

# The Unkindest Cut

Shakespeare in Exile 2015

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI



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A Report by the  
American Council of Trustees and Alumni

April 2015

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by the staff of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, primarily by Dr. Michael Poliakoff, Vice President of Policy. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni is a national non-profit based in Washington, DC, dedicated to academic freedom, academic quality, and accountability in higher education.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni is an independent, non-profit organization committed to academic freedom, excellence, and accountability at America's colleges and universities. Founded in 1995, ACTA is the only national organization dedicated to working with alumni, donors, trustees, and education leaders across the United States to support liberal arts education, uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives an intellectually rich, high-quality education at an affordable price. Our network consists of alumni and trustees from more than 1,100 colleges and universities, including over 17,000 current board members. Our quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe*, reaches nearly 13,000 readers.

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*O! what a noble mind is here o'erthrown.*

– HAMLET

**S**hakespeare's poetry and plays have inspired readers and audiences for

centuries, from one end of the world to the other. He is often simply called “The Bard,” honored by statesmen and philosophers, as well as poets and critics. Great authors over the centuries have paid him homage. John Milton described how Shakespeare built for himself an immortal monument “in our wonder and astonishment” that would be the envy of kings. John Dryden observed, “when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too.” For T.S. Eliot, “Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them, there is no third.”

Alexis de Tocqueville recounted that most American pioneers' cabins had copies of the plays. Space was tight as miners and trappers traveled West on the American frontier, but The Bard traveled with them to remote and austere camps.<sup>1</sup> Historian Jonathan Rose tells how in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England J. R. Clynes rose from labor in the textile mills to become deputy leader of the House of Commons. Clynes recounted

<sup>1</sup> Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jennifer Lee Carrell, “How the Bard Won the West,” *Smithsonian*, 29. 5 (August, 1998) 98-107.

*This was the unkindest cut of all.*

– JULIUS CAESAR

how he discovered in *Twelfth Night*: “Be not afraid of greatness,” and wondered, “How it would upset the world if men lived up to it.” Clynes, as a friend put it, was “the only man who ever settled a trade dispute by citing Shakespeare.”<sup>2</sup>

In Japan, Macbeth inspired Akira Kurosawa’s mid-century masterpiece, *Throne of Blood*. *Ran* followed later, inspired by King Lear. From *West Side Story* to the *Lion King*, The Bard is the unfailing fountain of ideas for contemporary stage and film. Such is Shakespeare’s reputation in Germany that scholars estimate his works have been staged more often there than anywhere else in the world, more than any single German author.<sup>3</sup> One could truly say that the plays performed in London’s Globe Theatre went on to capture the entire globe.

Except, it seems, for English majors at America’s most prestigious colleges and universities. And there’s the rub. The Bard, who is the birthright of the English speaking world, has no seat of honor.

That is not an opinion. It is an empirical fact.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni has researched how Shakespeare fits into English majors’ curricula at 52 of the nation’s leading colleges and universities—the *U.S. News and World Report* “Top 25” Liberal Arts Colleges and the “Top 25” National Universities. We have found our Bard suffering “the unkindest cut of all.”

At most universities, English majors were once required to study Shakespeare closely as an indispensable foundation for the understanding of English language and literature. But today—at the elite institutions we examined, public and private, large and small, east and west—he is required no more.

The basic finding is unambiguous. Not even one out of ten of the institutions ACTA surveyed required English majors to take a single course devoted to Shakespeare. And as the schools relax requirements relating to Shakespeare and other great authors, courses that have more to do with popular culture and contemporary issues are multiplying.

## 1: SHAKESPEARE IN EXILE

To determine where Shakespeare stands in today’s curriculum, ACTA surveyed English departments at leading universities and liberal arts colleges. Appendix A gives a full listing of the schools studied, with summaries of their English major requirements.

Today, a mere 4 of these 52 colleges and universities require English majors to take a course focused on Shakespeare. Those institutions are: Harvard, University of California-Berkeley, U.S. Naval Academy, and Wellesley College.<sup>4</sup>

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**Top 25 National Universities:** Two schools require Shakespeare  
**Top 25 Liberal Arts Colleges:** Two require Shakespeare  
**Ivy League:** One requires Shakespeare

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What do these figures mean? For starters, of the Ivy League universities, only one requires its English majors to take a course in Shakespeare. Only two of the top 25 national universities, as ranked by *U.S. News and World Report*, have a Shakespeare requirement. The top 25 liberal arts colleges fare no better: only two require English majors to study Shakespeare. It is a sad irony that not even Amherst College, which administers the Folger Shakespeare Library, requires its English majors to take a course that focuses on Shakespeare.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 123.

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Hortmann, *Shakespeare on the German Stage: Volume 2, The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Although a number of schools require majors to take a survey of British medieval and Renaissance literature, they do not guarantee such courses will provide the in depth study of Shakespeare appropriate for a college student majoring in English. For the purposes of this study, therefore, we do not classify these courses as fulfillment of a Shakespeare requirement.

*But man, proud man,  
Dressed in little brief authority,  
Most ignorant of what he's most assured.*

– MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Thus, 48 of the 52 schools we surveyed allow English majors—which often include future English teachers—to graduate without studying in depth the language's greatest writer.

At most colleges and universities, Shakespeare courses can be taken as options within the major, as described in Appendix A. And yet, as a quick glance at existing requirements shows, Shakespeare holds no favored place. A course called “Pulp Fictions: Popular Romance from Chaucer to Tarantino” at the University of Pennsylvania counts the same as a Shakespeare course toward the “Early Literature to 1660” requirement. The catalog description: “... readable, often salacious, and certainly never dull, these ‘pulp fictions’ reveal complex worlds beneath their seemingly simple or gritty exteriors” suggests an interesting course, but it is no substitute for the seminal study of Shakespeare. So also for “Gender, Sexuality and Literature: Our Cyborgs, Our Selves” that fulfilled Penn’s “Early Literature to 1660” requirement in Fall 2014. At Swarthmore and Bowdoin, “Renaissance Sexualities” can substitute for Shakespeare to fulfill the “Pre-1800” requirement. At Cornell, where undergraduate English majors need to take three pre-1800 courses, Spring 2015 choices include “Love and Ecstasy: Forms of Devotion in Medieval English Literature,” which addresses the question, “What do love, torture, and ecstasy all have in common?” The previous year, “Art of the Insult” fulfilled the same requirement, as did “Blood Politics,” whose course description begins, “Blood is everywhere. From vampire shows to video games, our culture seems to be obsessed with it.”

