

# English Department Senior Capstone Experience Guidelines *Updated December 2021*

## **DESCRIPTION**

“The Senior Capstone Experience (SCE) requires students to demonstrate the ability to think critically and to engage in a project of active learning in their major field of study. In the SCE, which is required of all graduating seniors, students integrate all relevant knowledge and skills from their entire academic program into a senior project demonstrating mastery of a body of knowledge and intellectual accomplishment that goes significantly beyond classroom learning.”<sup>1</sup>

The SCE for English majors exemplifies each student’s accumulated knowledge and mastery of literary analysis. It allows students the opportunity to pursue a substantive research project while working closely with a faculty advisor. English majors will bring their research and interpretive abilities, their writing skills, and their understanding of the literary tradition to bear on a long-term, independent project that consists of an annotated bibliography and an essay. SCE projects normally address British or American literature or literature written in English outside of the U.S. (like postcolonial literature) and grows out of coursework completed for the English major. Topics may be defined by author, historical period, theme, cultural, or theoretical issue. Topics also can be interdisciplinary, especially when designed to fulfill requirements for a double major. In all cases, SCE projects must be chosen in consultation with and approved by the SCE advisor and by the department.

## **SCE Timeline**

Fall of Junior Year	Enroll in Junior Seminar
Spring of Junior Year	Submit Abstract to SCE Advisor (Early Spring) Submit SCE Proposal to Department (Late Spring)
Fall of Senior Year	Complete Annotated Bibliography
Spring of Senior Year	Complete Thesis Essay

The English department has structured the SCE to help students avoid being overwhelmed in the final semester of their senior year. Specific assignment due dates are listed on [the department’s website](#). SCE advisors may set additional milestone deadlines and require regular meetings to discuss students’ progress.

Upon successful completion of their SCE, students will earn a grade and four academic credits (double-majors will earn two credits for each SCE). These four credits count toward the total needed to graduate from the College. SCE’s that earn a letter grade of A- or better qualify for honors.

The information provided in this document is intended to communicate the English department’s expectations clearly and consistently to its students. We realize that questions and special circumstances may arise that are not addressed here. Students and their SCE advisors should use this document to guide their conversations about what they both expect from individual SCE projects.

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<sup>1</sup> From the *Washington College Course Catalog*, 2021-2022, p. 57.

## **JUNIOR SEMINAR**

English majors are required to take the Junior Seminar during the fall of their junior year. This course fulfills the department's W3 (Writing in the Discipline) writing program requirement and helps majors focus their attention on the methodologies and modes of writing and critical thinking that are specific to literary studies. Junior Seminar builds on the knowledge and skills students learned in their W1 and W2 courses, and it helps them transition to the work needed to complete the W4 requirement (i.e., the SCE). Majors practice developing research questions and assessing the applicability and relevance of different research methods, thus providing a foundation for developing compelling SCE projects. The abstract and proposal completed in Junior Seminar may be revised, in consultation with the SCE advisor, and submitted for the SCE.

## **SCE ADVISORS and PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT**

Students should work in close contact with a member of the English Department while developing their proposal, conducting their research, preparing their annotated bibliography, and writing their thesis essay. They should identify their SCE advisor during the spring of their junior year by contacting a member of the department who represents the field or literary period in which the student proposes to work. They should submit their abstract to their potential SCE advisor and use it to guide discussions about the faculty member's availability and willingness to advise their SCE. Each member of the English faculty may limit their SCE students to six; thus, students will need to select an alternate if their first choice of advisor is not available.

After the student and advisor have agreed on a topic and approach, the student must complete a written proposal. Once completed and approved by the individual faculty member who has agreed to direct the project, the proposal must be sent electronically to the chair of the department via Canvas, who will bring it to the entire department for its consideration.

