Capstone Proposal
Department of English

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Course number and name:
- ENG 431 Seminar on Literacy Studies and the Teaching of Writing
- ENG 441 Seminar in Literary Criticism and Theory
- ENG 419 Seminar in Genre and Form
- ENG 411 Seminar in Journalism
- ENG 445 Seminar in Interdisciplinary and Cultural Studies
- ENG 451 Seminar in Medieval Studies
- ENG 456 Seminar in the Renaissance
- ENG 466 Seminar in the Eighteenth Century
- ENG 476 Seminar in Nineteenth-Century Studies
- ENG 491 Seminar in Literature Since 1900

Names of faculty developing the course:
Various. Most department faculty teach one or more of these courses on a rotating basis. A list of seminars offered in the past five years is attached.

Names of faculty expected to teach course (if different from above):

Department notification/approval
All courses in the new Core Curriculum must be taught as part of a faculty member’s normal load. Consultation with your department is an important component of course planning. Please ask your department or program chair to e-mail smcwilms@usm.maine.edu indicating that departmental notification/approval has occurred.

These are existing courses; all have been approved in the department and by the CRC.

Scheduling:
Expected number of sections: 2-3 courses offered each semester; only one section of each course

Semester/days/times/campus(es) in which you plan to offer the course for the first time (all sections): Typically, two seminars are scheduled during the day (M/W and T/R), and one in the evening, and all in Portland.

Has this scheduling been approved by the department(s) involved? Yes

After the first offering, what semesters do you plan to offer this course and how many sections will you offer per semester?

- Fall 2013: 2 courses
- Spring 2014: 2-3 courses
- Summer 2014: 0 courses
- Fall 2014: 2 courses
- Spring 2015: 2-3 courses
- Summer 2015: 0 courses
Course Proposal Narrative

English Capstone Seminars encourage independent thinking, intensive student participation, and in-depth research on topics of the student’s choice related to the seminar topic. Because there are multiple course numbers and multiple seminar topics, there is no course outline or any one syllabus that will adequately represent all of them. Instead, we have included a list of seminar topics from the past five years.

Seminar Characteristics:
- The seminar is taken during a student’s last 12 hours in the major.
- Students participate in discussions of assigned readings while conducting independent research.
- While the seminar has a general topic, students identify their own area of research in consultation with the professor and in relation to their own interests and strengths.
- Seminar projects may be collaborative, either in early stages or final production, with students presenting their own research in process and responding to that of their peers.
- Some seminars incorporate service learning (Course Characteristic #1).
- Beyond seminar peer reviews, students may make formal presentations at the end of the semester or at Thinking Matters (Course Characteristic #1).

Below is one schedule for planning research and writing over the semester:

1. Identify research and theoretical interests or strengths in an Academic Autobiography (Due 1/24)
2. Submit Preliminary Research Topic (Due 2/7)
3. Submit an Abstract and compile a Annotated Working Bibliography (3/2)
5. Oral Presentation of research findings (informally throughout the semester)
6. Exchange and review of written drafts (4/22)
7. At least one Conference with professor to discuss research and writing
8. Presentation of work at Thinking Matters (4/29)
9. Submit final Seminar Paper with Bibliography (5/13)

This work would be in addition to, though ideally overlapping with, the other reading and discussions for the seminar proper. The sequence of assignments is designed to lead students through the steps of research and writing. For example, The Academic Autobiography (1) can be used to identify research interests, current knowledge on the subject, academic strengths. Identifying general research topics early (2), allows the professor to assign works for Oral Reports (4) that will be useful to the student’s research. Students are asked to regularly report their progress to the class (2, 3, 5), to conference with the professor (7), and to submit and workshop drafts (6) before final written and/or oral presentations (8 and 9).
Outcomes:

1) **Draw on the specialized knowledge of the major to articulate a significant theme, topic, issue or problem;**

While the seminars are on a topic chosen by the professor of record, all are designed for senior English students and assume the substantial historical breadth and theoretical sophistication required for the major. In the sample assignment below, students must articulate a significant research question for their project and be able to explain what it is, why it matters, and how it relates to other research on the topic.

