THE UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENT HANDBOOK

# ENGLISH

*at Ashoka*

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# Why English?

The guiding assumption of the English major at Ashoka University is that we all like to travel. Even when we are beset by bad weather, dangerous beasts, visa problems, or even when travelling is impractical with a pandemic, we still like to travel and see new worlds. Some of these worlds might be frightening; many might involve thinking thoughts that we never have before; a few will allow us to recognise ideas that we have had all our lives. Nothing facilitates these journeys better than literature. Whether it is by reading books written by unfamiliar authors or thinking through the intricacies of an idea, literature challenges our minds to expand, grow, travel. All literature involves an imaginative movement outside the bounds of the familiar.

Our courses map such movements across genre – theory, fiction, poetry, drama, film – cultures, and languages. Literatures in translation are a vital component of our curriculum as we seek to put in conversation texts that have been divided by boundaries of various kinds.

English at Ashoka takes seriously knowledge of canonical Western texts like Ovid's Metamorphoses, Shakespeare's plays, and Brontë's novels, Indian texts like Mahasweta Devi's short stories, Amruta Patil's graphic novels, and Bollywood films, as well as world classics like *A Thousand and One Nights*, Greek tragedies, and Audre Lorde's poetry. The English Major and Minor at Ashoka puts disciplines in dynamic dialogue with each other, ensuring both specific knowledges and a more general ability to think.

Our aim is to be globally literate while also taking cognizance of our rootedness in India. We offer a wide range of courses that will prepare the Ashoka English graduate for a variety of careers in higher education, law, advertising, and any field that requires an agile mind able to traverse across borders.

*"To read is to be ecstatic. As the etymology of the word – ekstasis – suggests, reading takes us out of ourselves and out of our place. Through imagination, empathy, and self-questioning, by learning to trespass into unfamiliar times and inhabit unfamiliar spaces, and via translation and theory, studying literature allows us to examine our world and ourselves – which, as 'ecstatic' also suggests, can be great fun."*

**Mandakini Dubey**, Assistant Professor of English and Critical Thinking
Ph.D. Duke University
Nineteenth-century English literature and culture; Romanticism; Empire and Colonial Discourse; Literary Theory; Affect Theory

*"Literature is about life and our ways of being human. It is a practice of freedom that opens us to the power of language. Literature is comfortable with uncertainty, border crossing, and has no fear of contradictions."*

**Abir Bazaz**, Assistant Professor of English
Ph.D. University of Minnesota
South Asian literatures in English; Existentialism; Comparative Mysticism; Violence; Cinema Studies; Intellectual History of Islam in South Asia

*"To make a life in literature is to live as a 'bhasha karmi', a language worker. An understanding of language, its behaviour and its power, its ruptured blood vessels and its intestines – that is why we come to writing, to create a language of intimacy that rejects the readymade."*

**Sumana Roy**, Associate Professor of Creative Writing
Ph.D. University of North Bengal
Literature on the non-human; Provincial literatures; Cultures of close-reading; 'Minor' forms of writing

# Curriculum

The English department offers five core courses, of which two are gateways, required for a student to begin studying literature, and three survey courses, which tracks the movement of English literature from eighth-century to England to postcolonial nations in the twenty-first century. We also offer an array of electives in exciting sub-fields. Our faculty also offer different sections of the two Foundation courses, *Literature and the World* and *Great Books*.

## Gateway Courses

*ENG 1001 – Forms of Literature* (Offered every Spring)
We begin with introducing literary history as articulated through different genres: drama, poetry, prose, and newer forms. Rather than fixed categories or lists of unvarying characteristics, this course examines literary forms as dynamically shaped by their social and historical contexts. To understand both the changing narratives of history and the changing meanings of the genre itself, this course will also explore how these forms have signified differently at various points.

*ENG 1002 – Introduction to Literary Theory* (Offered every Monsoon)
The field of English is shaped by literary theory, through its profound engagements with big questions of reality, language, identity, power, desire, history – most broadly, the self and the world. When studying literature, we often seek out ways of uncovering the workings – and play – of these engagements in the texts we read. This course turns to the questions and answers posed by theory itself, rather than applications through the reading of literary texts. Theory can seem complex and intimidating, but its questions are fundamental: how do we make meaning? How do we constitute texts, and how do texts constitute us? How are we to know those parts of ourselves that refuse knowledge? How do our bodies, our given identities and the material conditions of our lives shape who we are and how we feel, think, act, desire, and read? Keeping these and other basic questions in mind, this course will survey the key approaches and texts of contemporary literary theory.

