ENGL 301: Dissertation Unit

Student Handbook

2018-2019

Proposal submission deadline: 3.00pm, Friday 22 June 2018

Dissertation submission deadline: 3.00pm, Monday 29 April 2019
Monday Week 2, Term 3.
ENGL 301: Dissertation Unit

This booklet explains what we are looking for on ENGL 301, the dissertation unit. The course is an opportunity for you to investigate a topic which falls within the field of English Studies (broadly defined), but with more breadth, depth and freedom than at any other time in your degree. It should absorb as much of your time as any other full unit course. It is important that you start thinking about it at the end of the second year and that you work on it steadily throughout your third year. Before they start, students often find that the freedom of a dissertation induces a good deal of anxiety; but once they finish they often find it’s the aspect of their degree work that they look back on with most satisfaction. We certainly hope that’s the case for you.

The preliminary lecture at the end of your 2nd year gives guidance on how to go about choosing a topic. We then require that you submit us a proposal form – see p. 3, which explains exactly what we’re looking for. This should be returned to the Department electronically via the submission area in Moodle, by 3.00pm, 22 June 2018 (Friday Week 9, Term 3). Writing the proposal will require some preliminary research. On the strength of a good proposal you will be able to think about and read around your topic over the summer and be in a good position to start work in October.

Proposals that the Department deems inadequate or unfeasible will be returned to you for rewriting. **You will not be assigned a supervisor until you submit an acceptable proposal.**

You will be assigned to a supervisor at the beginning of the first term and will begin working with her/him in the early weeks of that term. The criteria by which students are assigned to supervisors are complicated, and relate to staff availability and duties, as well as subject expertise – hence allocations cannot happen until the start of the academic year. Students are encouraged to discuss ideas for dissertation topics with members of the Department in office consultation hours during summer term, and to indicate they have done so on their proposal, but this does not guarantee that a particular member of staff will supervise the dissertation.

The dissertation must be word-processed, properly annotated, have an appropriate bibliography, and be ‘soft-bound’ in plastic covers with a smooth spine with your name clearly shown through the front cover. The final assessment will take into account research skills and presentation (including annotation and bibliography) as well as academic content, so be sure to stick assiduously to our regulations on presentation. For a full list of things to check before you submit your dissertation, see p.5 of this booklet and the frequently asked questions at the end.

The dissertation is fundamentally your project and responsibility. The supervisor’s role is a limited one; he or she will offer general guidance, not the detailed and regular teaching you receive on other courses.

**Submission: 3pm on Thursday of week 2, term 3 (2 May 2019)**

**Length: Absolutely no more than 10,000 words**

Departmental regulations about **plagiarism** apply to ENGL 301 (see the Part II handbook available on the ‘Resources for Current Students’ section of the Departmental website).
Our Expectations

We are looking for a number of things in an extended project of this nature:

- A sense of close involvement in a literary or cultural topic.
- A development, in terms of breadth and range, of the skills of close textual analysis and wider conceptual exploration which you have learnt on your degree thus far.
- Evidence of independent work throughout the year (with periodic supervision).
- Detailed, organised arguments, supported by primary and secondary evidence.
- An understanding that the study of literary or other cultural texts involves on-going debates about what is valuable in cultural texts and what the most fruitful ways of reading them might be.

Choice of Topic and Scope of the Dissertation

The dissertation is four times longer than a standard Year 2 essay, but you should not start with much more than twice the amount of primary texts you would expect to use in an essay. So 3-5 standard size novels would be appropriate, or their equivalents (3-5 poetry collections, 3-5 plays). You should also aim to at least double the extent of your use of secondary material (criticism and/or theory).

When choosing your topic:

- You are free to write on traditional/canonical or ‘popular’ texts – or a combination of both. Do bear in mind that popular texts (whether fiction, film or TV) will require just as rigorous an analysis as more canonical texts.
- Your dissertation does not need to be author (or director)-based; it can be thematic, comparative or genre-focused.
- If you are also a Creative Writing student, your dissertation could involve a creative component – but you must seek advice from the 301 convenor in the planning stages.

Secondary Sources

Please note that the Library uses OneSearch, which allows you to search for online books, journals, articles, newspapers and images, as well as giving you the option to search the Lancaster collection. Go to [http://libweb.lancs.ac.uk/](http://libweb.lancs.ac.uk/)

Be sure that any websites you use are authoritative, scholarly sources.

We do, of course, want to see your understanding of literary texts and cultural issues. But we also want to see you reflect on this understanding and how you came to it. What are your priorities? What critical methods do you favour? What are the strengths and limitations of these approaches? You will only be able to think clearly about such issues if you read widely and constructively in secondary critical and theoretical material. Secondary reading should clarify and focus your own reading.
Meetings with Supervisors

Term 1, Week 2: Group Meeting
Term 1, Week 10: Individual Supervision
Term 2, Week 5: Individual Supervision
Term 2, Week 10: Final Group Meeting

Supervisors will contact you via your Lancaster email and/or notices on the 301 Moodle site to organise these meetings. It is your responsibility to check the 301 site. If you miss a meeting without genuine medical or personal reasons, it will not be repeated or rescheduled, and the missed meeting will be placed on your student record.