## 2: SUBSTITUTES FOR THE BARD

**I**n the set of courses and requirements we now call the English curriculum, undergraduates too often have no guarantee of a sustained and coherent exposure to the key works of the English language, though most colleges claim otherwise. Haverford College’s English department, for example, claims to “maintain a working balance between an enduring commitment to the traditional canon of British and American literature and an expanding horizon of fresh concerns.” Yet, while faculty offered many “fresh concerns” in 2014-15, Haverford offered not a single course on The Bard on its own campus.

Similar declarations of balancing old and new are typical in departmental descriptions. In their attempt to incorporate “fresh concerns,” however, English departments have downplayed the classics. The motives vary. Some are ideological, such as the resistance to “Eurocentric” orientations. Others are practical, such as the need to boost enrollments. But the effect is the same. Indeed, while Shakespeare and other canonical authors are no longer required, many institutions such as Rice, Vassar, and Vanderbilt go further and require students to study “non-canonical traditions,” “race, gender, sexuality, or ethnicity,” and “ethnic or non-Western literature.” Pomona requires two courses that will each address one of three paired concepts of race and class, gender and sexuality, or diaspora and geopolitics.

English majors today find a mind-boggling array of courses that center on politics, sociology, popular culture, and sexuality, courses notable not because they focus on great literature, but on everything but

that heritage. English classes address a multiplicity of contemporary (and often non-literary) topics such as (in their own words): “Creatures, Aliens and Cyborgs,” (Duke University); “The Politics of Hip-Hop” (Emory University); “The Vietnam War in Literature and Film” or “Detective Fiction” (University of Virginia); “Cruising Home: Queer Kinship in Theory and Practice” (Haverford College); “HIV, AIDS, and the Color Line,” “Arab American Feminisms,” and “U.S. Film in the 1970s” (Bates College); “Literature, Food, and the American Racial Diet” (Princeton University); “Women Who Kill: Portrayals of Women & Violence in Lit & Film” (Northwestern University); “Punk Culture: The Aesthetics and Politics of Refusal” (Cornell University); “Queer Identity” (Johns Hopkins University); “The Wire” and “Digital Game Studies” (Dartmouth College).

English departments across the country are also offering an increasing number and variety of courses on “theory,” and many require it. (See Appendix A.) In these courses, students are typically introduced to a style of thought rather than a body of knowledge. Rather than studying major literary works in depth, students are taught the rationale for and applications of critical approaches that are heavily influenced by theories of race, class, gender, and sexuality. At the University of Virginia, English majors can avoid Shakespeare plays and study instead “Race, Space, and Culture,” which explores “the spatial implications at work in the theories, practices, and experiences of race, as well as the cultural implications at stake in our apprehensions and conceptions of space,” including “Indian reservations, burial grounds, suburban homes, gay bars, national monuments.” At Duke in Fall Semester 2014, undergraduates can study “Neuro-lit,” that is “the “neuro-novel,” a work in which the protagonist has some sort of “cognitive disorder,” to fulfill their requirement for a “Criticism, Theory, or Methodology” course. Theory is required, but not Shakespeare.

While Shakespeare requirements are on the decline, courses on children’s literature are proliferating. For well over \$40,000 per year, students can now spend some of their precious collegiate time at Yale, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Bowdoin College—and other institutions—studying the works of Dr. Seuss, Maurice Sendak, Lemony Snicket, and J.K. Rowling.

Many courses seek to sensationalize literary study, offering provocative, even titillating, course descriptions that notably focus on sex. Princeton’s “Race, Sex, and the Marriage Plot” “...examines how comedy in American cinema has been enlisted to stage race, sexuality, and their conjunctions in twentieth-century America.” Brown University’s “Perverse Cinema” covers “movies that pursue and spectacularize the perverse, as well as on how viewing movies is itself a perverse pleasure.” The course description notes, “We will study film genres that traffic in what’s sensational, excessive, uncanny, and transgressive.”

Speaking of film: Modern English departments are increasingly home to courses on movies, with many departments even hiring a dedicated film specialist. Columbia University’s English Department credits “Film Noir” and “Hollywood Cinema of the 1970’s” toward completing the major; Williams College has “Catastrophe/Apocalypse: The Movie.” University of Pennsylvania offers “Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Gawkers, Stalkers, Serial Killers, Citizens, and Spies,” in which the class studies such films as Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, Antonioni’s *Blow Up* (1966), Coppola’s *The Conversation* (1974), and Wan’s *Saw* (2004).

*Once more unto the breach,  
dear friends, once more*  
— HENRY V

### 3: WHAT YOU CAN DO

A

s this report makes clear, English majors across the country can graduate without reading Shakespeare beyond a

superficial level. Today, many high school curricula require students to read as little as two Shakespeare plays, hardly a foundation a college or university should consider sufficient for an English major and certainly not for a student intending one day to be a teacher of English. Employers—especially newspapers, publishers, schools, and cultural agencies that hire English majors—should be deeply concerned. So should parents, alumni, trustees, and interested citizens.

If reading Shakespeare is not central to a liberal education, what is? For English majors to miss out is far worse. A degree in English without serious study of Shakespeare is like a major in Greek Literature without the serious study of Homer. It is tantamount to fraud. A department that claims to cover the full span of literature written in English and represent the highest standards of academic study cannot marginalize the writer most honored and beloved in English literary history. A high school that hires someone with a B.A. in English should rightly assume that this individual can guide students through in-depth analysis of Shakespeare and other great authors. In a world where Shakespeare is no longer required, even of an English major, it's easy to imagine a day when schoolteachers will have read little or no Shakespeare and will not be competent to teach his works.