### **Proposal Checklist:**

The proposal should be approximately two pages long (though it may be longer). The more specific the proposal is, the more likely it is to be approved without problems. The proposal should detail the project carefully and include the following elements:

- A description of the scope and range of the proposed project along with the main argument.
- A description of any work the student has already been done on the topic. (e.g., a list of relevant coursework and independent research projects.)
- A description of critical or theoretical problems the thesis will investigate and the questions to be explored.
- A tentative bibliography of books and articles likely to be used that shows familiarity with the field of study.
- If the SCE is an expansion of a class assignment, then the student should append the essay submitted for the course upon which the thesis will be developed).

Students should meet with their SCE advisor once their proposal has been approved, and no later than the end of their junior year, to develop a milestone schedule for completing their project. They should discuss their expectations for their working relationship. Advisors and students may opt to document their conversation or complete a "SCE Contract" (see Appendix for a sample).

## **THE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

An annotated bibliography consists of a comprehensive list of works about a particular topic accompanied by a paragraph intended to explain, describe, and evaluate each work. Students should identify and annotate a minimum of 10-12 sources that pertain to their essay topic. The specific number of and type of sources should be chosen in consultation with and with the approval of the SCE advisor. These sources may consist of primary texts and peer-reviewed, secondary sources. The department expects students to complete this portion of the SCE project before the end of the fall semester of their senior year.

The annotated bibliography must:

- Demonstrate historical breath as well as an understanding of the body of critical literature appropriate for the topic
- Show the ability to locate and use both print and electronic information resources
- Use proper MLA or Chicago citation conventions.

### **THE ESSAY**

The thesis essay is a substantial (25-30 page) scholarly research paper on a literary topic that students produce during the spring of their senior year.

The essay must demonstrate:

- Knowledge of the primary text(s) as well relevant scholarship and criticism,
- A clear, well-structured argument that is supported with evidence,
- Appropriate use of literary terminology and effective use of at least one critical method or interpretive strategy,
- The ability to incorporate secondary sources and document them properly using MLA or Chicago citation conventions,
- Effective use of revision and editing strategies to produce a polished final essay,
- The ability to compose prose that is well written, convincing, imaginative, and engages meaningfully with both primary texts and scholarly literature.

### **FORMATTING AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

The SCE proposal should include the student's name, SCE advisor's name, date, and the Honor Code statement. The project description and supplemental material (i.e., the tentative bibliography and writing sample) should be included in the same file at the end of the proposal.

Both the annotated bibliography and essay should include:

- A coversheet including the thesis title, name of student, name of thesis advisor, and date,
- The Honor Code statement,
- If images are used in the essay, a list of illustrations,
- A works cited list that follows either the MLA or Chicago Style,
- Page numbers (but no page number on the cover sheet).

*Submitting the SCE proposal, annotated bibliography and essay:*

- Be sure to proofread everything before final submission. Do not rely on spell-check alone.
- Submit a complete electronic copy (final version) to Canvas on or before the deadline listed on the department webpage.
- Submit ONLY an electronic copy. Do not print and submit a hard copy.

### **HONOR CODE**

Students must adhere to the Washington College Honor Code when completing the Senior Capstone Experience. Any student found responsible for violating the Honor Code will be reported to the Dean.

Plagiarism is a serious academic and professional offense. Any SCE submission found to contain plagiarized material will be considered in violation of the Honor Code and will be reported to the Dean's office. The consequences for plagiarizing may include expulsion from Washington College. Washington College has contracted with Turnitin.com, a web-based plagiarism prevention service. Theses submitted for the Senior Capstone Experience may be submitted electronically to Turnitin.com.

### **GRADING CRITERIA**

The English department will use the following rubric to designate a letter grade for the SCE.

