

Area of Concentration in English

Overall English is a tremendously flexible field, founded on careful engagement with artistic writing or “literature,” but reaching into the corners of communicating in English including film, digital media, and performance. Our field engages questions that intersect with philosophy, cultural anthropology, and the arts. A degree in English can lead in many directions after college—from writing-intensive careers in publishing and education to less obvious tracks in library or curatorial work, healthcare, human resources, marketing and business, and public service with non-profit organizations. See more details about our graduates and what they are doing now on our webpage: <http://www.ncf.edu/english>

At New College we offer regular courses in literature and culture from the early modern period to contemporary print and electronic media, and performance. The Area of Concentration in English focuses on intersections between English language literature and its historical and cultural environments. Students graduating in this field should be able to analyze texts from a variety of genres and historical periods; to recognize the role of literature in encounters between cultures across national, ethnic, and temporal lines; and to be able to deploy a variety of critical and theoretical approaches to the study of literature.

Expectations and Guidelines for Planning and Applying for an AOC in English

Students should plan a balanced program of study in consultation with the faculty in English; failure to consult with faculty is likely to weaken an application significantly. Successful applications will demonstrate the appropriate qualitative and quantitative preparation (see below*), and especially:

- 1) that the student is capable of strong work in advanced literature courses,
- 2) that the student has been in contact with faculty about viable possible thesis topics,
- 3) that the student is close to meeting the requirements below and can complete them *and* the thesis in time for graduation,
- 4) that the student has worked with at least three of the English faculty, and
- 5) that the student has taken advantage of a combination of courses both in English and in other fields to achieve a minimum of two course-equivalents in each of the areas listed below.

1) Textual analysis and close reading

Close reading is the foundation of literary analysis. Students should demonstrate the ability to analyze technical features of verse, prose, and dramatic writing at a minimum; discuss the relation between form and content in multiple genres; and analyze the use of specific language.

2) Historical engagement

In order to work effectively with non-contemporary literature, students should demonstrate engagement with historical methodolog(ies) in addition to some understanding of the relation between the material studied and its particular historical situation. Students are required to take courses in more than one historical period.

3) Cross-cultural encounters

In order intelligently to consider the multiple perspectives that literature makes available, students should demonstrate engagement with approaches to issues of national, racial, ethnic, and sexual difference. Courses dealing with cultures within and beyond the English-speaking world are particularly appropriate to this requirement; students are required to complete at least one course in a non-anglophone literature either in translation or in the original language.

4) Criticism and/or theoretical approach

The scholarly conversation about literature is rich and complex; an understanding of critical approaches equips students to take part in it. Students should demonstrate some familiarity with relevant theoretical approaches; recognize that different methods produce different readings of the same text; be able to incorporate secondary criticism into their own writing, and choose appropriate approaches to their own projects.

NOTE: Up to 50% of the expectation for work in (2) Historical Engagement may be fulfilled by coursework in history, art history, or a related discipline; likewise to 50% of the expectation for work in (3) Cross-cultural Encounters may be fulfilled by coursework in history, anthropology, international studies/political science, or a related discipline. ALL of these categories may be fulfilled by work in non-anglophone literatures, but for the English Area of Concentration, it is expected that the majority of work will be in anglophone literatures. (Students who plan substantial work in at least two other language traditions may want to consider the Literature Area of Concentration.)

In General:

- Although not required, performance and creative work are strongly encouraged; students particularly interested in and prepared for creative work may consider the Creative+ thesis option. [see link]
- English values work in related fields highly, particularly history, art history, anthropology, philosophy, religion, classics, and of course literatures in languages other than English; such coursework will strengthen an application significantly. For students interested in creative work, work in art and/or music may also be appropriate.

***Quantitative:**

At the time of application, students should have not fewer than 5 and not more than 8 course-equivalents in English literature on their transcripts. 8 course-units are the minimum for an English AOC; a Joint-Disciplinary AOC is possible with 5 course equivalents in the field, roughly ½ of the expectation for a full AOC.

Courses in English indicate which of the requirements they meet in their course descriptions. Many courses will meet more than one requirement; no single course may be counted as meeting more than two requirements on the Application Form.

***Qualitative:**

- textual analysis and close-reading skills are evident in prior coursework at a level that gives confidence in the student's ability to undertake the senior thesis project;
- writing skills and expressive fluency to the level necessary for preparing to do advanced work in the field are also demonstrated;
- the basis for beginning to integrate secondary criticism effectively into one's own argument is established.

Outcomes:

Applications may be **accepted** with specific requirements for completing the degree, **denied**, or **deferred**; each applicant will receive a letter that details his or her specific decision and suggests next steps. **Acceptance** means that the student is approved and that any of the English faculty will sign the Provisional AOC form which is due Friday before break of the relevant term. **Deferral** means that the student is welcome to apply again at a later date and usually some guidance toward making a more successful application will be given. Applications that have met the quantitative expectations, but have not yet reached the qualitative expectations may be **denied** (not invited to reapply), or deferred.

---> Once accepted, the student is ready to embark on the two-semester process of researching and writing a senior thesis project. [Click here](#) for details of different pathways for the thesis in English literatures.