax's manuscript *The Wraith of Gawain*, which was published by the Decker Press in 1948

Box 2

University of Buffalo: Correspondence

- Emails between Marla Vizdal and James Maynard from University of Buffalo regarding copies of materials from their collections, dated 2008

University of Buffalo: *Upward* vol. 1, no. 3

- Xerox copy of the issue: Winter 1938–39, volume 1, number 3

Eisner, Steve: Collection development

- Obituary of Steven Jack Eisner, dated 2003
- List of items and materials accompanying Decker Press books
- “History of the Decker Collection Items Assembled by Steven J. Eisner” – a narrative on how Eisner learned about the press, his investigation of its history, his visit to Prairie City, interviews he conducted with townspeople, and his correspondence with Decker

Eisner, Steve: Writings about the press (A. Derleth, B. Frye, R. Leekley)

- “Poetry in the Field” by August Derleth
- “The Decker Press of Prairie City, Illinois” which was written by Burton Frye in 1950 for ENG 354 at WIU
- “The Poet's Publisher, 1937–1950: James A. Decker of Prairie City, Illinois” by Richard Leekley

Eisner, Steve: Correspondence re: Decker Press

- Handwritten authorization by William Everson for Steve Eisner to act as agent for materials related to *The Masculine Dead* held by Decker Press, dated April 21, 1959
- Letters from Sol Tax about Burton Frye's paper, dated December 14, 1961 [*see folder Eisner, Steve: Writings about the press (A. Derleth, B. Frye, R. Leekley)*]
- Correspondence between Eisner and Richard Leekley discussing their research and writings on the press, dated 1975 [*see folder Eisner, Steve: Writings about the press (A. Derleth, B. Frye, R. Leekley)*]

Eisner, Steve: Correspondence between Steve Eisner and James Decker

- Letter from Decker about details of the press, titles they published, and people involved, dated 1965
- Letter from Decker about the checklist of titles published. He also discusses the financial difficulties of the press, the sale of the press to Denman and then Ervin Tax's involvement, his own involvement in the legal trouble, the accusations made against him, and Dorothy and Tax's relationship. Also includes a brief autobiographical description from Decker, dated 1961

Eisner, Steve: Correspondence – Winfield Townley Scott

- Letters discussing the press and Scott's experience as an author

- Letters from Decker to Scott about publication details for his book and other titles

Eisner, Steve: Eisner's personal notes and checklist of book titles

- Lists compiled by Leekley and Eisner of Decker Press imprints, authors, titles, years
- Handwritten notes on titles with unknown years
- List of titles, with details on imprints, publication years, length, size, and binding color of various books

Eisner, Steve: *Upward*, vol. 1, no. 1

- Photocopy of the summer 1938 issue, which includes poems and books reviews. James Decker was the editor, Warren L. Van Dine was the associate editor

Eisner, Steve: *Upward*, vol. 1, no. 2

- Photocopy of the autumn 1938 issue, which includes poems and books reviews. James Decker was the editor, Warren L. Van Dine was the associate editor

Authors, miscellaneous

- Bibliographies of authors including Louis Zukofsky, Kenneth Patchen, Charles Henri Ford, and Kenneth Rexroth
- Register for the [David Ignatow papers](#) from Mandeville Special Collections at the University of California San Diego

Eisner, Steve: *Upward*, Decker's copy

- Physically bound book of the first two issues of *Upward*: volume 1, numbers 1 & 2.

Multi-volume binding of Decker items

- Bound volume of four Decker Press publications and one author-related publication, including *Calendar*, *An Anthology of 1940 Poetry* edited by Norman MacLeod, *The Exiles' Anthology of American and British Poets* edited by Helen Neville and Harry Roskolenko, *Towards a Personal Armageddon* by Henry Treece, *Paper Faces* by Nelson Del Bittner and *First Manifesto* by Thomas McGrath, published in 1940

Photographs

- Xerox copies of photos, original copies are in the Special Collections photo file under Prairie City: Businesses (Decker press)
- Pictures of the crime scene; Decker family photos and portraits of young James and Dorothy; military portrait of James; photo of Steve Eisner turning over collection to archives, dated 2003

Maureen Sullivan, 2021

Guide to Archival Readings and Resources

This is my guide to online archival work, with some of the reading, resources, and other information that was helpful to me as I worked on the Decker Press project. Of course, this guide itself could always be expanded by others who wish to build from my beginnings and contribute their own experiences working with any form of online archives!