A look at today's English departments illustrates what happens when various academic trends—and faculty interests—are allowed to

push aside the traditional study of great literature. It used to be that we could count on our colleges and universities to introduce students—in Matthew Arnold's words—to the best that has been thought and said. This is no longer the case.

Our colleges and universities, whether in the name of “inclusion” or in a debased hope that they will attract more students by eliminating requirements, have created a vicious circle of cultural illiteracy. It is no surprise that in 2004 the National Endowment for the Arts found in *Readers at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*,<sup>5</sup> that less than half of the U.S. adult population had read on their own any work of literature—of any quality, in any language—during the course of a full year. College students who are fed a diet of pop culture and film and cutting-edge theory in the English department are discouraged from developing criteria for determining greatness and worth in literature, and they are likely to carry their limited vision with them.

If our colleges and universities seek to retain public support of their work, they must understand that education is about informed choices, made possible by reason, professional training, and good sense. Faculties have the right to pursue personal intellectual interests, but they also have an obligation to address what students need to learn. If trained and tenured faculty will not distinguish between the meaningful and trivial, then how can we justify ever-increasing tuition bills?

Fortunately, as severe as this problem is, it is not difficult or expensive to fix. What colleges need most is to review and reform their curricula, and curricular self-examination can be done at little or no financial cost.

#### What Trustees and Administrators Can Do

Since many English professors endorse the shift away from curricula centered on major authors, English departments are unlikely to change on their own. Trustees and administrators should insist that departments articulate with far greater clarity what students should know upon graduating and ensure that major requirements are substantive.

<sup>5</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2004).

Academic freedom, of course, is a crucially important right. Yet like any other right, it also entails responsibility—in this case, faculty members' responsibility to teach, in addition to their own specialized research interests, the subjects students need to know. If such subjects are not being taught, trustees and administrators are right to be concerned and to call for a review of the curriculum.

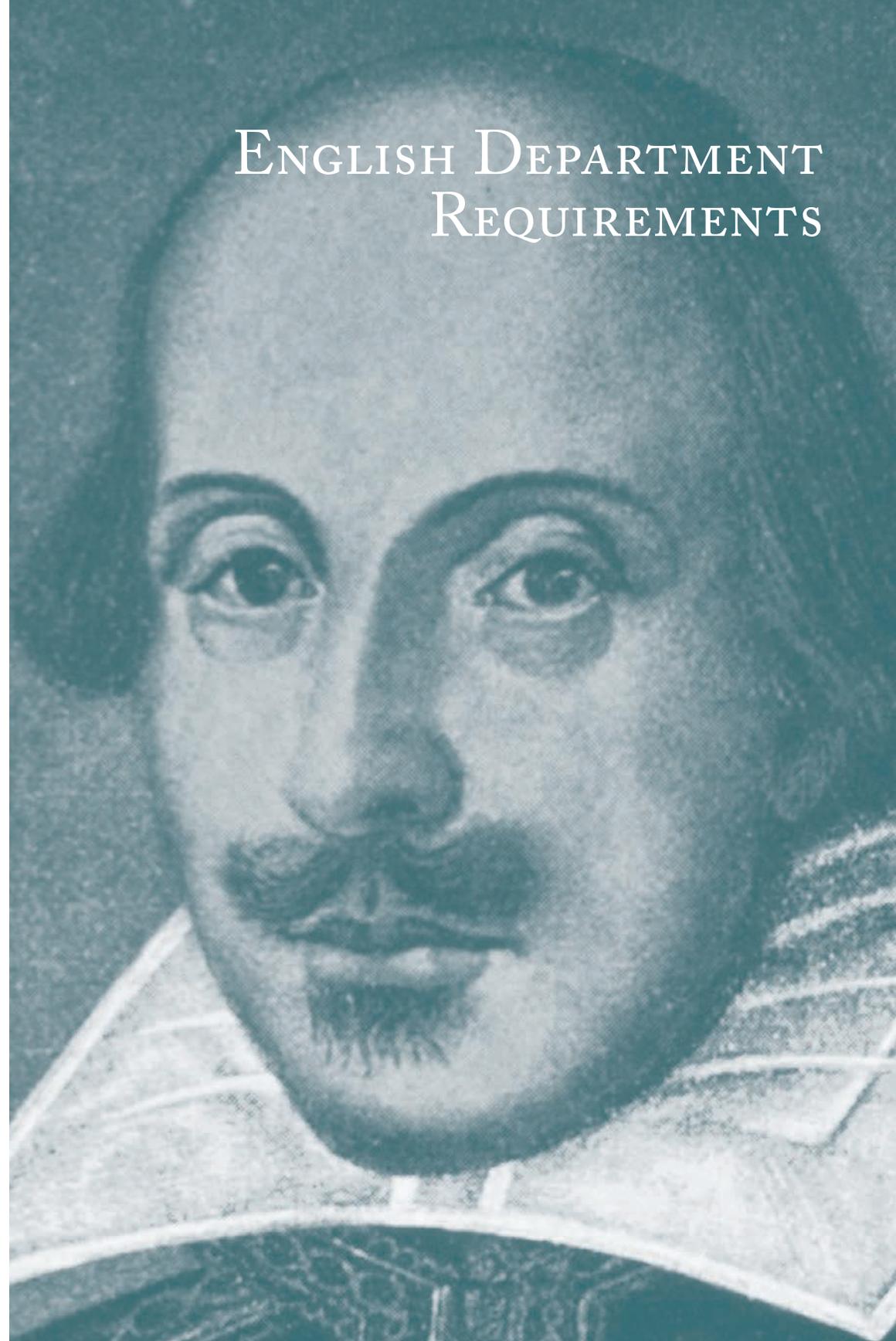
### **What Alumni and Donors Can Do**

Alumni should take an active interest in whether their alma maters have strong requirements in English and other key subjects. They should not allow their degrees to be devalued by a decline in college standards. Alumni outcry over proposed changes to the acclaimed curriculum at the University of Chicago resulted in the college revising its plans.

Those who give can be especially helpful, since donors can target outstanding programs and projects that introduce students to subjects that standard curricula do not adequately cover. ACTA can assist alumni and donors in identifying outstanding programs and in directing gifts to support them. It's time for alumni to tell universities that they will not remain silent when academic standards decline.

Restoring Shakespeare to his rightful place on the required reading list—especially for English majors—is a prime place to start.

# ENGLISH DEPARTMENT REQUIREMENTS



## CHART 1

### ENGLISH DEPARTMENT SHAKESPEARE REQUIREMENTS

Top 25 National Universities (as ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*, 2015)

	Requires	Does not Require
1 Princeton University		•
2 Harvard University	•	
3 Yale University		•
4 Columbia University		•
4 Stanford University		•
4 University of Chicago		•
7 Massachusetts Institute of Technology		•
8 Duke University		•
8 University of Pennsylvania		•
10 California Institute of Technology		•
11 Dartmouth College		•
12 Johns Hopkins University		•
13 Northwestern University		•
14 Washington University in St. Louis		•
15 Cornell University		•
16 Brown University		•
16 University of Notre Dame		•
16 Vanderbilt University		•
19 Rice University		•
20 University of California–Berkeley	•	
21 Emory University		•
21 Georgetown University		•
23 University of California–Los Angeles		•
23 University of Virginia		•
25 Carnegie Mellon University		•
25 University of Southern California		•

## CHART 2

### ENGLISH DEPARTMENT SHAKESPEARE REQUIREMENTS

Top 25 Liberal Arts Colleges (as ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*, 2015)

	Requires	Does not Require
1 Williams College		•
2 Amherst College		•
3 Swarthmore College		•
4 Wellesley College	•	
5 Bowdoin College		•
5 Pomona College		•
7 Middlebury College		•
8 Carleton College		•
8 Claremont McKenna College		•
8 Haverford College		•
11 Davidson College		•
11 Vassar College		•
13 United States Naval Academy	•	
14 Washington and Lee University		•
15 Colby College		•
15 Hamilton College		•
15 Harvey Mudd College		•
15 Wesleyan University		•
19 Bates College		•
19 Grinnell College		•
19 Smith College		•
22 Colgate College		•
23 Oberlin College		•
24 Macalester College		•
24 Scripps College		•
24 United States Military Academy		•

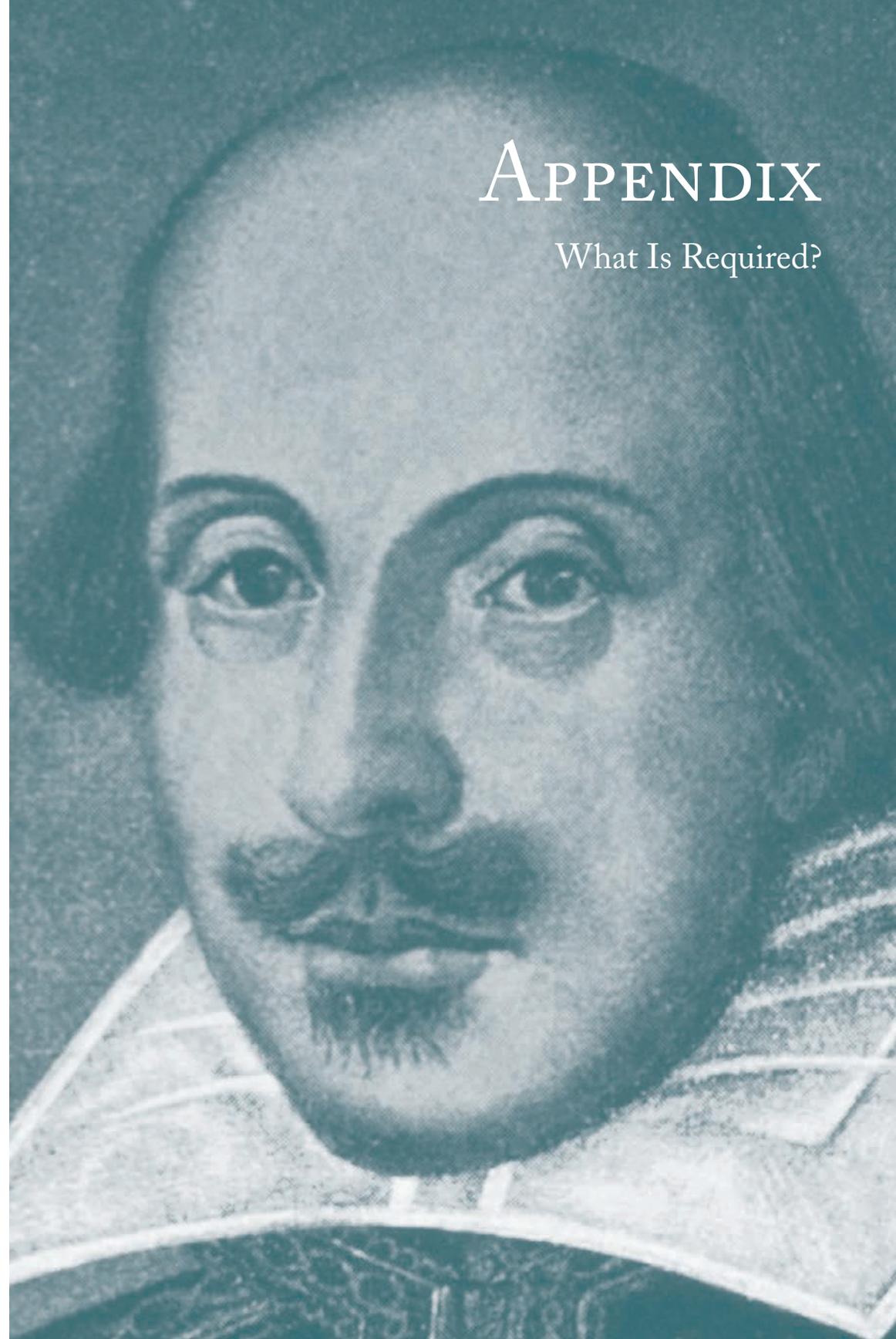
# APPENDIX

What Is Required?

## CHART 3

### ENGLISH DEPARTMENT SHAKESPEARE REQUIREMENTS Ivy League

	Requires	Does not Require
Brown University		•
Columbia University		•
Cornell University		•
Dartmouth College		•
Harvard University	•	
Princeton University		•
University of Pennsylvania		•
Yale University		•



## WHAT IS REQUIRED?

For the purposes of this study, we defined a college or university as having a Shakespeare requirement when English majors were obliged to take a dedicated course on Shakespeare. A number of schools require majors to take a survey of British medieval and Renaissance literature, but this is in no way the same as a term-long course focused on Shakespeare. At many schools, Shakespeare is included among the writers covered in surveys as one out of a range of authors students will cover. For purposes of this study, we do not classify these schools as having a Shakespeare requirement.

We based our analysis of major requirements on the most up-to-date information publicly available in academic catalogs and on college or university websites.

### AMHERST COLLEGE

Majors must take 10 courses. At a minimum, one 100 level course, three 200 level courses and a 400 level seminar are required. One of these courses must focus on texts and issues from the time period prior to 1800. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### BATES COLLEGE

Bates College English majors are required to take 11 courses, of which one or two must be at the 100 level and nine or 10 must be at the 200 level or above. Of these 11, three must focus on pre-1800s literature (one must be medieval and only one may be on Shakespeare), three must focus on post-1800s literature, two must explore “race, ethnicity or diasporic literature,” two will be “junior-senior seminars,” one must be a thesis, and one is a required course on critical methods and modes of inquiry. Majors must also develop a portfolio. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Bowdoin English majors must take a minimum of 10 courses, of which one must be a first-year seminar or introductory course serving as a

prerequisite for the major. At least three courses must be chosen from British and Irish literature before 1800, of which only one course may be a Shakespeare course and one a course on Chaucer. Students must also take at least one intermediate seminar and one advanced seminar. No more than two first-year seminars or introductory courses and no more than two creative writing courses may be counted towards the major. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### BROWN UNIVERSITY

A concentration in English requires 10 courses. One must be selected from a roster of courses titled “How Literature Matters,” one must be on literature prior to 1700, one on literature after 1700, one in the category “Literature Across Borders,” and one must be a theory course. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Humanities majors who elect the English Option must take a “Senior Tutorial” and 81 additional units of English, including a course in British literature, a course in American literature, and a course in literature from before 1850. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### CARLETON COLLEGE

English majors are required to take 72 credits. Majors must take one 100 level “Foundations” course, “Critical Methods,” and an advanced seminar. The 36 required credit hours in “Historical Eras” must include 12 credits in literature before 1660, 12 credits in literature between 1660 and 1900, and 12 credits in literature after 1900; six credit hours must be taken in each of the following groups: British literature, U.S. literature and English literatures other than British and U.S. At least 24 credits must be in courses numbered 300-395; up to six credits may be in literature other than English, either in its original language or in translation, and up to 12 credits in creative writing. All seniors must choose an “Integrative Exercise,” with four options for meeting the

requirement: colloquium, research essay, creative writing, or a project option. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

The Bachelor of Arts in English requires 11 courses. Required courses include a “Survey of Forms” course (genre-based survey course), “Interpretive Practices,” “Research in English,” and a course in rhetoric. Two 300 level courses which “investigate the production and interpretation of texts and other media” are required, as well as two 400 level seminar courses. Three English electives round out the major, and of the 11 courses, two at the 300 or 400 level must be “period” courses focusing on a distinct time period, place, or common social concern, with one focusing on an historical period prior to 1900. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

Literature majors must take at least nine courses including a two-course sequence of major British writers and the course “Literary Theory Since Plato.” Additionally, at least one course must be taken in each of creative writing, pre-1700s literature, literature of 1700-1900, and American literature. One of these required courses must qualify as a single-author course. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### COLBY COLLEGE

Colby English majors are required to take a “Gateway” seminar for literature in English as well as an introductory course in critical theory. They must also take four 200 to 300 level courses; two 400 level courses in special subjects; and two additional courses chosen from “Introduction to Cinema Studies,” advanced courses in English or American literature, creative writing, or literature in other languages or in translation. A senior seminar as well as one additional 300 or 400 level English course must be taken. At least three courses must focus on literature written before 1800, and at least three must focus

on literature written after 1800. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### COLGATE UNIVERSITY

Colgate University requires its English majors to take a minimum of nine English courses including “Major British Writers”; a course that is either an introduction to literary study or an introduction to literary history; and four courses at the 300 and 400 level, of which one must be a 400 level seminar in literature, two must be courses in literature before 1800, and two must be courses in literature after 1800. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Columbia English majors are required to take 10 courses, including “Literary Texts, Critical Methods” and the accompanying seminar. Majors are also required to complete three overlapping distribution requirements; three courses must deal with periods before 1800 (of which no more than one may be a course in Shakespeare), one course must be taken in each of the genres of “poetry,” “prose fiction/narrative,” and “drama/film/new media,” and one course must be taken in each of three geographical categories: “British,” “American,” and “comparative/global.” **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### CORNELL UNIVERSITY

English majors are required to take 10 courses, three of which must be primarily focused on pre-1800s literature, two of which must be at the 4000 level, and three of which “must form an intellectually coherent concentration.” **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

Students majoring in English must take 11 courses, including two courses in literature prior to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, two courses in literature from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one course in literature from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present,

and one course in “Criticism and Theory.” Students must also take two courses in “Literary Histories,” a “Junior Colloquium,” a senior seminar, and one course designated as satisfying the “Culminating Experience” requirement. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### DAVIDSON COLLEGE

Davidson College English majors are required to take 10 courses, including “Literary Analysis”; a course in writing, creative writing or creative practice; three historical survey courses; and five electives, of which at least four should be at the 300 level or higher and two should be at the 400 level. The three historical survey courses include a course in British literature to 1800, either a course in British literature from the 19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century or a course in world literatures, and a course in American literature through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### DUKE UNIVERSITY

English majors must take 10 courses, nine of which must be at the 200 level or above, and must complete one of three “Gateway” courses. Majors must also select at least two courses in the medieval and early modern era, at least one course in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and at least one course in the modern to contemporary era. They are also required to select a course on criticism, theory, or methodology. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### EMORY UNIVERSITY

English majors must take a course in poetry, four 300 or 400 level English courses in an area of concentration, and five electives. In these 10 courses, one course must be in British literature before 1660, one in post-1660 British, Irish or other non-American Anglophone literature, one in American literature, and one which must have a theoretical or interdisciplinary component. Two of the aforementioned four courses must be at the 300 or 400 level. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

The English major requires three “Foundation” courses, including “Methods of Literary and Cultural Studies,” “Literary History I,” and “Literary History II.” A “Capstone Seminar” is required, as are six electives, two of which must be at Level I (ENGL 100-299) and two of which must be at Level II (ENGL 300-459). Additionally, one of the six electives must be focused on literature written before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### GRINNELL COLLEGE

English majors at Grinnell College must take 36 credits in English. Majors are required to take either “Literary Analysis” or “Introduction to Shakespeare” and must take four 200 level English courses, with one chosen from each of the course groupings of “Early Literature,” “British or Postcolonial Literature,” “American Literature,” and “Genre or Methods.” Three courses must be at the 300 level. English majors must also take one course taught in another language department at the 200 level or above and are required to complete a second-semester college course in a non-native language or demonstrate equivalent competence. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### HAMILTON COLLEGE

Hamilton College English majors concentrating in literature are required to take 10 courses in the department, of which at least one must be chosen from a study of poetry or the novel; at least one each must focus on pre-1660 literature, literature from 1660-1900, and post-1900 literature; at least one must be a 500 level seminar; and only one of which from the remaining five courses may be at the 100 level. Majors must additionally complete a foreign language requirement consisting of two courses in a language other than English. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### HARVARD UNIVERSITY

All English concentrators at Harvard must take three “Common Grounds” courses: “Literary Arrivals, 700-1700,” “Poets,” and “Literary

Migrations: America in Transnational Context.” Elective concentrators must take eight additional courses, of which one must involve Shakespeare, two may be creative writing workshops, and two may be related courses from outside the English department. **Shakespeare is required.**

#### HARVEY MUDD COLLEGE

Harvey Mudd does not have an English department, but the “Literature” concentration of the Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts program requires at least four courses in literature. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### HVERFORD COLLEGE

Haverford English majors are required to take two “Junior Seminars,” a “Senior Conference,” and a minimum of seven additional courses, of which two must focus on literature written before 1800 and two must be at the 300 level. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Majors must take “Introduction to Literary Study” and nine other English courses, at least three of which must focus on literature before 1800 and the remainder of which must be at the 200 to 400 level. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### MACALESTER COLLEGE

Macalester College English majors in the English path must take a minimum of 10 courses, of which no more than two may be at the 100 level. One English course chosen from 105-194 must be chosen as a prerequisite to courses at the 300 level or above. Three courses at the 200, 300 or 400 level in British or American literature must be distributed among three of four periods: “Medieval/Renaissance,” “18<sup>th</sup> century British,” “19<sup>th</sup> century British,” or “19<sup>th</sup> century American.” One course “must focus on literature by U.S. writers of color or approved

courses in postcolonial or diasporic literature,” and seniors must complete a “Capstone Experience.” **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

MIT has a major in Literature rather than a major in English, which is described as “equivalent to the curricula in English (or literary studies) at other major liberal arts colleges and universities.” Majors in Literature must take 10 subjects in literature, of which three must be advanced seminars. Additionally, majors must complete a “Breadth” requirement in one of two ways: by completing four subjects in four of five historical periods (ancient/medieval; Renaissance; Restoration and 18<sup>th</sup> century; 19<sup>th</sup> century; 20<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary) or from four of five themes (historical period; genre; author study; film, media, and popular culture; gender and ethnic studies, theory). **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

The English & American Literatures major requires students to take 12 classes in the ENAM department, of which students must take “Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory” and one course from each of these two course pairings: “Reading Literature” or “Introduction to World Literature” and “Senior Essay: Critical Writing” or “Senior Thesis: Creative Writing.” The remaining nine electives must fulfill a series of distribution requirements, with single courses capable of fulfilling more than one requirement. At least three courses must be devoted to literature written before 1800, only one of which may be a Shakespeare course. At least one must be a junior seminar. At least one must explore American literature before 1900. At least one must “expose students to cultural diversity in Literatures in English.” With the exception of “Senior Thesis: Creative Writing,” creative writing courses do not fulfill major requirements. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

## NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Northwestern offers two different areas of study within the English major: the English major in English and American Literature and the English major in Creative Writing. English and American Literature majors must take a two-course introductory sequence in either British or American literature, an introductory seminar, and 11 additional courses. Ten of these 11 must be at the 300 level or above, with at least eight being English department courses or literature courses offered by related departments. Three must be on works written before 1830, three on works written after 1830, one must be in American literature, one must explore “transnationalism and textual circulation,” and one must explore “identities, communities and social practice.” At least one must be a research seminar, and up to two may be on works not originally written in English. Creative Writing majors must take two introductory courses and 11 additional courses, including a year-long theory and practice sequence counting for three units. Two of the 11 must be on works written before 1830 and two on works written after 1830. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

## OBERLIN COLLEGE

Oberlin’s English department requires at least nine courses for its “Standard Major,” including at least two 200 level courses, one of which must be “Introduction to the Advanced Study of Literature.” One course must be taken outside the English department in a literature which is not British, American, or Irish, taught either in English or in another language. Four courses must be taken at the 300 level, and one course may be taken at any level; a 400 level course which is a senior seminar, “Honors in English,” or the “Senior Tutorial” is required. As distribution requirements, one each of courses designated as “American,” “British,” and “Diversity” must be taken, as well as one course in each of three historical periods: pre-1700, 1700-1900 and post-1900. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

## POMONA COLLEGE

English majors must take 12 courses, of which one must be “Literary Interpretation” and one must be designated “theory-intensive.” The “Historical Breadth” requirement requires that majors pick four courses covering four of the five following periods: medieval, Renaissance/early modern, 18<sup>th</sup> century, 19<sup>th</sup> century, and 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century. The “Genre” requirement requires one course in poetry and poetics and one course in prose and narrative. Majors must also take one course focusing on the study of an individual author’s work. The “Interpretive Lenses” requirement may be fulfilled by courses emphasizing two of the following three sociopolitical areas: “race/class,” “gender/sexuality,” and “diaspora/geopolitics.” Students must take one “Advanced Studies Seminar,” and must complete either a thesis option or a seminar option to complete their degrees. Individual courses may satisfy up to two different requirements for the major. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

## PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

All majors must take the prerequisite course “ENG 200 Introduction to English Literature: 14th to 18th Century.” Majors must also select from one of four other prerequisite courses in poetry, fiction, drama, and the essay. Also required for the “Foundations” requirement are two courses in British literature before 1800, only one of which may focus on Shakespeare; one course in American literature before 1900; one course in literature after 1800; one course in Anglophone minority literatures; and one course in the theory and criticism of literature. Of six concentrations, only Theater and Performance Studies requires a course in Shakespeare. **As such, a course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

## RICE UNIVERSITY

English majors at Rice University must take a total of 12 courses, including “Critical Reading and Writing,” “Practices of Literary Study,” one 200 or 300 level course in “non-canonical” fields, and a 400 level

capstone course. They must also take three classes in periods before 1900, of which two must be in periods prior to 1800 and no more than one of these two may be a course on Shakespeare. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### SCRIPPS COLLEGE

Scripps College requires its English majors to take a minimum of 11 courses, including two introductory surveys of British literature, two introductory surveys of American literature, one course in British literature before 1900, four electives, a senior seminar and a senior thesis. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### SMITH COLLEGE

English majors at Smith College must take 12 courses, including two courses from “Methods of Literary Study,” “The English Literary Tradition I,” “The English Literary Tradition II,” and “American Literature before 1865.” Majors are required to take courses in two of three early canonical writers: Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton. One course must concentrate on literature before 1800, one on literature before 1900, and two on literature after 1900. One course must also explicitly focus on ethnic American literature, postcolonial literature in English, or gender and sexuality in literary theory, which may be used to fulfill the previous time period requirements; two seminars are required, one of which must be taken in the senior year. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Stanford English majors are required to complete a year-long sequence focused on literary history, as well as a course in poetry and a course in narrative theory. Majors must also take a senior seminar or a “Senior Capstone Seminar,” as well as a course in critical methods and one additional course in the history of literature. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

English majors must complete nine units of credit, which must include a “Seniors Course Majors Colloquium,” at least three units in literature written before 1830, and at least three units in literature written after 1830. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

West Point’s Art, Philosophy, and Literature major with the Literature track requires a course in the theory and practice of literary criticism, which serves as a prerequisite for the track. Cadets in the Literature track must also take four additional courses chosen from a list of literature electives, in addition to the non-literature curriculum required of the major. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY

English majors are required to take “Methods of Literary Analysis,” “Shakespeare,” one pre-1800 period course, one pre-1900 period course, a “Capstone Seminar” and six major electives. **Shakespeare is required.**

#### UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA–BERKELEY

English majors at Berkeley are required to take at least 12 courses, of which at least seven must be in the upper-division. The “Core” requirements mandate the following courses: “Literature in English: Through Milton,” “Literature in English: Late-17<sup>th</sup> Through Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” “Literature in English: Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” and a course on Shakespeare. It further requires one upper-division course in British, American, or Anglophone literature from an historical period before 1800 and one seminar course. **Shakespeare is required.**

#### UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA–LOS ANGELES

English majors at UCLA must take 10 upper-division courses, and must fulfill “Historical” and “Breadth” requirements. One course in English-language literature must be taken in each of the following historical

periods: before 1500, 1500-1700, 1700-1850, and 1850-present.

For the “Breadth” requirement, one course must be taken in three of the following four areas: 1) Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Disability and Sexuality Studies, 2) Imperial, Transnational, and Postcolonial Studies, 3) Genre Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, Critical Theory, and 4) Creative Writing. Two electives and one “Senior English Seminar” or “Capstone English Seminar” complete the major requirements. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Majors must take 13 courses, two of which are foreign language courses and 11 of which are English courses. They must fulfill a “Gateway” requirement, “Genre” requirement, “Period” requirement, and a “Literary and Critical Theory” requirement, all of which may overlap. The “Gateway” requirement is an introduction to one of three genres (fiction, poetry, or drama). The “Genre” requirement consists of one course each in fiction, poetry, or drama. The “Period” requirement mandates one course in each of the following time periods: before 1650, between 1650 and 1830, and between 1830 and 1940. One course must also be taken in literary or critical theory. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

The English major requires 10 courses in addition to the literature course required of all students in the College of Arts and Letters. As a prerequisite, all majors must take “Introduction to Literary Studies.” Students must also complete an original research project in a research seminar. Eight elective courses at the 30xxx level or above must be taken, which must fulfill a series of distribution requirements. In the “Literary History” category, students must take one course in the period before 1500, one course in the period 1500-1700, two courses in the period 1700-1900, and one course after 1900. They must also satisfy distribution requirements for “Literary Culture” and “Genre.” **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

