

**English 620:**  
**The Senior Project in English**  
**Procedures, Guidelines and [Deadlines](#)**

The senior project is one of the most important pieces of work a student will accomplish at Allegheny; many see it as the culminating intellectual experience of a student's particular major. As such, it is crucial that you read what follows with attention and care, and begin to plan and prepare early. As you embark on your project in English, you will need to *propose a project* (see guidelines below); if you are approved, you will work with a director to bring your work to fruition. A proposal will require concerted early effort on your part to achieve, as well as motivation, foresight and scope. **Students whose senior project proposals are not approved will complete their senior project requirements by designing an alternate project with their proposed director, a project suited to that student's interest and abilities, typically embodying sustained attention to a single text, or small unit of texts.** Within these parameters, students will produce a research-based work of literary criticism aligned with or connected to his or her project's subject—a critical review of a particular work, a focused study of a specific literary tradition or author, an aspect of literary style, form, etc.—embodied in a sustained, focused analysis.

**I. Preparation**

***The Senior Project Proposal***

You will need to secure a project director before beginning your project (see guidelines below). Once a director is secured, you must begin preliminary research. Through this research, you should be able to clearly articulate a planned topic and at this point begin writing the proposal. The proposal should set out the problem, question, or issue to be explored and should be **3-4 double-spaced pages in length**. Some thought should also be given to chapter divisions. **A preliminary annotated bibliography is required** and must be attached to your proposal. While the project may evolve through consultation with your first and second readers during the pre-project oral and through ongoing writing and research, it is expected that your final version will remain aligned with its original proposed direction. **[Senior project proposals are due on the Monday of the tenth full week of classes the semester before you wish to write your senior project.](#)**

**See Appendix Three (below) for a sample of a proposal.**

***Choosing a topic***

We recommend that you select a topic with which you are familiar. The topic should reflect in some degree work you have already done within the English major. Some students find that an idea for the senior project originates in the junior seminar; however, this need not be the case. You may find yourself wanting to explore in more detail work done in one of your 300-level or 400-level courses. You may also wish to weave together ideas discussed in courses outside the department with material covered in one of your English courses.

***Choosing a senior project director and second reader***

It is your responsibility to seek out your director (a.k.a. first reader). Early in the semester prior to enrolling in English 620, you should ask a faculty member to direct your senior project. The

decision to direct or not direct a senior project is entirely up to the faculty member. If you are at all in doubt about whom to ask, talk to your academic advisor or to the chair of the department about possibilities. *You must choose a director and get that person's approval by the time you register for English 620.* Following the submission and approval of your proposal, the Department Chair will assign your second reader.

### **Deadlines and Protocol**

**Again, proposals are due on Monday of the tenth full week of classes** in the semester prior to enrollment in English 620. You must email the proposal and annotated bib as a single pdf to your senior project director, who (following the Dept. Chair's selection of your second reader) will instruct you on how to arrange the pre-project oral.

### ***Pre-Project Oral***

The pre-project oral, a.k.a. "pre-comp oral," is typically scheduled during the final weeks of the semester, prior to final exams, and typically takes 30-40 minutes. It is a chance for your first and second readers to get a sense of the project, ask questions, and discuss areas that will need to be more fully developed. It is also a chance for you to ask questions and gain additional guidance and directions for proceeding with your project. In the majority of cases, the pre-comp oral is the only time that you and both readers will come together prior to the senior project oral at the end of the semester in which you write your project.

## **II. Basic Requirements for the Senior Project Itself**

### ***Drafting and Revision***

You are expected to work with your senior project director during the drafting and revising of the project. Working in tandem, director and student typically establish a schedule for meetings and due dates for draft submissions and returns. The outcomes of such meetings and of written commentary should be reflected in your final project.

### **Deadline and submission**

**The senior project is due by 4:00 on Friday of the twelfth full week of classes in the semester of enrollment.** You must submit it as a single pdf emailed to your director and second reader. You are also required to submit 3 bound copies, for which the department will pay, using the Allegheny College Print Shop. These copies may be submitted after the project deadline, but (ideally) prior to the senior project oral exam.

### ***Research***

Your project must consider previous scholarship and relevant material without being dependent on secondary sources for all substantive ideas. Senior projects are primarily evaluated on your ability to refute, amend, or expand upon previously published arguments and on the facility with which secondary materials are integrated.

### ***Organization***

The project should have a clearly articulated organizational rationale. Reasons for section divisions should be made evident, and conclusions should go beyond a summary of the project's argument.

### ***Documentation Style***

Please follow current MLA (Modern Language Association) format.