**Sample Assignment: Abstract**

Please write a 2-3\(\) abstract of your research essay that makes clear both the question that grounds the project and your tentative answer to that question. This answer may serve as a preliminary form of your essay’s thesis. Also, if you enter “abstracts” in the Purdue OWL page search function, you’ll find discussions of the constituents of a good abstract, including those used for journal submissions:

Journal abstracts are usually requested by scholarly journals and written after the original manuscript was composed. While a proposal can be quite long depending on the assignment and purpose, an abstract is generally kept brief (approximately 150-200 words), but includes some of the same elements as a proposal:

- A statement of the problem and objectives
- A summary of employed methods or your research approach
- A statement about the significance of the proposed topic
- A self-contained piece of writing that can be understood independently from the essay

You need not write a “self-contained piece,” but writing your abstract with the first three elements as guides will strengthen the final product.

**Assessment:** Student work is assessed according to the criteria articulated in the assignment description, especially the first three bulleted points: the statement of the problem, its significance to the field, and the methods for solving it, all understood in relation to other research on the subject within the discipline.

2) **Design and generate a significant oral, written, creative or applied final project;**

The blueprint requires students to complete a substantial final project, such as an analytical research paper of at least 20 pages or a comparable project in the digital humanities. Digital Humanities is an emerging field in the discipline that incorporates computers in the creation or presentation of knowledge in the humanities.

**Sample Assignment: Seminar Essay and Rubric**

The final essay is an extensive research study dedicated to a specific issue or text related to the seminar topic. Please consult with me by 3/28 to determine your topic. The essay is a minimum of 20 pages and includes significant research and use of secondary sources.
Assessment: Essays are evaluated according to the following rubric:

Importance of Inquiry: This category addresses the thinking that informs the overall project: how intriguing, sophisticated, consequential, and innovative is the inquiry?
- Is the research question worth pursuing: not too general, not too particular or narrow?
- Is the study breaking new ground in the discussion of [the seminar topic]?
- Is it extending arguments that have been raised before?
- Is it repeating arguments but bringing new material into the light of those inquiries?
- Is it theoretically grounded and sound?
- Is its methodology clear and consistent?

Quality of thesis: This category includes all elements directly related to the writer’s position on the topic.
- Is the topic of the essay evident to the reader?
- Is the subject/focus of the thesis statement a concept that is worth investigating?
- Is it directly related to the discussion of [the seminar topic]?
- What is the writer attempting to prove about this subject/focus?

Use of evidence: This category addresses the kinds of evidence brought to support the argument and the ways evidence is incorporated into the argument.
- Does the evidence directly support an aspect of the argument?
- Is the source quoted appropriate (peer-reviewed, expert, scholarly)?
- Is the source embedded smoothly into the writer’s own text (with strong signal phrases)?
- Is the quotation analyzed?
- Does the writer explain why the quote is important to the argument?

Coherence/unity of argument: This category addresses the organization and flow of the essay.
- Is a key term/phrase reiterated throughout the essay?
- Is there a rhetorical form that structures the essay (from general to particular? comparison? definition? narrative?)
- Do all paragraphs advance the thesis?
- Are paragraph transitions smooth and powerful?

Degree of error: This category addresses the syntactical, grammatical, and typographical elements of the essay.
- Is the sentence structure sound throughout?
- Is there no/minimal grammatical error?
- Are there many typos?

3) Collaborate or consult with others to research, create, or discuss solutions or approaches to the project;

Students will share their research or writing in progress with seminar participants and collaborate in the development of seminar materials for the benefit of all. In reports on research in progress, for example (e.g., Sample Assignment #1 below), students must
comprehend and evaluate what they read in light of what they know about the seminar topic and their own project. Their presentation adds to the body of knowledge and resources available to all seminar members. Peer Reviews of work in progress (e.g., Sample Assignment #2 below) similarly ask students to draw on their own research, reading, and discussion of the topic to respond helpfully to peer work.