# Survey Courses

*ENG 2001 Early British Literature* (Offered every Monsoon)
Early British Literature surveys texts and the cultural conditions of their production between, roughly, 700 and 1700 AD. Beginning with the Old English epic *Beowulf* and closing with the poetry of John Milton, the course affords a view of the many profound cultural changes and intercultural contacts that shape English literary history.

*ENG 2002 Literature in the Age of Empire*
*Literature in the Age of Empire* examine eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century literature's "global consciousness" by looking at the texts of British writers who act globally and of colonial subjects who "write back" to empire. These texts will include novels, poems, letters, paintings, engravings, and more. While analyzing them, we will consider the extent to which British writing advances and questions the creation of empire, and determine how notions of empire change what it means to be a British subject.

*ENG 3001 Postcolonial Literatures*
What is the relevance of reading postcolonial literature in contemporary classrooms? Is it somewhat redundant to do so? This course begins with such questions but moves beyond, to read certain postcolonial literary texts as not only physically rooted in material spaces, but also as embodying the spirit of such locations, often untranslatable and un-exportable. Here, we will come together to explore if the universal could be sought in the most sensory embodiment of the particular, including stories from "backward and provincial" spaces, or if it is to be identified more easily in the symbolism reinforced by colonial and neocolonial languages of modernity.

## Electives

1000-level General Electives are for all students of Ashoka University. They aim to introduce an interdisciplinary archive of literature or a sub-field of literary studies. Offered every Monsoon, recent general electives include *Law and Literature* and *Global Literatures in Antiquity*.

2000-level Introductory Electives are introductory courses to various fields and methodologies of literary study. Although they are aimed at English students specifically, they can be taken by all Ashoka students. Offered each semester, recent courses include *Introduction to Drama and Theatre*, *Introduction to Digital Humanities*, and *Introduction to Rasa*. Some of these electives will be offered as critical thinking seminars.

3000-level Seminar Electives are specialist courses designed for English majors and minors. Only students who have taken the gateways can take these courses. Recent offerings include *Indian Literature*, *Rhetoric of Social Protest*, and *Freud and Literature*.

Graduate Courses are 4000-level seminar courses reserved for the undergraduate students who pursue the Advanced Major in their 4th year. They will study these intensive courses along with MA and PhD students. Recent offerings include *Masala Shakespeare*, *Translation Theories and Multilingual Contexts*, and *The Law of Desire*.

*"Once we have some sense of how fundamentally at odds we are with ourselves – the lesson brought to us by literary theory – then we can begin to appreciate that we are texts requiring to be read. And once we grasp the ungraspable slipperiness of ourselves as texts, then we can begin to fathom the politics of reading itself. This is what studying literature is about."*

**Madhavi Menon**, Professor of English
Director of Centre for Studies in Gender and Sexuality
Ph.D. Tufts University
Queer Theory; Literary Theory; Renaissance; Shakespeare; Sexuality; Politics of Identity and Desire

*"It is easy to imagine that environmental crises are geophysical problems belonging first and foremost to the realm of science. But that thinking ignores the complex interplay between natural systems and human culture. The very word "ecology" was coined in 1866 comes from the Greek word oikos - household - and carries with it notions of balance, harmony, and stability. These are not empirical concepts, but rather questions of language, aesthetics, and ideology. As with most any other topic that matters to humans, we can't think about environmental questions without also considering the reality of human histories and cultures."*

**Alexander Phillips**, Assistant Professor of English
Ph.D. Cornell University
Ecocriticism and Environmental Humanism; Realism; Frankfurt School and Critical Theory; Nineteenth to twenty-first century German literature

*"Literature provides possibilities of lives we have not lived, but also ones we shouldn't be living. The study of literature is also the most meaningful way to understand the daunting expanse and depth of language; for language is much too important to be left to linguists! The failure of language in its effort to keep up with experience characterises translation; which is not a gesture achieved, but forever in a state of compounding approximations."*