What do digital archives involve, and why are they important?

As technology evolves and communication becomes increasingly digital, the storage and distribution of historical information is also able to take new forms. In addition to being a physical place filled with boxes of papers, an archive can also be a digital space that allows wider audiences to view information. Online archival processes might include uploading scans of documents, which serves dual purposes of preservation and distribution, or contributing information to virtual spaces that connect to larger institutional or educational systems.

Archives are important for a variety of audiences, and considering the different purposes that each demographic might have is something to keep in mind while assembling an online resource. A key function of an online archive is providing the information that could be the raw material for any number of projects: a student writing a paper for a class, a researcher tracing genealogical paths, a literary scholar analyzing a certain poet's work in the cultural context of the time, or even a computer engineer who wishes to work with the site itself to enhance digital storage or search possibilities. Increased accessibility through internet archives benefits audiences who may not be able to visit the archive in person for any number of reasons. Increased accessibility also benefits the institution and the collection itself, as more people can discover a previously unfamiliar topic and use it in their own projects.

1) Articles on Archival Areas

This is a selection of readings that I found most useful, covering a variety of topics ranging from the fundamental goals of traditional archives, ongoing transitions and translations into digital formats, possibilities for online archival resources, the participation of audiences in the creation of online sites, and case studies of how archival work was incorporated into

classroom projects. These articles and books offer an excellent starting point for anyone interested in learning more about these topics, as well as mentioning other related sources for further study.

Buehl, Jonathan, et al. "Training in the Archives: Archival Research as Professional Development." *Landmark Essays on Archival Research*, edited by Lynée Lewis Gaillet et al., Routledge, 2016, pp. 256–279.

Dingwall, Glenn. "Digital Preservation: From Possible to Practical." *Currents of Archival Thinking*, edited by Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood, 2nd ed., ABC-CLIO, 2017, pp. 135–161.

Enoch, Jessica, and Pamela VanHaitsma. "Archival Literacy: Reading the Rhetoric of Digital Archives in the Undergraduate Classroom." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2015, pp. 216–242. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24633856.

Eveleigh, Alexandra. "Participatory Archives." *Currents of Archival Thinking*, edited by Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood, 2nd ed., ABC-CLIO, 2017, pp. 299–325.

Martin, Julia, and David Coleman. "Change the Metaphor: The Archive as an Ecosystem." *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2002.

Morris, Sammie L., and Shirley K. Rose. "Invisible Hands: Recognizing Archivists' Work to Make Records Accessible." *Landmark Essays on Archival Research*, edited by Lynée Lewis Gaillet et al., Routledge, 2016, pp. 200–217.

Pearce-Moses, Richard. *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*. Society of American Archivists, 2005.

Theimer, Kate. "Archives in Context and as Context." *Journal of Digital Humanities*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2012.

VanHaitsma, Pamela. "New Pedagogical Engagements with Archives: Student Inquiry and Composing in Digital Spaces." *College English*, vol. 78, no. 1, 2015, pp. 34–55. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/44075096.

Vetter, Matthew A. "Archive 2.0: What Composition Students and Academic Libraries Can Gain from Digital-Collaborative Pedagogies." *Composition Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2014, pp. 35–53.

2) Useful websites and online tools

Wikipedia (wikipedia.org)

Wikipedia is a free, collaborative, online encyclopedia that anyone can edit or expand. The goal of the site is to provide clear, factual information on a broad range of subjects, and volunteers can help by adding their own contributions. Since

Wikipedia is often a starting point for general audiences, this is a great way to provide a basic overview of a topic and then provide sources that link to more detailed or in-depth information.

Useful links:

[Introduction / About page](#): Gives an overview of Wikipedia's mission

[Manual of Style](#): A detailed guide to Wikipedia's house style

[Guide to Citing Sources](#): Overview of what kind of sources to use as references for articles and how to cite the information from them. These requirements for the use of reliable scholarly sources overlap with the types of sources often used for academic works and the type of attribution needed for many papers. Information must be from a credible source, and information must be rephrased or cited to avoid plagiarism. For students or other academics who already have experience with integrating sources, this can be a great way to put those skills into practice in a new context. Students or scholars who have access to academic databases (JSTOR, EBSCO, etc.) through their institution are also in a prime position to be able to synthesize information from those sources for a publicly accessible platform.