	<b>A Exceeds Expectations</b>	<b>B Meets Expectations</b>	<b>C Partially Meets Expectations</b>	<b>D Does Not Meet Expectations</b>
<b>Overall Approach</b>	The SCE as a whole presents a fresh subject or argument and treats it in an interesting or original manner, displaying unusual insight. The student meets deadlines on time and is routinely responsive to the advisor's feedback.	The SCE as a whole presents an interesting subject or argument and approaches it in a consistent and careful manner, displaying good insight. The student meets most of the deadlines on time and responds to most of the advisor's feedback.	The SCE as a whole presents a subject or main idea, but the treatment may be too general or lack a clear argument. The insight is adequate but not marked by independent thought. The student meets some of the deadlines on time and is minimally responsive to the advisor's feedback.	The SCE as a whole presents a poorly defined or inconsistently treated subject and displays little insight. The student does not meet deadlines on time and is not responsive to the advisor's feedback.
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	The project engages and responds to relevant critical sources. It offers a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of what others have said about the topic and responds to opposing views and counter arguments. Appropriate critical lenses are used to engage in the continuing dialogue within and beyond a community of readers.	The project acknowledges relevant critical sources and possible further implications of the text, topic, or issue. Appropriate critical lenses are used to contribute to the ongoing dialogue. Opposing views are acknowledged occasionally.	The project lacks a coherent analysis or synthesis of relevant critical sources. It does not consistently utilize critical sources and is limited in identifying critical implications and/or opposing views.	The project comments on the text, topic, or issue in ways that fail to identify critical implications and/or an understanding of the continuing dialogue about it. Viewpoints of other scholars are taken as fact, without question or evaluation.
<b>Information Literacy</b>	The SCE effectively defines the extent of information needed by clearly defining the scope of the research question, determining key concepts, selecting appropriate information resources, and citing them correctly.	The SCE defines the scope of the research question, identifies key concepts, uses appropriate information resources, and cites most of them correctly.	The scope of the SCE is not clearly defined or remains too broad/too narrow. Key concepts are limited. The project makes minimal use of information resources and/or does not cite them correctly.	The SCE does not have a clearly defined scope. It does not identify key concepts. It does not use information resources related to the research question and/or does not cite them correctly. Sources are used inappropriately (i.e., misquoted or taken out of context).
<b>Execution of Analysis</b>	Paragraphs are fully developed with detail that supports the main argument. Sentences within the paragraphs are clearly linked, forming an appropriate pattern. Transitions are effective. Key words and terms are used to complicate simplistic ways of thinking about the topic.	Paragraphs are, with a few exceptions, adequately developed and generally successful in supporting the main argument. Transitions are clear, and sentences within the paragraphs are, for the most part, clearly related to each other and the main idea. Key words are utilized adequately.	Paragraphs may lack adequate supporting detail or may be only loosely linked to the main argument. The annotated bib/essay may contain too much plot summary. Sentences within paragraphs may be repetitive or only loosely related, and transitions may be missing. Key words and terms are absent. The annotated bib does not include the minimum number of sources. The essay does not meet the minimum	Paragraphs do not support the main idea or contain little supporting detail. Sentences within paragraphs are often unrelated to the main idea, and transitions are lacking. The annotated bib does not include the minimum number of sources. The essay does not meet the minimum required page length.

			page length requirement.	
<b>Grammar &amp; Mechanics</b>	Sentences are varied and imaginative in style, concise, and creative in wording. There are very few errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or citation, or errors only in sophisticated matters.	Sentences are clear and correct in structure and style and are not excessively wordy. Word choice is usually appropriate. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, and citations follow accepted conventions, except for a few minor errors.	Sentences are generally correct in structure but may be excessively wordy or vague. The annotated bib/essay may display serious errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, or citation, or frequent minor errors that greatly distract the reader.	Sentences are frequently incorrect in structure, vague, or wordy. The tone and word choice are inappropriate or inconsistent. The annotated bib/essay may contain serious errors in grammar, punctuation, or citation, as well as numerous minor errors and frequent misspellings.

[An **Unacceptable (F)** SCE does not have a clear subject or main idea, or the main idea is defined and treated in a way that does not follow the SCE Guidelines. The project lacks a purpose or plan. It does not demonstrate the author’s understanding of the chosen text, topic, or issue. It does not use appropriate information resources. The annotated bib does not include the minimum number of sources. The essay does not meet the minimum page length requirement. It is poorly written with paragraphs that are not related to the main idea or argument, sentences within paragraphs that are unrelated, and frequent serious errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, or citation. The student does not respond to or communicate with the advisor.]