**Rita Kothari**, Professor of English
Ph.D. Gujarat University
Caste and Communalism; Bollywood; Indian literatures; Translation Studies; Partition; Border Studies

# The English Major

To pursue a major in English, a student must complete 12 courses.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 Gateway Courses: | Forms of Literature<br>Introduction to Literary Theory |
| 3 Survey Courses: | Early British Literature<br>Literature in the Age of Empire<br>Postcolonial Literatures |
| 7 Elective Courses: | 1 x Critical Thinking Seminar*<br>2 x 1000/2000-level electives<br>3 x 3000-level electives<br>1 x 1000/2000/3000-level elective |

Postcolonial Literatures, although a 3000-level survey course, does not count towards the 3000-level elective requirement.

An undergraduate student can take, under exceptional circumstances, ONE 4000-level elective, but they need to have written permission from the teacher to do so.

Students can take cross-listed courses, courses taught by faculty of other disciplines, as electives, but they can only count 3 such electives towards their major.

## An ideal time-table for an English major looks like this:

| Semester 1 | Semester 2 | Semester 3 | Semester 4 | Semester 5 | Semester 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Forms of Literature | Literary Theory<br><br>Early British Literature | Literature in the Age of Empire | Postcolonial Literatures | |
| | | 7 electives, distributed as per the student's preference | | | |

We recommend that students follow this time-table, but under extraordinary circumstances, the student can reorganize the order in which they take the courses. But since the gateway courses introduce the discipline to students, it is always wise to take them first.

*Note about the Critical Thinking Seminar: The critical thinking seminar is being offered as an elective from Spring 2021, and it is a mandatory elective requirement for batches beginning from the incoming Undergraduate Batch of 2023 only. The previous batches *can* take the CTS as one of their three mandatory 1000/2000-level electives, but it is not required that they do so. Their elective requirements are therefore: 3 x 1000/2000-level electives; 3 x 3000-level electives; 1 x 1000/2000/3000-level elective.

# The English Minor

The Minor and the Concentrations facilitate students of other disciplines to pursue their interest in literary study.

A minor in English requires a student to complete 6 courses.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 Gateway Courses: | Forms of Literature |
| | Introduction to Literary Theory |
| 2 of 3 Survey Courses: | Early British Literature |
| | Literature in the Age of Empire |
| | Postcolonial Literatures |
| 2 Elective Courses: | 1 x 1000/2000-level electives |
| | 1 x 3000-level electives |

Postcolonial Literatures, although a 3000-level survey course, does not count towards the 3000-level elective requirement.

Students can take cross-listed courses, courses taught by faculty of other disciplines, as electives, but they can only count 2 such electives towards their major.

# The English Concentration

The Minor and the Concentrations facilitate students of other disciplines to pursue their interest in literary study.

A concentration in English requires a student to complete 4 courses.

1 of 2 Gateway Courses: Forms of Literature or
Introduction to Literary Theory

Any 3 English courses

(These 3 courses can include one of the other gateways, any of the survey courses, and the electives; but concentration students need to remember that they will not be allowed to take 3000-level electives if they have not taken Introduction to Literary Theory, which they can either take as a part of their gateway requirement, or as one of their 3 courses.)

Students can take cross-listed courses, courses taught by faculty of other disciplines, as electives, but they can only count 1 such elective towards their major.

*"One of the unique things we do in creative writing at Ashoka University is to forge a relationship with reading in our mother tongues. In India we have the happy advantage of usually being fluent in at least two languages, each of which has a rich literature of its own. Through our courses in translation, students not only read (and listen and imagine) closely in their mother tongue, but they also polish their own art of writing by translating these texts into English. In the process, they add more gems to the treasure trove of literatures in translation from around the world."*

**Arunava Sinha**, Associate Professor of Practice in Creative Writing
Translator of *Chowringhee*, *When The Time is Right*; Books Editor, Scroll.in
Translation; Literary Journalism; Graphic Narratives

*"A study of the most fundamental function of language is persuasion. Persuasion and argumentation are the foundations of rhetoric, a field as ancient as it is contemporary, as humanistic as is rooted in business communication. My special interest is the nature of political discourse, and the various means of persuasion - whether shady or respectable - that inspire politicians in their quest for votes."*