The dissertation, representing one eighth of your degree, is a substantial commitment, and involves a much greater degree of independence than standard taught courses. It is particularly important that you pace your work carefully across the academic year. We see the meetings with tutors as an important part of this pacing process. Subsequent missed meetings will similarly be recorded on your file.

Writing Your Proposal

Your proposal must be submitted by 22 June 2018 (Friday Week 9, Term 3). It must be typed and presented according to Departmental guidelines. It should be submitted electronically to the submission area in Moodle.

Your proposal has two purposes:

- To demonstrate that you have selected a good topic and that the Library can sustain your research and the Department provide adequate supervision. You will be asked to submit another proposal if the first is not considered viable.
- To ensure that you can start working as soon as you return in October. Over the summer, you should obtain your primary texts and start thinking about and reading around your topic. If you are not contacted by the ENGL 301 convenor over the summer, you can assume that your topic is viable.

Consequently, the proposal is not a mere formality. It will require some work in the Summer term, including Library and internet searches and, where appropriate, consultation with lecturers in the Department. Expect to spend several days or more on this.

Your proposal must take the following form:

- **Your Name and College**
- **Title (or Question)**
- **Key Texts and Key Words:** Give authors and texts in short form (e.g. Wordsworth, *The Prelude*; Barthes, 'Death of the Author'), and select three or four key words to indicate your questions, topics and focus (e.g. borders; masculinity; intertextuality; narrative point of view)
- **Description of the Proposed Research:** Between 250 and 500 words. You should describe the area of your research and indicate what questions you want to ask, what approach you will take, and what you might expect to conclude
- **Bibliography:** This should be set out correctly and should include your primary texts and a short list of secondary materials (between 6 and 12 items). Where
possible, you should have briefly checked that these secondary items are indeed of some use. Where you need to get hold of material from elsewhere than the Library (e.g. from other libraries), you should indicate in a note at the end that you have checked how you will do this. Please note that Undergraduates have limited access to the Library Interlending service.

- **Consultations:** If you have talked to any tutors in the department about your topic, then please indicate that here.

- **Contact Address:** Please let us know where we can write to you if we need to contact you over the summer regarding your proposal. An email address is best, provided you check it frequently. If you do not use your Lancaster email address, there is a risk that any messages from you to us will be filtered out as spam.

**Meetings With Supervisors**

**Meeting 1 (Week 2, Group):** You will have done some reading and thinking about your topic over the summer, so review your proposal. Can you define more precisely the set of tasks that your general topic is going to involve you in? Can you see what order you might tackle them in? Try to develop a working framework or plan. Identify your theoretical interests, fine-tune your choice of texts, and think about the research questions or concepts to help you organise your work and direct your reading. We will NOT give detailed written feedback on this draft chapter.

It is worth keeping in touch with other members of your ‘group’ between supervisions.

**Meeting 2 (Week 10, Individual):** As a check on your progress, we require you to complete a draft chapter (2,000 – 3,000 words) in time for this meeting. We will want to check that this written work physically exists, but supervisors only read a few pages of it – you are expected to summarise the argument orally in the meeting. We recommend you start with the chapter you feel most confident about.

After Meeting 2, we recommend that you draft an Introduction setting out your general themes and approach and draw up a timetable for the completion of subsequent chapters.

**Meeting 3 (Week 15, Individual):** You may have a particular issue you want to discuss; or you may present orally some of your later draft work and get oral feedback; or you may have a general discussion about your dissertation. Your supervisor may have given you specific individual instructions for this meeting, depending on your progress in meeting 2. By the end of the second term, you should aim to have 6000-7000 words of the dissertation written.

**Meeting 4 (Week 20, Group):** Focuses on presentation issues and submission guidelines.
Submission Checklist

• Submission Deadline: Thursday 2 May 2019, by 3pm. Please submit your dissertations to the Administration Office (B114, County Main).

• You should aim to finish writing and editing at least a week before the deadline: having a human or computer virus two days before the dissertation is due is not an excuse for late submission. You will need to factor binding time into your plans.

• You must submit two soft-bound copies and an electronic copy of the dissertation by the deadline. You should submit the electronic copy on the ENGL 301 Moodle page.

• Length: 10,000 words. You must state the actual word length on your title page. This includes quotations but excludes footnotes and bibliography. Appendices which are not in your own words can be included additionally with the permission of your supervisor and the ENGL 301 convenor. Please note that 10,000 words is the absolute maximum for the ENGL 301 dissertation. There is no leeway whatever to exceed 10,000 words.