[Guide to Wikilinks](#): A guide to creating and editing the internal links which connect Wikipedia's many pages into an interconnected whole. This web of information helps readers find related topics and understand the context of the topic they are learning about.

[Community Portal](#): A great starting point for new users, and a central hub to find new projects, join group efforts, ask questions, or consult references.

The Internet Archive (archive.org)

The Internet Archive is a digital library focused on offering scholars, researchers, students, and the public online access to a wide array of materials. In addition to books, the archive also includes videos, images, web pages, audio recordings, and software.

Useful links:

[The Wayback Machine](#): Archived captures of webpages, preserved so users can see how a certain site appeared at a certain moment in time. This is a great resource for finding older pages that might have been taken down or changed, and it can also be used as a tool for preventing link rot by adding a capture of a page that will be preserved in the archive.

Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org)

Project Gutenberg's mission is to create a free online library of eBooks of texts in the public domain. Their efforts seek to digitalize, archive, and distribute these literary works by making them available on the internet. Anyone can volunteer as a proofreader and help to check a scanned page against the text generated by OCR (optical character recognition) software and correct any errors. Participating in one of the three rounds of editing that a text undergoes as it is transformed into an eBook is a great experience to see behind the scenes of how texts are digitized, and it also offers insight into both the site's archival system and its philosophy of creative, collaborative efforts for the general public.

Library of Congress (loc.gov)

[What Are Finding Aids?](#) This page offers a brief overview of what a finding guide is and also includes extensive guidelines for the best practices on the more technical side of creating archival navigation documents.

[Digital Collections](#): Browse hundreds of online collections or search for a specific collection by subject, format, or date. Examining the assorted finding guides can be a great way to get a sense of possible organizational structures for online guides and how to present information including collection overview, contents list, and index terms.

Some examples of institutional archives:

- Western Illinois University: [Archives and Special Collections](#)
- University of Chicago: [List of finding aids](#)
- University of Kentucky: [Searchable list of research guides](#)
- Purdue University: [e-Archives Digital Collections](#), which includes digital scans of original documents from various collections
- Cornell University: Searchable list of [archival guides](#), as well as [Digital Collections](#) available online
- Online Archive of California: [Provides access to collection guides from many institutions in California](#)

Timeline of Events

1917 – James Decker is born in Prairie City, Illinois

1921 – James Decker's younger sister Dorothy is born

1934–1936 – James Decker attends Park College in Missouri

1937 – James Decker returns to Prairie City, purchases a small press, and starts the Press of James A. Decker

1938 – Decker publishes *Upward*, a literary magazine that includes poems and book reviews

1940 – James Decker marries Florence Rhodes

1941 – Decker starts a newspaper, the *Prairie Citizen*, selling it a few months later

1941 – Edgar Lee Masters agrees to publish his collection *Illinois Poems* with the Decker Press

1942 – *Along the Illinois*, a second volume by Edgar Lee Masters, is published, which brings additional national attention to the press

1943–1945 – while James is serving in the military, Dorothy continues to work at the press

1945 – Decker is awarded Bronze Star for service in the Philippines

1946 – Facing financial issues, Decker sells the press to Harry Denman

1948 – Denman sells the press to Ervin Tax, who shortens the name to the Decker Press

1949 – Decker leaves Prairie City and moves his family to Kansas City

1950 – Dorothy Decker and Ervin Tax are killed in murder-suicide

1959 – Steve Eisner begins investigating the story of the Decker Press

1976 – Death of James Decker

2003 – Steve Eisner donates his materials on the Decker Press to the WIU archives

2004–2005 – Marla Vizdal gives a series of informational talks on the history of the Decker Press

Individuals related to the Decker Press

The Decker family:

Eldon E. James and Viola Singleton: James Decker's maternal grandparents; Eldon owned the drug store where the press was set up

Arthur and Ulah Decker: James Decker's parents, married in 1913

Florence Rhodes Decker: James Decker's first wife, married in 1940

Sherry Swearngin: James Decker's daughter

Nicholas Decker: James Decker's son

People who are frequently mentioned in collection materials:

Harry Denman: local businessman and lumberyard owner, who purchased the press from James Decker in 1946

Ervin Tax: Chicago author whose manuscript *The Wraith of Gawain* was scheduled to be published by the Decker Press, but when it was delayed, Tax came to visit Prairie City to check on its progress and ended up buying the press from Denman. He was involved in the administrative coordination of the press until he was killed by Dorothy Decker in 1950.