**Subhashree Chakravarty**, Assistant Professor of English and Writing
Ph.D. The Ohio State University
Rhetoric and Critical Theory; Discourse Analysis; South Asian literatures; Race Studies; Immigration; Religion and Secularism in South Asia

*"Ancient literature reveals ways of being and thinking that are, at times, vastly different from our own, but also the human concerns that underpin all of our lives: love, loss, mourning, family, friendship, honor, social responsibility, and on and on. Bringing their own knowledge, experiences, questions, and insights to these texts, students renew these old stories, engaging in an ongoing conversation between present and past."*

**Mali Skotheim,** Assistant Professor of English
Ph.D. Princeton University
Greek and Roman drama and dance; Sanskrit drama; Paratheatrical forms (puppetry, trick magic, automata); Material Culture and Performance

# The Interdisciplinary Major *in English and Creative Writing*

The English and Creative Writing programme combines scholarly training in literature with exposure to the practice of writing in the various literary genres: poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Here, critical thinking and creative writing complement one another. Coursework will constitute of English courses focusing on literary history and theory, forms of literature, a selection of literature electives; as well as a multi-genre introductory course in creative writing, courses on the craft of writing, and genre-specific workshops where a community of student-writers come together to read and respond to each other's work.

To pursue this interdisciplinary major, a students needs to take 16 courses,

## 11 English:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 Gateway Courses: | Forms of Literature |
| | Introduction to Literary Theory |
| 3 Survey Courses: | Early British Literature |
| | Literature in the Age of Empire |
| | Postcolonial Literatures |
| 6 Elective Courses: | 1 x Critical Thinking Seminar* |
| | 2 x 1000/2000-level electives |
| | 3 x 3000-level electives |

## 5 Creative Writing:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 Gateway Courses: | Introduction to Creative Writing |
| | Craft of Writing |
| 2 Workshops: | Workshops in Fiction/Nonfiction/Poetry/Translation |
| 1 Thesis: | The Thesis and Publishing Seminar |

## Notes on the Interdisciplinary Major

Postcolonial Literatures, although a 3000-level survey course, does not count towards the 3000-level elective requirement. Students can take cross-listed courses, courses taught by faculty of other disciplines, as electives, but they can only count 2 such electives towards their ID major.

The Thesis: The thesis can be of any genre – fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or translation – with a minimum length of 25000 words for prose, and 10000 words for poetry. English and Creative Writing students should also write a 3000-word critical piece introducing their work. This can either be an academic essay or a writerly reflection of the work produced.

*Note about the Critical Thinking Seminar: The critical thinking seminar is being offered as an elective from Spring 2021, and it is a mandatory elective requirement for batches beginning from the incoming Undergraduate Batch of 2023 only. The previous batches can take the CTS as one of their three mandatory 1000/2000-level electives, but it is not required that they do so. Their elective requirements are therefore: 3 x 1000/2000-level electives; 3 x 3000-level electives.

# The Interdisciplinary Major *in English and Media Studies*

The rigorous reading and writing practices learnt in literary studies can influence the ways in which we analyse and make media. Simultaneously, a study of contemporary communication media and its representation of our times can provide a foundation to ground our literary study. This is the proposition behind the English and Media Studies programme. Apart from the core courses and electives in English, students will study the technical and interpretive skills required to make and analyse creative and responsible media. Be it a poem or social media story, a novel or a visual news report, the process is to learn how it reflects and influences our reading and writing of texts and the world.

To pursue this interdisciplinary major, a student needs to take 16 courses,

## 10 English:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 Gateway Courses: | Forms of Literature<br>Introduction to Literary Theory |
| 2 of 3 Survey Courses: | Early British Literature<br>Literature in the Age of Empire<br>Postcolonial Literatures |
| 6 Elective Courses: | 1 x Critical Thinking Seminar*<br>2 x 1000/2000-level electives<br>3 x 3000-level electives |

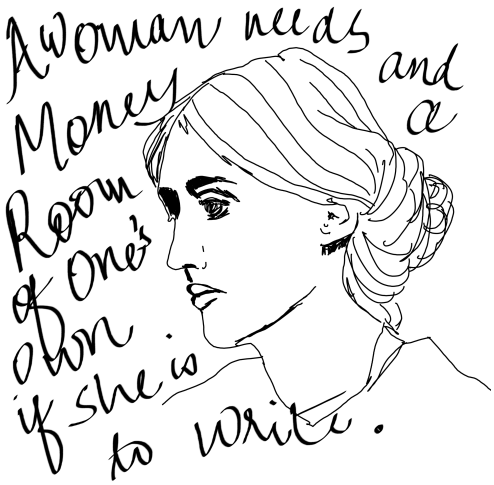
## 6 Media Studies:

| | |
|---|---|
| 3 Required Courses: | Introduction to Newswriting and Reporting<br>Media, Culture and Society<br>Audio-Video Production |
| 3 Elective Courses: | 1 x 200-level elective<br>2 x 300-level electives |

## Notes on the Interdisciplinary Major

Postcolonial Literatures, although a 3000-level survey course, does not count towards the 3000-level elective requirement. Students can take cross-listed courses, courses taught by faculty of other disciplines, as electives, but they can only count 2 such electives towards their ID major.

*The Critical Thinking Seminar is being offered as an elective from Spring 2021, and it is a mandatory elective requirement for batches beginning from the incoming Undergraduate Batch of 2023 only. The previous batches can take the CTS as one of their three mandatory 1000/2000-level electives, but it is not required that they do so. Their elective requirements are therefore: 3 x 1000/2000-level electives; 3 x 3000-level electives.



*"Reading pre-modern literature compels us to enter into conversation with the unfamiliar. Through such transtemporal encounters, we find common ground with a past that once seemed strange and, at the same time, locate the unfamiliar within ourselves."*

**Alexandra Verini**, Assistant Professor of English
Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles
Medieval and Early Modern literature and visual culture; Women's literature; Gender and Sexuality; Friendship; Religion; Utopia

*"At first glance, performance seems antithetical to literature: it is a non-written embodied thing that disappears before it reaches the archive. But look at it differently: performance extends literature's vast reach to the ways in which individuals and communities appear, disappear, and reappear in the ordinary moments of everyday life. By theorizing this ordinary, embodied, and ultimately irreducible aspect of human experience, performance widens the scope of literature and the humanities."*

**Vivek Narayan,** Assistant Professor of English, Theatre and Performance Studies
Ph.D. Stanford University
Theatre and Performance Studies; Postcolonial Theory; Dalit Studies; Transnational Solidarities; Care Ethics; Performance-Making

*"The very act of speaking about something called "law and literature" seems to presuppose that law is a bloodless activity full of technocrats who are only interested in rules and standards. In fact, I think that the methods of literary analysis can allow us to see the imagination and intellectual ambition driving the law."*

**Sharif Youssef**, Assistant Professor in English and Legal Studies
Ph.D. University of Chicago
Long Eighteenth-century; Transatlantic Literature; Empire; Law & Literature; Critical Refugee Studies; Literary Theory

# The Interdisciplinary Major *in English and Performing Arts*

The centrality within the English curriculum of drama (classical and modern, Western and Indian) and theories of performance and performativity (Butler, Austin, Goffman, the Natyashastra) makes the discipline an obvious fit with Performing Arts. Attending to the strong curiosity about not just theatre but also the academic study of the historical and practical relations between text and performance, the English and Performing Arts will give students the curricular space in which to incorporate Performing Arts into a major programme, while sacrificing none of the rigour of either discipline.

## 5 Performing Arts:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Gateway Course: | Performing Arts History |
| 16 credits for electives: | This may include up to 2 co-curricular courses |

## 2 Interdisciplinary Major Gateways:

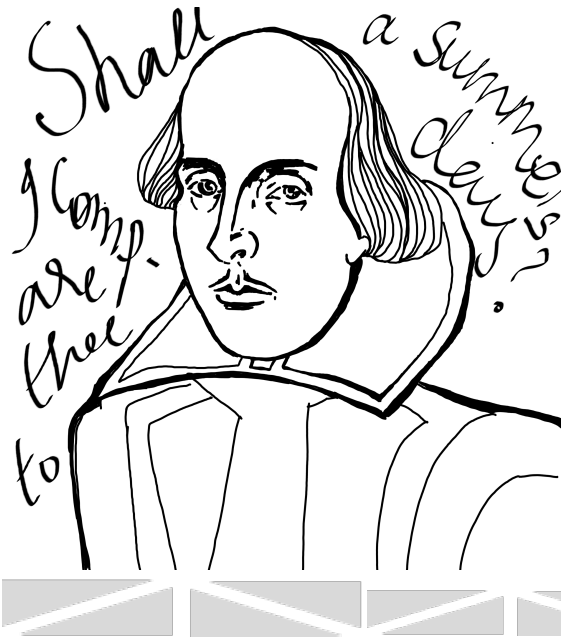
Introduction to Theatre and Drama
Introduction to Performance Studies

## 9 English:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 Gateway Courses: | Forms of Literature<br>Introduction to Literary Theory |
| 2 of 3 Survey Courses: | Early British Literature<br>Literature in the Age of Empire<br>Postcolonial Literatures |
| 5 Elective Courses: | 1 x Critical Thinking Seminar*<br>1 x 1000/2000-level electives<br>2 x 3000-level electives<br>1 x 4000-level elective from the Global and Indian Shakespeare bucket |

## Notes on the Interdisciplinary Major

*The Critical Thinking Seminar is being offered as an elective from Spring 2021, and it is a mandatory elective requirement for batches beginning from the incoming Undergraduate Batch of 2023 only. The previous batches can take the CTS as one of their two mandatory 1000/2000-level electives, but it is not required that they do so. Their elective requirements are therefore: 2 x 1000/2000-level electives; 2 x 3000-level electives; 1 x 4000-level elective from the Global and Indian Shakespeare bucket.



# The 4th Year

## *Advanced Major in English*

The 4th year, or what students colloquially call the "thesis year," is an extension of the undergraduate programme, in which students pursue the Advanced Major in English. They will enrol as students pursuing the Ashoka Scholar's Programme, and receive a Postgraduate Diploma at the end of the year. For the ASP, students need to complete 32 credits, of which 24 credits are from the Advanced English Major.

We consider the Advanced Major not an add-on, but a crucial capstone to the English@Ashoka experience. This is the year in which the students move from being students to members of a teaching and scholarly community. They will have the opportunity to:

- TA for a course and be mentored by an English professor in questions of pedagogy through the Teaching Practicum
- Take 4000-level electives at the graduate level, alongside MA and PhD students.
- Write a research thesis under the supervision of an advisor.

All these experiences will be crucial preparation for any students planning to go on to do higher studies in English or any other discipline.

The 24 credits are distributed as follows:

- An ASP will enroll for the graduate pro-seminar each semester. The proseminar aids in preparing your thesis in the Monsoon, and writing your dissertation in the Spring. The thesis will be a part of these courses. The proseminar is worth 8 credits.
- An ASP is required to take 2 4000-level electives, 1 each in the Monsoon and Spring. That is, all ASP students are required to sign-up for at least 1 4000-level seminar over and above the Proseminar each semester.
- The other 8 credits can either be fulfilled by the Teaching Practicum, which will allow them to TA for courses (limited to 1 course per semester); or they can be fulfilled by taking 2 other 4000-level graduate seminars.

Note: 1000/2000/3000-level electives do not count as electives for the Advanced Major. They can be only taken over and above these 24 credits.

## The Advanced Major will look like this:

| Monsoon | Spring |
|---|---|
| •4000-L Graduate Proseminar<br>•4000-L Graduate Seminar Elective<br>•Teaching Practicum/ 4000-L Graduate Seminar Elective | •4000-L Graduate Proseminar<br>•4000-L Graduate Seminar Elective<br>•Teaching Practicum/ 4000-L Graduate Seminar Elective |

*"The ASP program put me in a classroom where I was able to write a capstone thesis in the company of people passionate about what they do. The experience has been incredible. With its wonderful mentorship and strong emphasis on friendship and community, the program turned the classroom into a space of refuge, teaching us how to say what we want to say with rigour and conviction."*

**Ailin Jain**, ASP 2020

*"My fourth year with the English department helped develop my thinking in important and formative ways. The proseminar, easily the highlight of the program, introduced me to ways of engaging with different scholars of various temperaments. The capstone thesis was a great gateway to thinking about larger academic projects, and faculty guidance in this regard was extremely helpful. The thesis writing and presentation process also gave me a head start in understanding how to write for conference presentations. This experience has been especially useful in graduate school. The ASP program built a sense of scholarly community while providing the necessary training for me to flourish in higher education."*