UPenn English majors are required to take 12 courses. Six courses constitute the “Core,” with one course on theory or poetics, one on “Difference and Diasporas” in literature; and one course in each of four historical periods: Early Literatures to 1660, 1660-1830, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In addition, majors must take at least four advanced seminars and a “Junior Research Seminar.” **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Students pursuing the Bachelor of Arts in English emphasizing English Literature must take three introductory courses, at least two of which are selected from “English Literature to 1800,” “English Literature since 1800,” and “American Literature.” Also required are seven upper-division courses, including two courses in literature written before 1800, one course in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, one course in American literature, and two electives. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Majors must take 10 courses, all of which must be at the upper-division level, with the exception of the single ENLT 2000 level course which serves as a prerequisite for the major. A three course “History of Literatures in English” sequence is required. At least one course must cover literature before 1700, and another must cover literature between 1700 and 1900. One 4000 level seminar in literature is required. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

### VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

The English Department offers three programs. All three require “Foundations of Literary Studies.” The Literary Studies track requires six credits of “History” (literature before 1800), six credits of “Diverse Perspectives” (ethnic American or Anglophone literature), three credits of “Approaches,” nine English elective credits, and the “Senior Capstone

Seminar.” The Creative Writing track requires 12 credits of 200 level creative writing workshops in at least two different genres, three credits of “History,” three credits of “Diverse Perspectives,” and nine English elective credits. The Specialized Critical Studies track requires 12 credits concentrated on a particular period, genre or movement, an aspect of intellectual history, or another area of special interest. It also requires six credits of “History,” six credits of “Diverse Perspectives,” three credits of “Approaches,” three credits of any 200 level English course, and the “Senior Capstone Seminar.” **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### VASSAR COLLEGE

English majors at Vassar College are required to take 12 courses including either an ungraded “Senior Tutorial” or a 300 level seminar taken in the senior year. Two of these courses must focus on literature written before 1800, and one must focus on literature written before 1900; one course must “focus on issues of race, gender, sexuality, or ethnicity.” All courses must be taken at either the 200 or 300 level. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

The Washington and Lee English major consists of 11 courses, including one or two courses numbered between 202 and 295, a “Seminar for Prospective Majors,” at least two courses which focus on literature before 1700, at least one course focusing on literature between 1700 and 1900, and at least one course focusing on literature after 1900. Additionally, majors must take a course on “counter traditions.” Two or three additional courses at the 300 level or above must also be taken, and students must complete a “Capstone Writing Requirement.” **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Majors must take two prerequisite courses and eight upper-division courses. At least one course must be taken from either “Medieval” or “Early Modern” literature, and at least one course must be taken from

18<sup>th</sup> century, 19<sup>th</sup> century, or 20<sup>th</sup> century and later literature, with at least three of the five aforementioned time periods studied. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### WELLESLEY COLLEGE

Wellesley English majors must take a minimum of 10 units of which at least eight must address topics other than creative writing. At least seven units must be above the 100 level, and at least two must be earned in 300 level courses dealing with literature, film, or literary theory. All students majoring in English must take “Critical Interpretation,” two courses in literature written before 1900, of which at least one must focus on literature written before 1800, and a course in Shakespeare. **Shakespeare is required.**

#### WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Wesleyan University English majors are required to complete 36 hours of credit, including “Introduction to Literary Criticism,” a senior seminar, and two surveys each of British and United States literature. Majors must choose five of six courses including seminars in British and world literature, argumentative writing, creative writing, or qualifying special topics. They must also choose as an elective one course from either “Women’s World Literature,” “African-American Literature,” “Narratives of Nature,” “Professional Writing,” or “Perspectives on World Literature.” **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

#### WILLIAMS COLLEGE

English majors at Williams College must take at least nine courses. Among these nine, one must be any 100 level English class, one must be a 200 level “Gateway” course, and one must be a “Criticism” course. At least three of the nine required courses must be at the 300 level or above. At least three “Literary Histories” courses must be taken, at least two of which must focus on literature before 1900 and of which at least one must focus on literature before 1800. **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

## YALE UNIVERSITY

English majors at Yale must take three courses in literature written in English before 1800, one course in English literature from before 1900, and one course in American literature. “Major English Poets from Chaucer to Donne” and “Major English Poets from Milton to T.S. Eliot” must be taken as prerequisites, or else majors must take “four advanced courses that deal substantially and intensively with poets included in the aforementioned course, with two of these courses covering poets from ‘Major English Poets from Chaucer to Donne’ and two covering poets from ‘Major English Poets from Milton to T.S. Eliot’.” **A course focused on the study of Shakespeare is not required.**

*There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life is  
bound in shallows and in miseries.*

– JULIUS CAESAR



In the past English departments taught students how to read well, to write clearly, to think critically, and to appreciate great literature as great art. This ACTA study is an important and eloquent argument for the restoration of a genius who for centuries has inspired the thought and dreams of millions worldwide.

– Bruce Cole, the 8<sup>th</sup> Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, DC

The trend identified in this report bespeaks the loss of a crucial ingredient in a healthy culture: that is, the difference between the great and the not-so-great. If we fail to pass on to rising generations the highest human expressions from the past, our culture decays. We no longer uphold beauty against vulgarity, depth against superficiality.

– Mark Bauerlein, Professor of English, Emory University

In a culture dominated by 140 character messages, the appreciation, comprehension and use of complex syntax and semantics enshrined in the Shakespearean canon is eroding apace. Notwithstanding the vast repository of ethics and values within it, the engagement of linguistic rigor required in studying the works of Shakespeare in any undergraduate program serves to inoculate the mind against weak reasoning, flawed thinking and powerless communication.

– Edward Gero, Associate Professor of Theater, George Mason University

Shakespeare absolutely pervades American pop culture. His plays are produced everywhere: Broadway, inner city high schools, military bases, and the edgiest avant-garde theaters. Among contemporary flicks, *She's the Man* is basically *Twelfth Night*, *Get Over It* is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Ten Things I Hate About You* steals from *The Taming of the Shrew*. Shakespeare inspired songs by Taylor Swift, Dolly Parton, Elvis Costello, Sting, the Beatles, and Bob Dylan. Trekkies recite Hamlet's soliloquy in Klingon. If you don't study Shakespeare with your students, you're pathetically uncool.

– Jonathan Rose, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of History, Drew University



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