

University Scholar Proposal, Fall 2000

History, Literature, and Fiction: Civil War America and the Classics

I. Introduction and Description

The University Scholar Program is based upon the twin ideals of research and creativity. Pursuing these goals by means of an interdisciplinary and independent course structure is the unique advantage afforded by the Program. This is my opportunity to meld into a single course of study a number of different interests: the Classical period; Classical literature; American history, specifically my long-term interest in the Civil War; and creative writing. These subjects interest me individually, and it will be a unique and exciting opportunity to combine them into a single work. With these ideas in mind, I propose for my University Scholar project a short piece of historical fiction, sixty to eighty pages in length.

This story, set during the American Civil War, will have as its main character a fictional young Lieutenant from New Haven named Virgil Hale. I have chosen to follow my character from the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861 until late 1862. This will incorporate his enlistment in the Eighth Connecticut Volunteer Infantry in September 1861 and the early battles of the Eighth Connecticut, culminating in the heroic actions of the Eighth at the Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862. My focus during the story will be on Virgil Hale's battlefield experiences, which force him to reassess his heroic notions of war garnered mainly from his study of Classical history, especially the Greco-Roman epics of Homer and Vergil.

This novelette will be based on both imaginative invention and historical research. According to Richard Slotkin, author of both historical fiction and non-fiction,

Historical fiction may do as well as history for telling what happened, when, and how. It can, and should, be based on the same kind of research and rigorous analysis of evidence. But the distinction and advantage of the fictional form lies in the way it uses evidence and represents conclusions.

I propose to take advantage of this fictional form to achieve a multidimensional understanding of past events and then communicate that understanding to others.

Fiction writing is often as difficult as purely “academic” writing, but I am qualified to undertake a project of this sort. My relevant coursework includes: Honors English I (ENGL250), which centered around weekly creative writing assignments; The Short Story (ENGL216); The American Historical Novel (ENGL299), which has included frequent writing exercises in historical fiction; and finally, I plan to take a series of independent, creative writing development courses over the next three semesters (ENGL299, “Creative Writing I-III”). Also, I am currently a Contributing Columnist for *The Daily Campus*, writing creative humorous essays. My experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom, will help me to complete my project successfully.

II. Methods and Courses

This project will require intensive research into Civil War America, the epic and historical traditions of Greece and Rome, and the study of the Classics in America in the first half of the 19th Century. I plan to employ published letters, diaries, and memoirs of the period as the foundation for the preconceptions of the fictional protagonist, a member of Connecticut’s educated elite. The thoughts and interpretations of my character will therefore be drawn largely from a study of the literature and culture of ancient Rome as it was taught during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

Among others, I will work closely with Professor Richard D. Brown in the History department as well as with Professors Lynn Z. Bloom and Thomas Roberts in English and Roger Travis in Classics. The faculty members I plan to work with are best suited for my task: Dr. Brown is a specialist in early America, Dr. Bloom is a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor as well as the Aetna Chair of Writing, Dr. Roberts' specialty includes the theory of fiction and the novel, and Dr. Travis' field of study is the literary analysis of the Classics.

My University Scholar plan of study follows. Numbers of credits are in parentheses and Honors-level courses are designated by an asterisk (*) following the number of credits. Professors' names are bracketed. Fall 2000 is provided for informational and descriptive purposes only, as it is my current course list and therefore not a proposed part of my University Scholar application.

FALL 2000

This semester I am beginning preparation for my project by examining Greek and Roman history, studying the development of historical fiction in America, and working on sections of my story, which I am submitting to Professor Tilton. The pair of medieval-period courses provide a complete look at the immediate post-Classical world, in which there was a codifying of the Classical literary tradition.

- English 299 (3): Independent Study, "The American Historical Novel" [Robert Tilton]
- Classics 212 (3*): Greek Historians [Roger Travis]
- Classics 227 (3*): Roman Historians [Sara Johnson]
- History 204 (3): Medieval Islamic Civilization [Fakhreddin Azimi]
- History 219 (3): Early Middle Ages [Sherri Olson]

SPRING 2001

In anticipation of my acceptance, I have won consent to enroll in a graduate-level course on the American Revolution in the Spring of 2001. This course will provide me with an in-depth look at the rise of the American Republic whose founders often looked to Rome as a model for their own burgeoning nation. I also propose to study the classical epic, which will become an important facet in my character's world view. To develop other aspects of my fictional character, and to explore my personal interests in the field, I also intend participate in a study of the field of personality type and non-traditional psychology. Finally, CLAS243 will further my study of the ancient world, and ENGL299 will help me continue to develop my personal writing style.