### ***Issues of Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics***

The prose in the senior project is expected to be mechanically correct in all respects (grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.), and to be of consistent quality throughout. The project must be proofread scrupulously. There will be no opportunity for revision or correction of errors after the project is submitted. Please be aware that projects suffering from a significant number of errors will be graded accordingly.

### ***Length***

The minimum required length is 35 pages, not including documentation.

**See Appendix One and Appendix Two (below) for samples of the cover page and signature page.**

## **III. The Senior Project Oral**

Although the written essay is the most important determinant of your grade, the oral is a meaningful culmination of those efforts and can, depending upon its quality, raise or lower that grade by a partial letter grade. (For example, a "C" might become a "C-" or a "C+," depending on the quality of the oral.) You should arrive for the oral familiar with the objectives, claims, and details of your work, and you should arrive prepared to talk about them. While the emphasis in the oral will be on what you have written, discussion may range to include relevant issues, contexts, and sources not directly addressed in the project. In a highly successful oral, you will demonstrate that the written essay represents only a portion of what you have learned about your chosen topic.

### ***Grades***

After the oral, you will be told whether or not you have passed. No letter grade will be given at this point. At the discretion of the director, you may receive written comments or be encouraged to meet with the director at a later date to discuss the project. After you have left the room, the board members will discuss the grade, which will be made known to you only when you receive final grades for the semester.

## **IV. Plagiarism**

As in all other areas of your academic work, plagiarism will not be tolerated in the senior project. Plagiarism includes direct and indirect uncited use of any words or ideas other than your own.

Using the words or ideas of another person without proper citation is a crime. All acts of plagiarism will be taken seriously, and all incidents will be reported to the Honor Committee. The Honor Code can be found in the Student Handbook and in the college catalogue.

## **V. Policies on Extensions and on Lateness**

### ***Extensions***

An important aspect of writing the senior project is learning to adhere to a strict deadline. You must make every effort to meet the deadline. If genuine need for an extension of the due date should arise, you must petition members of your senior project board in writing. After receiving a petition, the board will discuss its merits and submit a recommendation to the chairperson of the department for final review. Petitioners will be informed of action taken as speedily as possible. No second petition is permissible, and the petitioner may not bypass his or her board to seek the direct approval of the departmental chairperson.

### ***Lateness***

Late projects will be handled in the following manner: a senior project submitted after the deadline will be penalized by one whole grade on the college grade scale after the board has determined the final grade for the project (for example from "A" to "B" or "C" to "D"). If the senior project is not turned in by Tuesday at 4 p.m. following the Friday deadline, it will not be accepted. The lowest final grade after penalties have been imposed shall be no lower than a D, unless the quality of the project (according to the judgment of the committee) merits an F.

### **Goals and Procedures for the Double Senior Project**

The English department has no prescribed procedures for double senior projects. Our common practice is, on the one hand, to follow as fully as possible our departmental procedures and expectations (outlined above), and on the other, to work with the other department as sensibly as possible.

#### ***Common practice***

- You select a director in both English and the department of your second major to advise the project. Since you have two directors or "first readers," for double majors there is no "second reader."
- In declaring a double major, you have already indicated which major is your graduation major. You have decided, that is, whether you'll be an English-History double major or a History-English double major, for example. While both directors will have equal roles in the advising and assessment of your senior project, the director in your graduation major field will be responsible for submitting your final grade.
- In a single-semester double senior project, the deadlines for the proposal and the completed project will be those of the graduation major.
- If one of the majors has a two-semester senior project (English has a one-semester senior project), you must submit your proposal at the required time for the two-semester senior project. Even though the English project will technically not start until the following semester, you should choose your English director and involve them in the process as early as possible.

- For all double senior projects, it is your responsibility to submit the proposal to both project directors.
- For all double senior projects, a meeting (standing in for the English pre-project oral) is held near the end of the semester before the one in which you begin writing the project. During this meeting you and both directors must agree on questions of methodology.
- It is your responsibility to see that both directors receive a copy of the completed project;
- Directly after the senior project oral, a discussion follows between both directors regarding the grade.

*Expectations about the content and methodology of double comps*

- Ideally the project should be genuinely interdisciplinary, with literary-critical texts and/or interpretive tools complementing the work in the other discipline;
- You should demonstrate, both in the project and the oral, some clear sense of how these two disciplines usefully interact in the project;
- The double project makes substantial use of the literary-critical and interpretive skills acquired in departmental coursework by bringing these skills to bear on the primary texts on which the project is based;
- These primary texts do not need to be predominantly “literary” in a strict sense; the practice of close-reading can serve to illuminate a wide array of cultural texts.

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### **General Goals of the Senior Project in English**

*Students completing a senior project in English should strive to*

- put into independent practice the critical and interpretive skills cultivated in earlier literature classes;
- trace the trajectory of a literary question or issue through a text or set of texts, or articulate a new, demonstrably valid way of understanding those texts or text;
- find a subject for their project that is appropriately ambitious and yet properly focused;
- gain a thorough understanding of their subject;
- undertake successfully the challenge of arguing an interpretive thesis that develops over the course of 35-45 pages;
- research and analyze published criticism (secondary sources) that are relevant and up-to-date, and have those sources inform their own thinking in fair and persuasive ways;
- comprehend a variety of critical approaches to literary texts and employ self-consciously a critical methodology;
- assimilate their learning during the process fully enough to converse intelligently about their subject in the oral;
- organize and manage their independent work time effectively;
- take feedback from faculty constructively.

**Skills students should be able to demonstrate in completing their project.**

*In completing the project, students should be able to*

- scrutinize literary language carefully and infer interesting implications about the text;
- convincingly argue in the written document for the validity of their interpretations;
- demonstrate an awareness of the critical methodology they are employing and articulate the value and implications of that approach;
- gather textual evidence (both primary and secondary) in a well-organized way that advances their thinking in the project;
- talk about their subject in a poised and learned fashion;
- justify, on intellectual, theoretical and rhetorical grounds, the decisions they have made in constructing their project as they have;
- follow correctly the protocols of quotation, citation, and documentation, as described by the current MLA style manual;
- produce clean copy—avoiding spelling, grammatical or other mechanical mistakes;
- interact productively with their senior project advisor;
- revise their writing successfully.

*Revised May 2025*

# **APPENDIX ONE: COVER PAGE**

**TITLE OF SENIOR PROJECT**

**By [Author]**

**A Senior Comprehensive Project in English**

**Submitted to the Department of English at Allegheny College**

**By [Author]**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree**

**[Date]**

# APPENDIX TWO: SIGNATURE PAGE

TITLE OF SENIOR PROJECT

By [Author]

A Senior Comprehensive Project in English

Submitted to the Department of English at Allegheny College

By [Author]

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree

[Date]

Professor [Director] \_\_\_\_\_

Professor [Second Reader] \_\_\_\_\_

**I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code  
and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the college community as a whole.**

\_\_\_\_\_[Author's Signature]\_\_\_\_\_

[Author's Full Name: Printed]



# APPENDIX THREE: PROPOSAL EXAMPLE

Senior Project Proposal

Director: Professor Quinn

Second Reader: Professor Lockridge

## **The American Dream?: The Borders of Social Class and Gender in the Latino/a American Bildungsroman**

For my senior project I am interested in writing a comparative analysis of the semi-autobiographical novels How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents by Julia Alvarez and Drown by Junot Diaz. Both of these novels take place first in the Dominican Republic under the shadow of Dictator Rafael Leonides Trujillo Molina and then in the United States; in addition, both novels trace their central protagonists' immigration journeys from the Dominican Republic and the cultural, linguistic, and personal confusion of making such transitions. In fact, these novels are coming of age stories in which the characters must not only deal with the regular trials of adolescence but must also live their adolescence while trying to understand their identities as immigrants in the United States. Other similarities include both novels' non-traditional structure; for example, the stories are not told in a linear, chronological time line. In addition, both novels shift their points of view so some of the narrative is told in third-person omniscient while some of it is told by one of the central characters in first person.

However, while both novels are about immigrant experiences, they are also radically different about how they represent and portray these experiences. Alvarez's novel deals with the immigrant struggles of an educated, upper-class family forced to flee the Dominican Republic and it explores how they lose their class-status and social position once they move to the US. Diaz's novel is about a poor, working class family in the Dominican Republic and the fact that their emigration to the United States is an act of desperation to try and access more job opportunities and a better way of life. My central questions in comparing and contrasting these two novels about Dominican Republic immigrants are: to what extent does the class status of immigrants in her/his home country affect how they will be received and assimilated into American society and culture? And to what extent is gender related to how the immigrant experience is portrayed?

My plan is to approach these two questions from a new historicist and feminist perspective, and in particular to use Gloria Anzaldua's ideas about borders, which she defines as both geographic and cultural, to think about how these two novels understand and explore the intersection of social class and gender in immigrant experiences. Anzaldua defines "the border" as a place for misfits, a place, literal and metaphorical for those who are rejected from dominant society. She considers this to be a very violent and traumatic psychic and physical space. I hope to use this idea of the border to consider how social class and gender inform the ways in which Alvarez and Diaz's characters understand themselves, their place in their adopted countries and simultaneously how they are defined and understood by the larger "Anglo" culture.

What I am most interested in is seeing how these two texts try to portray the trauma of being an immigrant while at the same time offering very distinct and oppositional views of life in the United States.