**Goutam Piduri**, ASP 2018

## TA-ship

Students pursuing the Advanced English major will have the opportunity to TA for one course per semester as a part of the credit requirement. Students can choose not to TA, but it is strongly recommended that they take the Teaching Practicum. The Practicum consists of working with a professor to provide logistical and pedagogic support for his/her UG courses. This entails circulating readings, running PPTs, managing Piazza pages, and meeting with students to discuss topics. The professor also provides mentorship on classroom management, syllabus design, and other aspects of teaching.

*Note: An ASP can TA for one English course i.e. 4 credits per semester, and only for two English courses i.e. 8 credits in the span of their 4th year.*

*Every story is a migrant. We are conditioned to think in terms of "national literatures" and "national languages," but the truth is that stories and words rarely if ever spring from one soil. The act of communication is always a movement across a border. Every utterance reconfigures words spoken before; every tale reimagines stories told elsewhere; every reading moves "me" toward what I am not. This is the promise of literature — to move us.*

**Jonathan Gil Harris,** Professor of English
Chair of the Department of English
Ph. D. University of Sussex
Shakespeare; Global and Indian Shakespeares; Early Modern literature; Migration and cultural contact; Silk Road Cultures; Global Jewish History

*"Studying literature at Ashoka is not a march through the 'canon' but a three or four-year experience of reading both widely and closely, in all kinds of texts, in order to better imagine how literature works in the world. Studying medieval literature, in particular, may sound like a conscientious exercise in building 'background' for the reading of works written closer to us in time. But in fact its very remoteness – the challenge it presents of understanding its language, diction, and historical and cultural interactions – denies us the opportunity to ever read passively, compels us always to be energetic, critical, and questioning participants in a very lively textual world."*

**Aparna Chaudhuri**, Assistant Professor of English
Ph.D. Harvard University
Vernacular Theology; Medieval English Literature; Global Medieval Studies; Medieval and Early Modern Religion; History of Domesticity

*"Humans = smart but slow*
*Computers = stupid but fast*
*Humans + Computers = mediocre but productive."*

**Johannes Burgers**, Assistant Professor of English and Digital Humanities
Ph.D. The City University of New York (CUNY)
Qualitative Data Visualization; Narrative GIS; Aesthetics; Sexology; Global and Transnational Modernism; Racial Theories; Jewish Studies

# Campus Engagement

## Epigraph, the Literary Society

Falling directly under the English department, Epigraph, the Literary Society is founded and run by students who organise talks, lectures, workshops, and events about the literary in and out of the classroom. The activities of the society are proof that the literary is not limited to academic, and that the academic is as intoxicating as the informal. From a speaker series of disability studies and a workshop on graphic narrative to treasure hunts and book exchanges, Epigraph strives to create a space to engage with literature in more than one way.

## The Annual Confabulation

The Annual Confabulation is an English-only event that is jointly hosted by the department and the literary society. Students of English, undergraduates and graduates, come together to meet their faculty in a new avatar outside their classroom, teaming up and playing literary games. On this exciting day, all the headiness of literary study takes the form of fun and banter!

# What after English?

The skills that are learnt in the literature classroom are much sought after in a variety of institutions and professions. While many of our students decided to further study literature at the graduate level, some of our students have also gone to work in media organisations, publishing houses, law forms, public policy think-tanks, public relations firms, corporations, and educational institutions.

*"I work as an executive producer at Star Plus. As the custodian of the shows I work on, I am involved in helping finalize the broad story, scripting and editing episodes and marketing my shows across all platforms. This entails a lot of critical reading and discussion to decide the journeys our protagonists will take and how the story will move forward. My favourite part here is working together with different people to ideate stories. Just like the English classroom, there is no possibility of claiming an idea or working individually—we all chime in with our thoughts and feed off one another to collectively!"*