Sol Tax: Ervin Tax's brother, who was a professor at the University of Chicago

Edgar Lee Masters: author of *Illinois Poems* (1941) and *Along the Illinois* (1942), which Decker convinced him to publish with the Decker Press

Sylvia Auxier: author of *Meadow Rue*, which was published by the Decker Press in 1948

C.R. Crabb: purchased Decker's newspaper, the *Prairie Citizen*, in 1941

Lyle Robbins: the administrator of Ervin Tax's estate after Tax was killed by Dorothy Decker in 1950

(A complete list of authors published by the Decker Press is available in the [bibliography of titles](#))

Scholars who studied the history of the press

James Ballowe: author of the article "Little Press on the Prairie" (published in 1996) on the history of the Decker Press

Steve Eisner: donated materials he had collected related to the Decker Press to the archives after researching the history and story of James Decker's life and publications

Richard Leekley: author of the article "The Poet's Publisher, 1937-1950: James A. Decker of Prairie City, Illinois"

John Hallwas: archives researcher and author of several articles on the history of the press, including "Our Regional Heritage – Poetry and Murder: Prairie City's Decker Press"

Marla Vizdal: employee at the WIU archives who investigated the story of the press and expanded the collection of Decker materials

Buron Frye: wrote a paper on the history of the press titled "The Decker Press of Prairie City, Illinois" in 1950 for ENG 354 at WIU

Overview of Wikipedia Work for Decker Press

1) Expanding the article

The first element of my applied project that I worked on was fleshing out the Wikipedia article on the [Decker Press](#). Wikipedia is a free online collaborative encyclopedia that anyone can edit or expand. Volunteers build from the work of others with the goal of creating informative articles on a wide range of subjects.

I wanted to start with expanding the Decker Press article on Wikipedia because it is an accessible, easy starting point for general audiences seeking information about a topic. For many people looking for a basic understanding or introduction to a subject, a quick internet search is the first step. Wikipedia is frequently the first search research on Google for many topics, and Google will often generate a sidebar summary for the reader drawing information directly from the Wikipedia page. It is with this theme of connection in mind that I hoped to add more information, so that an interested audience can be directed to the several articles that provide an overview of the press, or perhaps even to WIU's archive collection. There was already a page started for the Decker Press, but it was a stub, meaning that it was very short without many details or sources.

Decker Press

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Press of James A. Decker** was a poetry publishing house once located in the tiny hamlet of [Prairie City, Illinois](#). The Decker Press received national attention in the 1940s, when it published work by famous authors like [Edgar Lee Masters](#), [August Derleth](#), Hubert Creekmore, [William Everson](#) (Brother Antoninus), [David Ignatow](#), [Kenneth Patchen](#), [Kenneth Rexroth](#) and [Louis Zukofsky](#).^[1]

The [Archives and Special Collections Unit at Western Illinois University Libraries](#) is the single-largest holder of materials from the Press of James A. Decker. Archives staff has compiled a complete bibliography of Decker Press books with a listing of which books are currently held there. Other materials include unpublished typescripts about the Decker Press and James Decker, correspondence, newspaper clippings, and historical articles.

References [edit source]

- ↑ "The Decker Press - Article by John Hallwas" . *www.connectotel.com*. Retrieved 2020-10-29.



This article about a United States publishing company is a stub. You can help Wikipedia by [expanding it](#).