States in comparison to life in the home country. In particular, while Alvarez's novel seems to suggest that the immigrant always feels like an immigrant even if she is educated, fluent in English, and seems to have acquired middle-class success and the "American Dream," Diaz's novel seems to question any fixed distinctions between immigrants and the poor, on the one hand, and working class Americans in the United States on the other. It seems that for Diaz there is no American Dream if one is poor, forgotten, and uneducated and that the real trauma is that there's not that much distinction between being poor and disadvantaged in the United States or in the Dominican Republic. And in both cases, the notions of assimilation and success, of the "American Dream" are questioned and complicated. Both of these novels define immigration as a border experience, a crossing over from one thing into another and this crossing over is dangerous, traumatic, and often violent. I'm interested in seeing how this crossing over is further complicated if social class and gender are taken more explicitly into account.

I plan on doing some general research about the Dominican Republic during the dictatorship years in addition to reading about Alvarez and Diaz's place in the Latino/a American literary canon. I also plan to do some reading about the genre form of the bildungsroman, since I think both of these novels are experimenting with the conventions of the coming of age story within the context of the immigrant experience. In terms of my writing plan, I hope to re-read both novels over break and begin my preliminary reading as well. I think that my first chapter will attempt to set up the basic questions I'll be working out in the project, in particular my theoretical frame-work and then offering my overall argument(s) about how I think these two novels are interacting with each other. I plan to have a chapter about the ways in which these two texts use and experiment with the coming of age story in relation to immigrant experiences they represent and portray, a chapter about how these novels explore social class, and a chapter about how they engage the questions of gender in the coming of age/immigrant experience story. Finally my conclusion will try and think about the extent to which what Alvarez and Diaz offer as insights about these questions is still pertinent to our understandings of immigration and the American Dream.

### **Annotated Bibliography for Senior Project on Two Dominican-American Novels: Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Junot Diaz's *Drown*\***

**Anzaldua, Gloria.** *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

This book will provide a theoretical framework for examining the two novels as narratives of border crossing and re-crossing; it explores the tensions between tradition and assimilation as well as the losses and gains of the migrant/immigrant experience. The "border" for Anzaldua is a metaphor for the personal, political and geographic state of the self.

**Kevane, Bridget,** *Latino Literature in America*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2003.

This is a kind of reference book with brief entries on both Alvarez and Diaz. It discusses both the novels I have chosen and is mainly valuable for basic background information.

**Luis, William.** "A Search for Identity in Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*," in *Dance Between Two Cultures: Latino Caribbean Literature Written in the United States*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997. Pages 266-277.

This article focuses on *Garcia Girls* as a narrative of exile and explores the way that exile

complicates identity formation. The book also makes brief reference in another section to Diaz's *Drown* as a narrative of exile in the context of the Trujillo era in Dominican politics.

**Mardorossian, Carine M.** "From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature." *Modern Language Studies*, 32, no 2 (2002, Fall). Pages 15-33.

This compares Alvarez's novel to Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, with respect to narrative technique used to represent the exile/migrant story.

**Muller, Gilbert H.** *New Strangers in Paradise: The Immigrant Experience and Contemporary American Fiction*. University of Kentucky Press, 1999.

This book has some overall discussion of "new" immigrant literature in the U.S. and its distinctive features and a brief discussion of *Garcia Girls* as a Dominican-American novel that participates in what the author calls "metropolitan dreams."

**Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth.** "Junot Diaz's *Drown*: Revisiting "Those Mean Streets."

In *U.S. Latino Literature: A Critical Guide for Students and Teachers*. Edited By Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernandez Olmos. Westwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000. pages 163-174.

This article examines the short story structure of *Drown*, which has the same kind of cumulative overall coherence that *Garcia Girls*. It also looks at the autobiographical component of this fiction and briefly identifies key themes and patterns.

**Rosario-Sievert, Heather.** "The Dominican-American Bildungsroman: Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. In *U.S. Latino Literature: A Critical Guide for Students and Teachers*. Edited by Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernandez Olmos. Westwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000. Pages 113-122.

This article explores the structure of Alvarez's novel as a bildungsroman, while also looking at its episodic story structure. It argues that this work is both a novel of development and a picaresque novel, and it briefly situates both of those forms within the context of a migrant identity.

**Stefanko, Jacqueline.** "New Ways of Telling: Latinas' Narratives of Exile and Return." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 17, no. 2 (1996). Pages 50-69.

This article compares several novels by Latina women (including *Garcia Girls*) with an emphasis on the way that the experience of political exile affects cross-cultural identities. Political exiles are both angry at and nostalgic for the homeland; their relationship to their new home is similarly ambivalent.

\*It is clear that there is a great deal more critical material available on Alvarez's novel than on Diaz's. He is a newer and less established writer.