Sample Assignment 1: Oral and Written Report on Critical Sources
Each student in the seminar will report orally and in writing on a significant secondary critical source on the literature and culture of the seminar topic. A list of works will be provided. These books have not be ordered for the course, so you should secure your selection immediately because you may have to order it from another campus in the system or through InterLibrary Loan. Written reports of your source will be posted in Blackboard under the Annotated Course Bibliography, with full bibliographic information, so that other students can access it and follow up for their own research.

Assessment: Oral and written presentations are assessed according to the student’s ability to summarize the critical source, delineate its major arguments, critique it if necessary, and, where possible, relate it to the other works on the syllabus, the student’s own or someone else's research, or to earlier class discussions.

Sample Assignment 2: Peer Review

The most important outcome of the peer review is that the writer will have substantive comments for final revision from the reader. A secondary outcome is the reader’s exposure to another perspective on the seminar topic. The peer review focuses the reading on a few crucial elements of the writing. Please begin by scanning the essay quickly without marking it. Then work through the various components of the peer review process listed below. Finally, provide an overall comment at the end of the essay, paying close attention to whether the essay directly addresses some aspect of [seminar topic].

THESIS STATEMENT
Underline the sentence (or sentences) that you think serves as the thesis statement for the essay. Remember that, although the thesis should appear in the opening ¶s, it can often be buried in the conclusion of the essay. Be especially careful to evaluate whether the thesis offers a description rather than poses an argument: tell the writer if you think the thesis statement is descriptive rather than interpretive. Please rewrite the thesis statement according to your own understanding of the writer's intent.

KEY TERM. Is the subject of the THESIS STATEMENT the key term/concept that captures the essay’s topic? For example, is it clear to you what the topic of the essay is? Can you identify a single term (word or phrase) that represents the writer’s focus? If you can, please underline that term. If you can’t, tell the writer that you cannot locate the governing word/phrase that grounds the thesis, then offer a word or phrase that will make the focus explicit.

UNITY. Is the key term used throughout the essay to ensure the coherence of the argument? Does each paragraph advance the essay’s argument either by defining the subject of the thesis
(most often the key term) or by proving the predicate of the thesis? If not, mark those paragraphs that veer off from the essay’s stated purpose.

USING QUOTATIONS FOR EVIDENCE

- Mark every passage in which the writer inserts a quotation. Does the writer use a strong signal phrase to embed the quotation?
- Mark in the margin each time the writer makes a claim or comment about the topic WITHOUT using a quotation.
- Mark in the margin each time the writer uses a quotation and doesn’t analyze or comment on the quotation. Write a helpful question such as “why did you choose this quotation?” or “when I read this quotation, I think about _______. Is that what you wanted me to notice?”
- Mark in the margin each time the writer only summarizes or describes what the quotation is saying. Write a comment in the margin that directs the writer to go beyond description or paraphrase; ask “why is this quotation important? What is interesting or suggestive about it?” If you can, suggest ways the writer might more effectively incorporate the quotation.

Assessment: Criteria for assessment are written into the assignment itself. See, especially, the italicized sentences above.

4) Analyze, apply, and integrate multiple sources of information and specialized perspectives to complete the project;

All seminars present students with a range of primary and secondary materials, but require them to locate, evaluate, and use their own additional research in the development of their seminar paper or project. Often steps will be structured into the syllabus to guide students through the research, drafting, and revision process or through stages of thought. Sample Assignment #1, for example, requires students to integrate multiple sources and then build on their initial assessment to new knowledge. Besides the paper, seminars may require working or annotated bibliographies (Sample Assignments #2 and #3) that require students to identify, access, and evaluate multiple sources of information, primarily peer-reviewed “specialized perspectives” from within the discipline.

Assessment will be based on the paper or project itself, specifically in terms of the range and quality of sources and how well the student uses them in the process of producing new knowledge.