- History 331 (3*): American Revolution [Richard D. Brown]
- Classics 241W (3*): Classical Epic [Roger Travis]
- Interdepartmental 299 (3): Independent Study, "Personality and Parapsychology" [Kevin Sullivan]
- Classics 243 (3): World of Late Antiquity [Daniel Caner]
- English 299 (3): Independent Study, "Creative Writing I" [Lynn Z. Bloom]

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During Fall 2001, I will develop my University Scholar project further with two History courses that supply an opportunity for intensive research, reading, and thesis preparation, including HIST301, a graduate-level course. In addition, an independent study in English will further my writing skills. Other courses will include an independent study on the history of Classics in Early America with Professor Bergmann, and a study of Classical political systems in POLS201.

- History 200W (3*): Senior Thesis [Richard D. Brown]
- History 301 (3*): Independent Reading, "Secondary Sources" [Richard D. Brown]
- English 299 (3): Independent Study, "Creative Writing II" [Thomas Roberts]

- History 299 (3): Independent Study, "Classics in Early America" [Peter Bergmann]
- Political Science 201 (3): Classical and Medieval Political Theory [Cyrus Zirakzadeh]

SPRING 2002

In Spring 2002, I plan to complete my project with independent work in both History and English. I also plan to conclude my studies of Rome and the American Civil War with CLAS255 and HIST236. I will also investigate the technical aspects of warfare in the ancient world with a final independent study in the Classics department.

- History 200W (3*): Senior Thesis [Richard D. Brown]
- English 299 (3): Independent Study, "Creative Writing III" [Thomas Roberts]
- Classics 255 (3): Ancient Rome [Daniel Caner]
- History 236 (3): Civil War America [To be announced]
- Classics 299 (3): Independent Study, "War in the Ancient World" [Sara Johnson/Roger Travis]

This plan of study is suited to the University Scholar Program because it involves interdisciplinary research tailored to a comprehensive final project. If I am not chosen to be a University Scholar, my plan of study would substitute general upper division courses in History and Classics for many of the independent study seminars.

My most valuable experience will come from interacting closely with professors and by investigating topics at a deeper level than that which is offered in standard undergraduate courses. It is this "dialogue of ideas" which is the most valuable part of any educational experience. As Vice President of the Honors Council, I am currently trying to augment traditional upper division Honors courses through the use of frequent, periodic small discussions between students and faculty. This model is well suited to the independent work that I envision.

My research will demand more than a standard Honors thesis; not only must I understand the society, events, and causes of the periods under study, but I must interpret this information

and create feasible characters, settings, and actions through the device of historical fiction. My goal is to produce a University Scholar level project that is both creative and of significant merit.

III. General Education and Major Requirements

It may be noted that I have not planned to complete my “C” or “computer” General Education requirement with University coursework. This is due to the fact that my experiences outside of my undergraduate experience should serve as a viable substitution for this requirement. For the previous two summers, I have worked as a database development consultant at the Pacific Gas and Electric Company in San Francisco, CA. This job required a familiarity with computer skills and incorporated many elements of both programming and business analysis. I now have an extensive knowledge of the Microsoft Access platform for database creation and management. My experience in computer programming and business analysis go far beyond the skill requirements of any “C” course; therefore it seems logical to substitute my extracurricular experiences for such a class.

Other than what is stated above, I have completed (or have planned to complete) all other requirements for my majors (History and Classics, both as an Honors Scholar) as well as the University General Education requirements for a Bachelor of Arts degree.

IV. Conclusion

My University Scholar project will involve both scholarly research and pure creativity. My study will cover a broad range of history, literature, and classics to a depth not available in the standard undergraduate program. My interdisciplinary approach will require a sophisticated synthesis of disciplines and departments. Through this ambitious study, I intend to create a work

that will be compelling to scholars of the Civil War era and stimulating to the general reader, with or without a latent interest in Classical and American history.

After graduation, I do not plan to set aside my completed University Scholar project. Instead, I hope to work toward some form of publication: either expanded as a novel or revised as a short story. Thus I will provide the opportunity for the dissemination of my academic and creative efforts to society as a whole, while still enjoying the benefits of an undergraduate experience of the greatest personal interest, importance, and value.

I have read this proposal and indicate my support by signing below.

Richard D. Brown, History

Roger Travis, Classics