• Style: Your dissertation should be word-processed, properly referenced and with an appropriate Bibliography. Be sure to follow our regulations on presentation. Your overall mark will be affected if there are serious errors and/or shortcomings in your presentation (e.g. spelling, grammar, written style, layout etc.) The dissertation should have an unnumbered title page and contents page.

• Binding: Your dissertation should be soft-bound in plastic front and back covers with a smooth spine (NOT SPIRAL). Please include the following information on the front cover:
  ▪ Your name and college
  ▪ The title of your dissertation followed by the words 'A dissertation submitted to the Department of English and Creative Writing in fulfilment of the unit ENGL 301'
  ▪ The name of your supervisor
  ▪ The word count (see above)

• Coversheets: Include two copies of the coversheet, one in each copy of the dissertation, and sign each copy. Please do not bind the coversheet into the dissertation.
Frequently Asked Questions

Presentation

What do I need to include on the title page?

Your name and college
The title of your dissertation followed by ‘A dissertation submitted to the Department of English and Creative Writing in fulfilment of the unit ENGL 301’
Your supervisor’s name spelt correctly
Word count

Should I include an abstract?

No. An abstract is not a requirement for this kind of dissertation.

Is it acceptable to print on both sides of the paper?

Yes. However, if you choose to do this, please ensure adequate left and right margins, bearing in mind that the dissertation will be bound.

Do I need to include my name at the top of each page?

We recommend that you do include your name at the top of each page. Occasionally pages have gone missing from imperfectly bound dissertations.

Are footnotes and/or Bibliography included in my wordcount?

Neither footnotes nor Bibliography are included in your wordcount. The Department discourages lengthy discursive footnotes, however – if the point is important, it should be in your main text.

How long should my Bibliography be?

There is no definitive answer to this, but we expect you to have engaged relevant critical and theoretical fields in some depth and would expect to see more than one page of Bibliographic material.

What should be included in my Bibliography?

All material referred to in your dissertation. You may choose to include key texts that have informed your thinking even if you have not directly referenced them. Avoid excessive use of internet sources, as these can be less than reliable and/or unscholarly.

Should I use a Bibliography or Works Cited?

Either is fine. Works Cited should only include material actually referred to.

Should I separate primary and secondary material in my Bibliography?

This is acceptable, but you are not required to do so.
Should I list electronic sources separately in my Bibliography?

If the source is an electronic article with an author, list it alphabetically in the main text of your Bibliography. If it does not have a specific author (as is the case for, say, a website), list it after the main Bibliography under ‘Websites’.

Do I need to restart my footnotes at the beginning of each chapter?

You can either restart your footnotes at the beginning of each chapter or run footnotes continuously through the dissertation as a single document.

Will I be penalised if my dissertation is over or under-length?

The word limit of 10,000 words is a hard limit. Markers will not mark beyond 10,000 words.

If your dissertation is under-length, you will not receive a formal penalty; we consider short dissertations to be self-penalising in terms of content.

Submission

When is the submission deadline for ENGL 301?

The submission date for ENGL 301 is Thursday 2 May 2019 (Week 2, Term 3), by 3pm.

Where do I submit my dissertation?

You need to submit your dissertation to the Administration Office (B114 County Main). Please do not put it in the essay box.

How many copies do I need to submit?

You need to submit two correctly bound paper copies and one electronic copy.

How should I submit my electronic copy?

Your electronic copy should be submitted through the ENGL 301 Moodle site. You do not need to submit an additional copy on a disc or pen drive.

Why do you need an electronic copy?

We ask for an electronic copy as one of your paper copies may be sent to the External Examiner. We also may need to use it to check the word count.

What format should I use for the electronic submission?

We use Microsoft Word, so any programme compatible with that will be fine. Please be aware that some text (e.g. footnotes) can be lost in conversion from some other programmes to Microsoft Word.

Who do I contact about an extension?

Extensions are only granted in exceptional circumstances for ENGL 301 and can only be granted by the Director of Undergraduate Studies (Students) or, if s/he is unavailable, by the Director of Undergraduate Studies (Courses) / ENGL 301 convenor. Please do not seek an extension from your ENGL 301 supervisor.
**What about binding?**

Please note: You should probably aim to finish your dissertation around a week before the deadline date to give you time to arrange the binding.

Both paper copies need to be soft-bound, which means that a spine and plastic covers are attached to the dissertation.

The University Bindery is now closed. Design, photography and print unit (Lancaster University, County Main) offer a soft binding service. Tel: 01524 592070

There are also shops in town who will offer binding services. Whichever bindery service you use, you are strongly encouraged to contact them well before the deadline to get a sense of prices and turnaround times.

Please don’t forget that wherever you have your dissertations bound, we need thermal binding with a smooth spine and plastic covers. Comb binding is not acceptable.

You will need to complete a coversheet for each paper copy of the dissertation and slide this into the front of each bound copy. Please don’t have it bound in, as we will need to be able to remove it later.