# SENIOR CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

## Student-Faculty Advisor Agreement

This AGREEMENT is made as of [Date] between [Student] and [SCE Advisor].

### ***I. Purpose of the Senior Capstone Experience***

The Senior Capstone Experience requires students to demonstrate the ability to think critically and to engage in a project of active learning in their major field of studies. In the SCE, required of all graduating seniors, students integrate acquired knowledge and skills in a senior project demonstrating mastery of a body of knowledge and intellectual accomplishment that goes significantly beyond classroom learning.

For English majors, the SCE is an opportunity to bring research and interpretive abilities, writing skills, and an understanding of the literary tradition to bear on a long-term, independent project that will serve as the culmination of the students' literary studies at Washington College. The SCE for English majors exemplifies each student's accumulated knowledge and mastery of literary analysis.

Upon successful completion of the SCE, the student will receive four academic credits. These four credits will count toward the total needed to graduate from the College (typically 128). Students do earn a grade for their SCE; SCEs receiving the equivalent of an A- or above are eligible for honors consideration.

### ***II. Student's Responsibilities***

The SCE is an independent project that carries a number of responsibilities for the student:

The student is expected to conduct significant preparatory work and research prior to the start of the senior year, and should entail (re)reading primary texts and surveying the critical literature related to the chosen subject.

The student is expected to begin drafting the SCE proposal during the spring prior to the start of the senior year in order to meet the proposal deadline.

During the academic year, the student must submit annotated bibliography and thesis drafts according to the deadlines established by the SCE advisor. The student must also meet with their advisor throughout the academic year to confer about the research completed to date, to discuss any further research sources that may be helpful, and to discuss the advisor's comments about each draft submission.

The student must keep up with and be responsive to the advisor's communications.

### ***III. SCE Advisor's Responsibilities***

The faculty advisor is responsible for mentoring the student as they work on the completion of the SCE:

The advisor must keep up with and be responsive to the student's communications.

The advisor must read the student's drafts and offer suggestions for revision in a timely manner.

The advisor must meet with the student to offer suggestions on how to proceed with the research and to discuss comments about the draft submissions.

The advisor must assess the student's progress with the SCE and advise the student if they are at risk of failing to complete the SCE or meet the expectations for the project.

### ***IV. Draft Submission Schedule***

The student is expected to complete and submit drafts of the proposal, annotated bibliography, and thesis according to the following schedule:

**[Schedule to be filled in by SCE advisor]**

The dates listed above may be subject to change; however, the student must understand that failing to submit drafts on time will delay progress and put the student at risk of failing to complete the SCE on time. The student's grade might also be affected.

**V. Terms and Conditions**

The faculty advisor may assign a grade of Incomplete to the student for the SCE, subject to the policy on Incompletes as stated in the *College Catalog*: In short, if the student is prevented from completing required coursework by illness (as shown by a physician's certificate) or some other valid circumstance, the faculty advisor may assign the temporary grade of "I" (Incomplete). Under no circumstances should the student be given an Incomplete as a substitute for failure. When the student, through negligence or procrastination, fails to complete the senior thesis on time, and where there are no extenuating circumstance, the student will receive an "F."

Plagiarism is a serious academic and professional offense. Any SCE submission found to contain plagiarized material will be considered in violation of the Honor Code and will be reported to the Dean's office. The consequences for plagiarizing may include expulsion from Washington College. Washington College has contracted with Turnitin.com, a web-based plagiarism prevention service. SCEs submitted for the Senior Capstone Experience may be submitted electronically to Turnitin.com.

I have read and understand the stipulations, terms, and conditions of this agreement. I agree to fulfill my responsibilities as described above to the best of my ability.

Student's Signature:

Date:

SCE Advisor's Signature:

Date: