



ENG 615: Professing English
COURSE SYLLABUS: Fall 2020

Instructor: Shannon Carter, Professor of English

Office Location: HL 224

Office Hours: TBA (by phone; appointments are especially welcome)

Office Phone: My "office phone" is my cell phone, which I won't publish here so publicly for obvious reasons. You'll find it easily in our course shell (D2L)

Office Fax: (903) 886.5980

Email Address: shannon.carter@tamuc.edu and cartershannon@gmail.com

Course Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/english615/home> (for the most up-to-date information about this course, please visit our course website and D2L)

COURSE INFORMATION

We don't have prescribed plans for your career path. Our mission is to help you get the job you want, not the "tenure track position or you're an embarrassment" model that many of us were brought up in. We'll even explore career options for putting that PhD to use in exciting ways you've never considered or, in some cases, ever knew even existed. That's a key goal for English 615.

Required Texts:

Foss, Sonja K. and William Waters. *Destination Dissertation: A Traveler's Guide to a Done Dissertation*. NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016.

Moore, Cindy and Hildy Miller. *A Guide to Professional Development for Graduate Students in English*. NCTE, 2006.

Munroe, Randall. *Thing Explainer: Complicated Stuff in Simple Words*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. Norton, 2014.

[PhD Comics \(Piled Higher and Deeper\)](#)

Doctoral Student Handbook. Graduate School, Texas A&M-Commerce, 2019 (February).

<https://tinyurl.com/yxzgvydm>

Graduate Handbook. Department of Literature and Languages. Texas A&M-Commerce, 2008.

<http://tinyurl.com/ybx6segw>

Updated 8/7/2020

NOTE: I will provide additional resources and articles to serve the above goals. Again, practical, directly-applicable to you and designed to serve your own program and career objectives.

Recommended Text:

- Sword, Helen. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Harvard UP, 2012.
- Munroe, Randall. [XKCD](https://xkcd.com/): *A Webcomic of Romance, Sarcasm, Math, and Language*.
https://xkcd.com/
- Toth, Emily. *Ms. Mentor's Impeccable Advice for Women [and Men!] in Academia* (available in course shell)

Course Description

Primarily for English doctoral students, English 615 is an introduction to the profession of English—that is, the process by which one becomes a professional. Issues covered will include the curriculum vita, abstracts, dissertation proposals, dissertations, the job search, the research process beyond graduate school. The course will also include history of English as a part of the college curriculum. This course is required of all doctoral students. Graded on a satisfactory (S) and unsatisfactory (U) basis.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

1. Students will demonstrate substantive knowledge of their chosen field in English Studies by illustrating they understand what is necessary to earn a degree in that field through a completion plan (“Backwards Calendar and Completion Plan”)
2. Students will demonstrate their ability to generate meaningful, substantive, and productive contributions to the scholarly conversation in their chosen field by generating a viable dissertation plan, which could serve as a productive starting point for beginning work with their chosen dissertation advisor (“Preproposal”).
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to hypothesize, design, and organize their professional goals by generating a career plan that takes into deep consideration a relationship to proposed path through doctoral plan (see above SLO) and something about generating an attractive vita.

This course will make use a variety of texts to provide a quick immersion in issues facing higher education, the job market, how insiders describe what they do, and how you might map out your own career plan. The course objectives are that you:

- become acquainted with some of the contemporary issues facing higher education;
- understand the steps toward completion of your degree;
- have a career plan that will serve you when you enter the job market.

Overview

Academia is a foreign and strange place for outsiders. Crazy as it sounds, I still feel like an outsider in a lot of ways. The vast majority of us do, to tell the truth. At least everyone with whom I've spoken about it. “Imposter syndrome,” they call it. We've all had it, starting at least as early as graduate school. Pretty much everything I learned about the culture of the academy, I learned from generous mentors or the hard way—*on my own*. Yikes. The good part is that I

Updated 8/7/2020

survived pretty darned well. I'd like to do what I can to help you avoid some of the mistakes I made out of ignorance.

This class is designed to make sure that once you complete your degree, you're prepared for the job market and for the job itself once you get it. In addition, you will become acquainted with some of the contemporary issues facing higher education.