Sample Assignment 1: Writing Sequence

Short Essay #1: Salem, 1692. Please select only one of the figures whose cases we have read [Bridget Bishop, Rebecca Nurse, Giles Corey, Tituba, Sarah Cole of Lynn, Candy, George Jacobs (Sr.), Margaret Jacobs, Elizabeth Cary, Nathaniel Cary]. Then in a 4-page essay that uses the language of the contemporary documents for evidence, please discuss how those documents—through their rhetorical form, imagery, metaphors, and/or arguments—shape your understanding of witchcraft in 1692 Salem. Be sure to engage in a close reading of the documents and quote them extensively to support your claim. In addition, use either Hill or Gibson to situate your argument in the broader scholarly discussion.
Preliminary thinking/writing:

- By “shape your understanding,” I mean to ask how you are approaching this vexed and confusing topic. Are you interested in the particular charges? The kinds of evidence brought against the accused? The ways in which the accused is examined? The particular imagery at work in the case? What about this case engages your critical sensibilities? That is, what aspect of witchcraft emerges in this case?
- What are one or two passages in the documents that you think provide a good example of this aspect of witchcraft? Why?
- Which statements in either Hill or Gibson help to support your argument? Be sure to quote from the scholar and explain how her work grounds your thesis. You need not agree with the scholar; you might disagree, or challenge her position. You might extend her point. It is up to you; the only requirement is that you put yourself in dialogue with the scholar as you stage your argument about 1692 Salem witchcraft.

Short Essay #2: Revising Salem. This essay is meant to build on your earlier investigation into the Salem events so that you might deepen your questions and understandings of the role of witchcraft in American cultural production. You can work with one of the texts, say just I, Tituba..., or you can do a comparative study of I, Tituba and/or The Afflicted Girls and/or one of the Hawthorne short stories. You can stick with Hawthorne alone (as creepy as that might be). The point is that you find a perspective on witches and witchcraft derived from the Salem events but then revised by the work you choose. What is the nature of the revision? What do the particular aspects of this revision tell us about some cultural meanings of Salem witches/witchcraft for later historical periods? How can a focus on this revision aid in an understanding of the significance of witches/witchcraft in American literary tradition? In contemporary cultural reimaginings?

Some thoughts for preliminary writing:

- Where in the text(s) do you find passages that speak directly to your broader claim?
- Do these literary revisions of the events of 1692 Salem aim at specific targets? To what ends?
- How do specific figures and rhetorical forms or structures complicate, challenge, or support the cultural meanings you find in the text?
- What is lost or gained in these Salem revisions?

Please be sure to quote generously from the texts to substantiate your arguments.

Sample Assignment 2: Annotated Bibliography

The bibliography should include 10-15 peer-reviewed sources, with annotations, from recent (post-2000) sources and should be in correct bibliographical form. For the purposes of this assignment, you are writing summaries not analyses of your sources; that is, you provide a brief description of the content of the source (what it addresses, what approach the scholar might take to the material, its theoretical basis, and its methodology, if applicable). Additionally, each annotation should include at least one or two sentences explaining how the source might be integrated into your essay.

Sample Assignment 3: Working Bibliography
A Working Bibliography is a detailed list of works of books, articles, and other sources consulted as your research and develop your topic. You may or may not actually cite all of these sources in your final paper. Your Working Bibliography should include at least ten sources, each of which is presented with full bibliographic information and a brief summary (e.g., a few sentences). You should arrange your entries in two (possibly three) sections:

A) Primary Sources: These are original sources that are "closest to the person, information, period, or idea being studied," something that was created either during the time period being studied or afterward by individuals reflecting on their involvement in the events of that time" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primary_source). They are your main source of evidence in a literary argument. Primary sources in literature include
- original literary works;
- other works by the author, including other literary writing, letters and diaries, memoirs and autobiographies;
- contemporaneous reviews or any other contemporaneous documents or accounts, including magazine and newspaper articles, other books, etc.;
- cultural and historical artifacts, including images, films, advertisements, or items of material culture

B) Secondary Sources: These are sources that discuss or analyze original information (e.g., primary sources) after the fact and from a perspective other than direct participant. Secondary sources “involve generalization, analysis, synthesis, interpretation, or evaluation of the original information” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secondary_sources). Secondary sources in the analysis of literature include
- Critical articles published in peer-reviewed journals
- Books published by academic presses, including biographies and critical works on literary subjects
- Credible websites and blogs

C) Archival and Manuscript Sources: These are primary materials located in archives such USM’s Osher Map Library (http://usm.maine.edu/maps/) and the Special Collections (http://library.usm.maine.edu/specialcollections/collectionsdescriptions.html)

5) Draw on learning in general education and other courses to reflect on and critically interrogate learning within the capstone and the major.

Seminar students will do one or more of the following, all of which address Course Characteristics #2:
- Write an Academic/Intellectual Autobiography or reflective essay that helps students to think critically about their major, general education, and future plans while identifying strengths and interests in preparation for identifying a paper topic;
- In-class work in which each of five groups is assigned one of the goals of a General Education at USM and asked to correlate it to their overall university academic experience and discuss its possible relation to their future academic, professional, and future life.
Participate in blackboard discussions for all graduating senior enrolled in seminars that semester about their experience at USM, both in general education in the English major, and how it informs their future academic, professional, and future lives.

Assessment will vary according to the assignment. In the Sample Assignment below, for example, students will be assessed according to the thoroughness of their examination in the three parts of the autobiography. Blackboard discussions can be monitored and measured. In class work will include an oral or written component that summarizes the group discussion or presents questions for the full seminar.

Sample Assignment: Academic/Intellectual Autobiography

This assignment is intended to be a preliminary step in developing your major seminar paper. You will need to select a paper topic early in the semester, so you should begin now to reflect self-consciously and critically about what you already know, are interested in or good at, or simply what you like to do.

In at least 4 pages, write a critical analysis of your own intellectual and academic history. To do this, you will need to look at both the major and non-major courses listed on your Academic History as well as any other intellectual or academic activities not listed there but which you believe are significant to your development. Your autobiography should have three parts:

**Part 1:** Examine your coursework outside of the major. Look at what you have taken and why. Did scheduling or other pragmatic issues govern your choices or did they reflect an interest? If not, did your non-major courses contribute to the development of new academic or intellectual interests? Did you have a minor or participate in Honors? Think about whether and how core courses, electives, and, if applicable, your minor related to or influenced your study within the major. Who is the person represented by this collection of courses and experiences?

**Part 2:** Examine your completed English Major Requirements form and your progress through it. Write a critical description of your literary training, research interests, and theoretical orientation or critical method. What interests you most about the study of English as a major? What kinds of literary works do you like to read? When confronted with a literary or cultural text, what kinds of questions do you ask or issues address? Do you consider yourself a particular kind of critic? It might be helpful to think about courses or areas within the major you have particularly liked or done well in and consider why.

**Part 3:** Examine other experiences that you consider integral to your development as a thinker and a person. In what ways have your experiences inside and outside the university reflected or complicated each other or what you thought you knew about each? In other words, think about how your learning has related to your life outside the classroom or the ways that life outside the classroom has made you rethink what you have learned inside. How will your classroom learning, both in English and in other fields, continue to shape what you do or know outside the university and how you do and know it?
Blueprint for English Capstone Seminars

Course Description

English Capstone Seminars encourage independent thinking, intensive student participation, and in-depth research on topics of the student’s choice related to the seminar topic.

Gen Ed Prerequisites: Ethical Inquiry; Social Responsibility, and Citizenship
English Prerequisites: 36 credit hours in ENG courses, including ENG 245
Class Size: 15
Rotation: Every semester, 2-3 sections
Number of Credit Hours: 3
General Education: Capstone

Course Outcomes and Core Outcomes (general capstone outcomes in roman numerals):

Students will

1. draw on the specialized knowledge of the major to explore a significant theme, topic, issue, or problem related to the seminar topic. (I)
2. complete a substantial final project, such as an analytical paper of at least 20 pages or a comparable project in the digital humanities. (II)
3. present their research in process orally or in writing and respond to the presentations of their peers. (III)
4. compile, analyze, evaluate, and document appropriate primary and secondary sources needed to complete the project. (IV)
5. reflect critically on learning within general education and the major. This can take many forms, such as the following (V):

   - Academic Autobiography or reflective essay that helps students identify strengths and interests in preparation for identifying a paper topic;
   - In-class work in which each of five groups is assigned one of the five goals of a General Education at USM and asked to correlate it to their overall university academic experience.
   - Participate in blackboard discussions for all majors in seminars that semester about their experience at USM and in the English major.

Course Characteristics:

1. Seminars are limited to majors in their final 12 hours of the English course work.
2. Where possible, students should have the opportunity to share their work orally, such as at Thinking Matters or as a presentation to seminar members.
3. Where appropriate, seminars may include service learning or internships.
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 08</td>
<td>ENG 445</td>
<td>Seminar: David Bowie and the Phenomenology of Performance</td>
<td>S. Waldrep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ENG 491</td>
<td>Seminar: Joyce</td>
<td>F.C. McGrath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 09</td>
<td>ENG 431</td>
<td>Seminar: Literacy Studies and Teaching of Writing</td>
<td>A. Dean</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ENG 466</td>
<td>Seminar: Aphra Behn and Libertine Tradition</td>
<td>L. Cole</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ENG 476</td>
<td>Seminar: In 19th Century Studies</td>
<td>R. Swartz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 09</td>
<td>ENG 456</td>
<td>Seminar in the Renaissance: Shakespeare</td>
<td>R. Abrams</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ENG 491</td>
<td>Seminar in Literature Since 1900</td>
<td>L. Walker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 10</td>
<td>ENG 456</td>
<td>Seminar in the Renaissance: Renaissance Eroticism</td>
<td>B. Bertram</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ENG 491</td>
<td>Seminar in Literature Since 1900: The Great War and Modern Lit.</td>
<td>N. Gish</td>
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<td>ENG 466</td>
<td>Seminar in 18th Century Literature: Aphra Behn and the Libertine Tradition</td>
<td>L. Cole</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ENG 491</td>
<td>Seminar in Literature Since 1900: Women and Islam</td>
<td>D. Marya</td>
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<td>Spring 11</td>
<td>ENG 445</td>
<td>Seminar in Interdisciplinary &amp; Cultural Studies</td>
<td>L. Carroll</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ENG 476</td>
<td>Seminar in 19th Century Studies: Race in Post-Reconstruction America</td>
<td>J. Kuenz</td>
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<td>Fall 11</td>
<td>ENG 419</td>
<td>Seminar in Genre and Form: Bildungsroman</td>
<td>G. Peters</td>
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<td>ENG 419/ANE 650</td>
<td>American Autobiography</td>
<td>K. Ashley</td>
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<td>ENG 491</td>
<td>Seminar in Literature Since 1900: Joyce</td>
<td>F.C. McGrath</td>
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<td>Spring 12</td>
<td>ENG 445</td>
<td>Seminar in Interdisciplinary and Cultural Studies</td>
<td>S. Waldrep</td>
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<td>ENG 491</td>
<td>Seminar in Literature Since 1900: Love, War, and Poetry: Language in the Aftermath of the Great War</td>
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<td>ENG 445</td>
<td>Seminar in Interdisciplinary and Cultural Studies</td>
<td>K. Ashley</td>
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<td>ENG 466</td>
<td>Seminar in Eighteenth Century</td>
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<td>Nature, Animals, and Early Modern Ecology</td>
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<td>ENG 491</td>
<td>Seminar in Literature Since 1900: Arab Women Writers</td>
<td>D. Marya</td>
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