

Brown University
Literary Arts
Undergraduate Program Handbook

The undergraduate program in Literary Arts at Brown is designed to allow student writers to develop their skills in one or more genres, while deepening their understanding of the craft of writing. Concentration requirements are intended to balance creative and critical concerns.

By the time they graduate, concentrators should possess critical acumen, attain fluency in writing in general and within one or more genres as well. The department also wants our concentrators to learn something about an art: to gain a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in developing their craft and sensibility as artists.

Concentration Requirements

Concentrators must take four workshop courses from among LITR 110, 210, 310, 610, 1010, 1110, 1150, 1310 and 1510. At the discretion of the concentration advisor, workshop credit may also be given for Playwriting workshops given by the departments of Africana Studies and Theatre and Performance Studies; credit may also be given for 1000-level writing courses given through the English Department.

Concentrators must also take six literature courses*, including: a course in literary theory or history of literary criticism; two courses that cover reading and research in literary arts created before the 20th century (these must cover two distinct time periods); and one course that covers literary arts created after the 19th century.

During the senior year, all concentrators must take one course from among the Literary Arts offerings (designated as LITR or cross-listed by LITR).

At least four courses counted toward the concentration must be at the 1000-level.

At least six courses counted toward the concentration must be taken in the Literary Arts Department (with the approval of the concentration advisor, the rest may be taken at other institutions or other departments at Brown that offer literature courses).

No more than two courses may count toward the Literary Arts concentration and toward a second concentration.

*By literature courses, the department means courses where the primary readings for the course are works of literature.

Concentration Advising

To learn more about the concentration and before you file your concentration forms online, we recommend that you make an appointment with Gale Nelson -- contact him by electronic mail at Gale_Nelson@brown.edu. Gale Nelson's office is Room 109, Literary Arts Building, 68 1/2 Brown Street.

To establish your Literary Arts concentration, you'll need to visit the Registrars website, where you can complete the concentration filing process online.

Honors in Creative Writing

Literary Arts concentrators who wish to complete their concentration with Honors in Creative Writing must include two 1000-level workshops or independent studies among their courses and must, in addition, complete a thesis. The thesis is a substantial body of work that reflects the student's achievement during his/her years in the Department: a collection of stories or poems, a novel, a play, screenplay, a literary translation, a cross-disciplinary project or an extended electronic/mixed media project. Students may complete a thesis by taking either LITR 1510 (an independent study) or by taking LITR 1410 (the Honors workshop).

Students wishing to complete Honors in Cross-Disciplinary writing must take either two special topics workshops, one special topics plus one genre workshop, or one workshop in each of two different genres.

Applications to the Honors Program are due between the first day of the fall semester and 20 September (or the first Monday thereafter if the 20th falls on a weekend). Applications are considered annually. In order to apply, candidates must have taken OR be taking a workshop in the respective genre at the 1000-level (the workshop may be LITR 1010, 1110 or 1150; LITR 1310 also makes one eligible). Candidates may apply in more than one genre (if eligible), but will do ONE thesis (with the thesis advisor's consent, a thesis may cross the boundaries of genre).

Theses are typically completed in the senior year, and are due on 13 April (Samuel Beckett's birthday) or the Monday thereafter when the 13th falls on a weekend). If a concentrator is to complete course work in December, the thesis may be completed by the previous 13 April, by the end of December, or by the following 13 April (the date selected must be agreed upon by the thesis advisor). Most students complete the thesis through an honors independent study or through an honors workshop.

Frequent Questions

Do I have to complete a thesis for a Literary Arts concentration? No; but you must complete a thesis to be considered for honors.

If I don't complete a thesis, what do I do in my senior year? All concentrators must complete at least one course through the Literary Arts program in the senior year. In many cases, this will be a literature seminar or a workshop. This course constitutes the capstone experience in Literary Arts.

Do many concentrators pursue a second concentration? We've found that about a third of the Literary Arts concentrators complete two concentrations. The "other" concentrations have been spread widely throughout the college – there's no particular pattern to this. If you have two strong interests, and feel that you can comfortably undertake two concentrations while also having a rich and diverse educational experience, we recommend that you consider this.

Do concentrators have advantages over other students in terms of getting into Literary Arts classes? During the registration period, we make ten slots available to concentrators in LITR 210 sections. By registering during that period, concentrators are thereby not required to submit writing samples for these intermediate writing sections. Certain literature courses offered through Literary Arts may also allow concentrators to register without instructor permission (override) during the registration period.