**Nayani Kushal Goyal**, ASP 2018
Executive Producer, Star Plus India

*"English at Ashoka taught me to read critically and with grace. The department's brilliant faculty encouraged me to ask difficult questions about the world and our place in it without expecting easy answers – a skill that has proven to be invaluable at my current position as a PhD student in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. As mentors and pedagogues, the department has shown me what instruction, support, and even at times, tough love can look like. As a result, I feel better equipped to be a more equitable and engaging facilitator with my own students. English at Ashoka has created a vibrant community of scholars who are passionate about nuanced and exciting ways of thinking and being in the world, and for that, I'm grateful!"*

**Kaagni Harekal**, ASP 2019
Ph.D. Candidate, Columbia University

*"Prof. Harris sometimes reminds us that the Latin derivation of 'educate' is to 'lead away'. This etymology is a helpful reminder that an education doesn't have to be a hierarchical instruction-giving with a predestined lesson. The four years I spent with Ashoka's Literature Department resonate well with this interpretation. For me, learning occurred not while marching towards a fixed destination but in deviations from the prescribed 'path'. After graduating, in another deviation from the so-called 'path', I worked with the Govt. of Haryana and NITI Aayog on various skill development projects. The critical thinking, close reading, and writing skills I learned at Ashoka have helped me to grow not just in my work but also as a person. This Fall, I am heading to Oxford to begin my MPhil in Development Studies with the Department of International Development."*

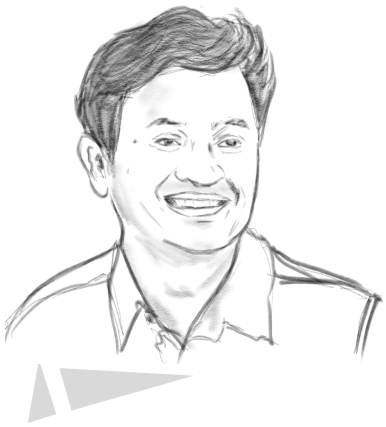
**Vibhuti Gour**, ASP 2019,
M.Phil. Candidate, University of Oxford

*"Studying English at Ashoka impacted, I would say, my entire career trajectory. While entering Ashoka I was all set to major in Economics, but I became enamoured with the warmth of the English faculty and the freshness of the subject. If not for Ashoka I'd probably have been a banker somewhere. Gives me the shivers, to even imagine it. But more than anything Ashoka gave me the space to do my own research and even do a little bit of teaching while I was an undergraduate, and that really helped me determine who I wanted to be as a scholar. I was supposed to fly out to Chicago in August 2020 for my PhD, but the Covid-19 Pandemic has compelled me to be content with online classes for at least the first quarter. Excited as I am to be in midnight zoom classes, I really can't wait to be in a university again, learning, teaching, and researching. What after English? Quite simply, more English!"*

**Govind Narayan**, ASP 2018
Ph.D. Candidate, Northwestern University

*"The offerings of the English Department are a veritable smorgasbord. You get a variety of tastes and the chance to explore deeper and wider and make a meal of what appeals most to you. Who would have thought that you could go back to find new meanings in childhood stories or discover hidden gender messages in everyday Bollywood movies? These unique and exciting offerings are a far cry from what we are used to seeing on a traditional English Lit syllabus."*

**Geetanjali Chanda**, Assistant Professor of English
Ph.D. Hong Kong University
Children's Literature; Bollywood; Sikh writings and films; Women's writings; Feminist and Transcultural pedagogy, Masculinities and Religion



*"Calling literary study "knowledge on a holiday", the critic Michael Wood argues that literature "creates a new zone between work and play." Can the study or the practice of literature – or any of the arts – be professionalized? Or is it simply meant to enrich and deepen our amateur identity? This is the amateur as rooted not in ineptitude but in amour or love. These are some of the questions that intrigue me these days, and I hope you will find knowledge on a holiday no less rigorous than whatever it is the world gathers on its workdays."*

**Saikat Majumdar**, Professor of English and Creative Writing,
Chair of the Department for Creative Writing
Ph.D. Rutgers University
Modern and Contemporary World literatures; Modernism; Postcolonial Studies; Novel and Narrative Theory; History of Criticism; Fiction writing

*"Literature is a mode of thinking different from any other. I've spent my life as a writer trying to tease out, and argue for, this difference, and, when possible, to share my thoughts with my students."*

**Amit Chaudhuri**, Professor of Creative Writing
D.Phil. Oxford University
Creative and Critical Writing; Contemporary literature; Literary Activism

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