CHANGE "WRITING **converging and intersectional literacies**"

ABOUT OUR DOCTORAL PROGRAM

The Ph.D. in English at Texas A&M University-Commerce emphasizes an integrated vision of writing/writers, reading/readers, texts, and associated technologies in a variety of cultural and historical contexts, with research, teaching, administrative, professional, and publication opportunities designed to prepare students for careers within and beyond the academy (i.e., "alt-ac" or Alternative Academic" career paths). The doctoral program offers three tracks: (1) rhetoric and composition, (2) literary studies, and (3) linguistics. Most doctoral programs approach such "tracks" as entirely separate, diverging paths with few if any opportunities for crossover. What sets our program apart is our insistence that whatever form it may take, discourse is discourse. In other words, our doctoral program places more traditional literary texts alongside community writing, multimedia projects, public rhetoric, children's and adolescent literature, creative writing, professional writing, and the digital humanities. Texas A&M-Commerce, an R2, remains committed to its working class roots. Established in 1889 in direct response to the needs of the area's poor farmers and their families, our campus has a long history of providing local citizens with rhetorical training necessary for civic engagement. Building upon that history, our doctoral program calls attention to the dynamic, critical intersections of class, race, gender, sexuality, (dis)abilities, and related identity markers that limit and shape everyday lives. In other words, we refuse to separate the texts we study and compose from the material, embodied, always already political contexts in which they are created and circulated over time.

Course Requirements

Attendance Policy: Be here, every day and on time. *This is a course on professionalism. Let's be professional, yeah?*

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. I will not let you make up the work unless you experience something dire--and I don't wish that on anyone. If something is going on that's getting in the way of your class time, please let me know right away. I also don't make a distinction between excused and unexcused absences. If you're here, you're here. If you're not, you're not. You're all adults. I trust you. You know not to miss any single class meeting without having a good reason for doing so. Be here for every class meeting and be on time so you can participate in every class meeting. If you must miss a class, check the syllabus and maybe even contact a classmate to find out what you missed. Never say to a professor, "Did I miss anything?" Of course you did. Otherwise, what are we all doing here? :) Tom Wayman's fun--at once cheeky and rigorously honest--poem called "Did I Miss Anything?" is a super useful reminder as to why class meetings matter and why asking your professor "Did I miss anything?" is a rather silly thing to do. :) Read that poem [here](#).

Updated 8/7/2020

In fact, the university has no policy for “excused absences” except for school sanctioned events, so please save your absences for illness, court appearances, child care arrangements, and other situations when you must miss class. Appointments should be scheduled at times when you are not in class.

Grading Policy and Criteria:

English 615 is a pass/fail course (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory). To pass (earn an “S” or “Satisfactory”) you must submit all assignments on time and be an active participant in all class discussions with contributions clearly informed by all assigned readings and related materials and activities.

Assignment
Informal Writing Assignments/Presentations, including following social media on higher education, doctoral programs, alt-ac careers, specific twitter accounts, blogs, and/or hashtags (ex: #BlackintheIvory)
Backwards Calendar and Completion Plan (template)
Final Project (including your “Thing Explainer,” which you’ll learn plenty about as we move forward through our course together).
Dissertation Plans (“Preproposal”)

Assignments:

The work we do in this class depends on your coming each day, prepared to work. I count on you all to teach and learn from each other and to each be an important presence in our weekly discussions. I will do everything I can to make the atmosphere of our discussion a comfortable one; I do not tolerate disrespect, so you can rest assured that at no time will your comments be ridiculed or made fun of by me or anyone else in the class. I want this to be a place where intellectual inquiry is the norm. And if at any time you feel that someone has exhibited disrespect, let me know immediately.

We should be able to challenge each other's reading and ideas in professional ways that stimulate discussion, not shut it down. I'm always nervous that my humor will come across wrong or mean because I can be a tad on the sarcastic side. Let me know if you think I've been caustic or mean because I am never intentionally either of those.

Each day, I'll get the discussion started; then I'll expect you all to carry the conversational ball. I would also like you to contribute generative questions to keep that ball rolling. I don't expect you to respond to everyone's comments, but I do expect you to take some responsibility in seeing that everyone gets a response and that the responses are substantive.

Updated 8/7/2020

Informal Writing Assignments: We'll have a variety of these throughout the term, often as fodder and/or early drafts of more formal assignments like those that follow. Examples include something as easy as keeping up with your favorite comics about academia or “meatier” source material like those listed above. Comics that fit this category [PhDComics](#) and/or [XKCD Comics](#) fun options. [Oatmeal](#) is a delight and has several relevant to English majors/Academia). More of our work together will address

Backward Calendar and Completion Plan: Basically a two-part assignment (one part calendar, one part narrative), this assignment requires that you learn the Graduate School's deadlines so that you can manage your time most efficiently. Decide what semester you want to graduate, and then move backwards. *Neither the Backward Calendar nor the Completion Plan will be submitted to me directly. Prepare them before the deadline, as we will discuss them. However, these are for you and you alone.*

- Backwards Calendar (written, though not submitted) [here's a [template](#)]
- Completion Plan/Narrative (written, though not submitted until the end of the term as part of the Final Project).

The calendar can be a typed list or you can download a calendar template and use that if you like. The idea is that by working backwards from the date you want to graduate, you can set deadlines and give yourself a realistic idea of what you'll have to get done each semester to meet that goal.

The narrative part of your assignment is more flexible. How are you going to make it happen? How are you going to get your family and friends to understand that you're not available 24/7? How will you keep your kids occupied? Review your degree plan. What do you need to take? What do you *want* to take? When it is time to tackle your comprehensive exams, that dissertation proposal, and the dissertation itself, how will you keep your backside in your chair? That last question is one of the most important ones, believe it or not. A surprising percentage of scholarly work, including developing publishable journal articles and books, is getting (and keeping) that backside in seat often enough to generate prose, regardless of whether or not you are “feeling” it.

Important Notes:

- Committee members should have to have at least three weeks to read dissertation drafts, including your proposal, and you have to have time to do the revisions they ask for. Note: faculty members may not be available in the summer. Factor that in, as well.
- The Graduate School's deadlines *always* come as a shock. The calendar helps you to take as much control of this process as you can.
- If you plan to work toward a doctorate and are currently working toward a Masters, you may use this as an opportunity to plan your doctoral work.

The “backwards calendar” helps you take as much control of the process as you can. For models, noodle around a bit with search terms like “doctoral” and “backwards calendar” and you'll come

up with a number of options. Again, you can also just download the [template](#) I created for you, as mentioned above.

“Thing Explain” Our Doctoral Program (Infographic)

Our handbook for doctoral students was written in 2008 and hasn’t ever been updated ([Graduate Handbook](#), Department of Literature and Languages) In recent years, it’s been regularly criticized for being inaccurate, out of date, and hard to use. This is our opportunity to do something about it--*together*.

To that end, we’ll “Thing Explain” or create an Infographic designed to aid future doctoral students in navigating our doctoral program. The clearest, most concise, accurate, and informative product(s) resulting from this assignment will be invited to submit to Department. Ideally, we’ll be able to share your revised Graduate Handbook with future doctoral students *for real*. :)

Resources: Anything at our “[About Our Phd. Program](#)” page and from our course texts (*A Guide; Destination Dissertation*)

- Thing Explainer [Lecture](#)
- Infographic: “[What is an Infographic?](#)”; [[How much do cats actually kill?](#)] [the oatmeal]; [Infographics from “the oatmeal”](#)]; “[Get More Out of Google](#)” (bonus: research tips!)

“Thing Explain”/Infograph on “Alt-Ac” or “Alternative Academic” Careers

“Alt-Ac” is a term, concept, and now mainstream category denoting an alternative to the single, straight, and narrow path to fulfillment and return on investment of a graduate student’s humanities education and meaningful contribution to the profession. As a doctoral student, you actually have numerous no less exciting opportunities that extend beyond the traditionally tenure-track position at a college or university. “‘Academic’ is an active and meaningful identity to an alt-ac person.” The alt-ac is, ultimately, “proof that there is a third way—that one can remain within the academy outside of a tenure-track position: teaching, publishing, and living the ‘life of the mind’ (libraries, museums, digital humanities centers, academic affairs, student affairs, research centers, grant-writing, research and development, business affairs) or even beyond the academy (ie., think-tanks, publishing).

You can complete this assignment in groups of up to three students or on your own. Up to you. Your goal is to create a “Thing Explainer” (see Munroe’s book) or Infographic on Alternative Academic Careers (as a general concept, a career path more generally or more personally, a good advertisement to future doctoral students who might not be thinking of--if even aware of--alternative, intellectually rewarding paths beyond the traditional one of the cranky old professor surrounded by her dusty books (I say this as someone who deeply enjoys this cranky, dusty world of hers and couldn’t imagine it any other way). The point is, there are great options out there beyond what you see here. We need a Public Service Announcement or something. Let’s get the word out!

Each “Thing Explainer” should offer a unique perspective on this subject matter, so make extensive use of your research and evidence and experiences with tools like *The Versatile PhD* and *Imagine PhD* to ensure your own “Thing Explainer” doesn’t merely repeat what your classmate’s “Thing Explainers” communicate. After you’ve all presented your individual “Thing Explainers,” we should have a much broader, more nuanced understanding of Alt-Ac careers.

1. Locate and synthesize *at least three articles* from periodicals like the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or *Inside Higher Ed* to inform and expand your understanding of Alt-Ac or Alternative Academic Careers. Here’s a good starting place--search results in Inside Higher Ed on “alt-ac”: <https://tinyurl.com/y5d2ypbc>
2. Return to the *The Versatile PhD* and *Imagine PhD*, tools you explored briefly at the beginning of our course. Spend more time with them, keeping this project in mind as you do and considering the unique perspective you can offer on it.
3. When you’re ready, draft your “Thing Explainer,” knowing you’re very likely to use many words beyond the “Ten Hundred” ones Munroe insists upon on pages 57-60 of his book by the same name.
4. Fiddle with your existing prose to recalibrate your message into the “Thing Explainer”-ese by utilizing XKCD’s “Simplewriter” (<https://xkcd.com/simplewriter/>). The creator explains the way this tool works at <https://tinyurl.com/hafw4x9>
5. The “Thing Explainer” is, of course, limited in what it can communicate given the tremendously small vocabulary it allows. For that reason, you’ll need to work your prose quite a bit, maintaining the simplicity as much as possible but revising as extensively as needed to communicate what needs to be said in ways that don’t sound like Incredible Hulk (“Hulk mad!”; “Hulk smash!”).
6. Design to be as informative, clear, and accessible (and, of course, accurate) as possible).

Product: A “Thing Explainer” or Infograph that synthesizes the above information

Group Presentation: Interview

You will work with at least one other classmate to interview someone about the academic world as they’ve (deliberate use of singular “they,” by the way) experienced it thus far.

I want you all to be as familiar as you can with the academic professional process so it will be as demystified as possible. The process of seeking a job in academia bears little resemblance to the way the job search process works in just about every other profession. For this reason, I’d like you to get the inside scoop from someone who has gone through this themselves. You might even end up with someone who has been involved in the search process on the hiring end. Many of us have been on multiple search committees.

Updated 8/7/2020

Your job is to interview an academic about the job search process, but you may include information about the steps leading up to the moment you enter the job market (choices they made in developing dissertation topic, selecting an advisor, getting through the dissertation process, etc.)

We will brainstorm some good questions together, but one I would definitely ask is a variation of these: (1) What do you wish you'd known then that you know now? (2) What's the smartest thing you did to get through the process? (3) What's the best advice you have for someone going into the job search process for the first time? Of course, you want to know what their search process involved, how they prepared for it, etc.

And, yes, the interview can be conducted via email, but some people will prefer face-to-face or telephone—provide them with an option if it's at all possible.

By the way, if you're interested in working at a particular school, this might be a good chance to connect with someone there by requesting an interview. As long as you are clear that it will be no more than eight or so questions and that it's for a doctoral-level practicum, I don't think you'll have a hard time convincing a stranger to talk with you. Also, consider how you can tie what you ask here to help you prepare your career path.

A caveat: A lot of people love to tell horror stories about their experiences. Do not get discouraged by this. For one thing, people love to make themselves look like they had it way harder than anyone else. For another, they survived it, and so will you. As a mentor once told me, "We all have stories. Move on."

Etiquette—

This is a course in professionalism, so it's only fitting that you do everything you can to ensure the entire process is conducted as professionally as possible. To that end, you should:

- Where possible, select an interview subject with whom you already have a good working relationship. If you do not know the person you'd most like to interview, talk to me first. In fact, . . .
- Before reaching out to schedule an interview, talk to me first about your top choices and why. I want to guide and, to some extent, "approve" your choice.
- Invite them with a carefully crafted email that includes all the information they need to determine what they might be getting themselves into and why it matters (example below, which you can use as is or tweak as needed).
- Show up on time, notebook out and ready to begin as soon as they are ready to get started.
- Before you begin, remind them about the purpose of the interview and core objectives.
- Conduct the interview as professionally as possible.
- Don't take up a lot of their time! Set a timer for thirty minutes and try to be in and out within that window unless the interviewee would prefer to go longer and you have the time to do so.
- Thank them, of course, as soon as you finish.