Categories: [Book publishing companies based in Illinois](#) | [Defunct book publishing companies of the United States](#) | [United States publishing company stubs](#)

The article before my additions

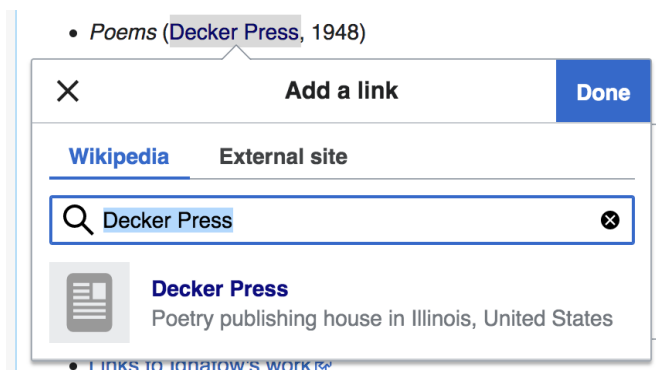
I expanded the lead section of the article, which serves as an introduction to the topic and gives a basic summary of the article. I also created several additional subsections, including a brief family summary, a historical overview of the

press, and a list of notable authors. By adding these additional details and multiple sources supporting this information, I hope to create a foundation which, in the spirit of Wikipedia, can continue to grow as it is expanded by others.

2) Adding links

The second component of my work on Wikipedia was the creation and insertion of numerous internal links, or wikilinks. Wikilinks connect web pages together, directing readers toward related topics and increasing traffic to articles. This is important not only for readers but also other potential editors: people with additional knowledge or sources on a subject can't add it if they don't know an article on that topic exists. In [the guide for new editors](#), wikilinks are described as “one of the key components of Wikipedia,” as they unite all the individual pages into an interconnected whole. In this way, each article is part of a larger informational network.

I started the process of inserting links back to the Decker Press page simply by searching for mentions of “Decker Press” in Wikipedia. I found several pages that listed the press as the publisher of various authors' works, but those mentions did not usually link to any further information about the press. After finding those handful of pages where the press was mentioned by name, I also searched for other authors whose names frequently came up in articles about the history of the press or whose work was frequently mentioned in archive materials. For those authors' pages, I added either the relevant title that was missing from their bibliography or a sentence or two that mentioned the press's publication of their work. Once I found pages related to the Decker Press, I could easily add links with Wikipedia's Visual Editor by highlighting the term; existing articles matching that term will pop up.



Adding a link in Visual Editor

List of wikilinks added on related pages:

1. 1949 in poetry
2. August Derleth

3. Carlos Bulosan
4. David Ignatow
5. Edgar Lee Masters
6. Edouard Roditi
7. Gilbert Maxwell
8. Herbert Bruncken
9. Hubert Creekmore
10. Kenneth Patchen
11. Kenneth Rexroth
12. Lorine Niedecker
13. Louis Zukofsky
14. Marshall Schact
15. Objectivism (poetry)
16. Park College
17. Robert Friend
18. Thomas McGrath
19. Tom Boggs
20. William Everson
21. WIU (library systems)

3) Adding redirect and disambiguation pages

Something that I noticed while adding the links was that automatic link generation doesn't work if the term doesn't match the title of the existing article exactly. You can still type in a different term to find a different page to link, but I realized that this posed a barrier in making connections between pages and inserting links. The original name was "The Press of James A. Decker" which was later shortened to simply "The Decker Press," so articles of authors used both names. To avoid confusion on the readers' part and to make sure all mentions of the press were linked back to the central

article, I created redirect pages for “The Press of James A. Decker” and “Press of James A. Decker” which would automatically reroute readers to the main Decker Press article.

Decker Press

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
(Redirected from [The Press of James A. Decker](#))

Message shown at the top of the page when readers click on a redirect link

In a similar vein, I created a disambiguation page for “James Decker” since the existing redirect page automatically took readers to the page for the 2000 film *Animal Factory*, which includes a character named James Decker. This redirect page that helps readers find exactly what they are looking for increases the traffic to the page, makes the information easier to find, and reduces any confusion about similar terms.

One initial reason I was interested in working with Wikipedia is because it is a unique form of online writing that blends the collaborative interaction of social media with the informative communication of academic papers. Wikipedia does have its own [Manual of Style](#) that prescribes style and convention, and the sources required for article citations are very similar to scholarly sources required for academic writing. In this part of my project, I enjoyed the opportunity to become familiar with a new style of writing, as I gained experience in tailoring writing to a certain audience and gained skills in a new type of online communication.