Updated 8/7/2020

- ~~Send them a thank-you email as soon as possible, in which you promise to send your write-up on the interview as soon as it is available and certainly before you present it in class.~~
- ~~Send them a copy of your narrative, with an invitation to review and address any concerns before the presentation.~~

Dear _____:

For English 615: Professing English, Dr. Carter has asked us to interview someone about the academic world as they have experienced it thus far, including any advice for those of us who hope to follow in your footsteps. We will present our findings to the class later this term.

When we received this assignment, you were the first person who came to mind. Would you be available for a thirty-minute interview with us in the next few weeks? Before we present our interview experience with the class, we will share our write-up with you to be sure it effectively captures aligned captures the gist of our interview.

Our questions include the following: (1) What do you wish you'd known then that you know now? (2) What's the smartest thing you did to get through the process? (3) What's the best advice you have for someone going into the job search process for the first time? Of course, you want to know what their search process involved, how they prepared for it, etc.

Possible? If so, please fill out our Doodle Poll here (url) so we can identify a time that is most convenient for you.

Thanks in advance.

Yours,

Your Names

Product; a relatively informal 5-10 minute presentation of above.

FINAL PROJECT:

Your final project consists of three, deeply interrelated parts: (a) your "Preproposal/Dissertation Plan" (deeply revised throughout the term), (b) your deeply revised "Backwards Calendar," and two "Thing Explainers" (you can also go with an Infographic for one or the other)--one for your dissertation plans and the second to communicate your career plans (in broad strokes). You'll present your "Thing Explainers" or Infographic to the class.

SCHEDULE (deadlines subject to change)

WK 1	<p>Introduction/Overview</p> <p>Graduate Handbook (Department of Literature and Languages, Texas A&M-Commerce, 2008); <i>Thing Explainer</i>, “Things in This Book By Page” (Table of Contents), “Page Before the Book Starts” (Introduction), “Shared Space House” (pg. 1), and “The Ten Hundred Words People Use Most” (pgs. 57-60);</p>	
WK 2	<p>Read: “Introduction” to <i>A Guide to Professional Development</i>; Doctoral Student Handbook. Graduate School, Texas A&M-Commerce, 2019 (February); Graduate School Website (well, don’t “read” it so much as “explore it”); “What is an Infographic?”</p>	<p>DUE:</p> <p>Close reading of the following resources:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “current” department Graduate Handbook 2. Backwards Calendar and Completion Plan (template) 3. Doctoral Student Handbook. 4. Graduate School Website
WK 3	<p>Read: Chapter 1-2, <i>A Guide to Professional Development</i>; <i>Thing Explainer</i>; Destination Dissertation, Chapter 1</p>	<p>Due:</p> <p>--“Thing Explain our Doctoral Program” (status: rough, rough draft to share and workshop together). To this end, also fiddle a bit with Infographic editors/templates (for example, What is an Infographic?”) to see what might work best. <u>POST TO relevant area in D2L before class.</u></p>
WK 4	<p>Workshop/finalize “Thing Explainers” for doctoral program and begin revising into prose utilizing more than the “Ten Hundred Words” the <i>Thing Explainer</i> allows yet still maintaining that same level of accessibility. Remember your target audience is future doctoral students.</p> <p>Destination Dissertation, Chapter 2-3</p>	<p>Draft of “Backwards Calendar” [here’s a template to consider, but lots of options out there]]</p>
WK 5	<p>Foss, through chapter 4, with “conceptual conversation” (page 29)</p>	

Updated 8/7/2020

WK 6	Foss, 5; Chapter 3, <i>A Guide to Professional Development</i>	Due: draft of preproposal
WK 7	Foss, 6 (Dissertation Proposal); Chapter 4, <i>A Guide to Professional Development</i> (“Establishing Yourself as a Scholar”)	Thing Explainer for assigned element from pre proposal (Foss)
WK 8 (10/16)	Foss, 7-8; Chapter 5, <i>A Guide to Professional Development</i> (“Establishing Other Academic . . .”)	
WK 9 (10/22)	Read: Chapter 6, <i>A Guide to Professional Development</i> Watch in Class: The PhD Movie 2	
WK 10 (10/29)	Foss, through end; Appendix A-B, <i>A Guide to Professional Development</i>	
WK 11 (11/6)	Foss, through end; Appendix A-B, <i>A Guide to Professional Development</i>	
WK 12 (11/13)		Due: “Thing Explainer/Infographic on Alt-Ac Careers
WK 13 (11/20)	TBA	
WK 14 (11/27)	No class/Happy Thanksgiving!	
WK 15 (12/4)		Final Project due/Presentations
Finals Week		Final Project due/Presentations