SJSU | DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Graduate Newsletter

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MA Advising



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MFA Advising



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2026 Lurie Chair
Distinguished Writer in Residence
Shanthi Sekaran



Photo: © Daniel Grisales

Shanthi Sekaran is a novelist and television writer. Her most recent adult novel, *Lucky Boy*, was named an Indie Next Great Read, an Amazon Editor's Pick and a Best Book of 2017 by NPR, Barnes & Noble, Library Journal, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Her essays have appeared in the *New York Times*, Huffington Post, The Rumpus and Salon. In 2021, her middle grade debut, *The Samosa Rebellion*, won the Northern California Book Award and was named an Amazon Editor's Pick for readers aged 9-13. Her second middle grade novel, *Boomi's Boombox*, came out in Spring 2023. She recently wrapped up her work on the acclaimed NBC medical drama, "New Amsterdam." She lives in Berkeley, California, with her family and a cat named Frog.

Important Policies

Continuous Enrollment

University Policy requires that graduate students must be continuously enrolled until they finish their culminating experiences (such as theses and exams). Note that students must finish their theses while they are enrolled in 299 units (or in UNVS 1290R, which is basically just a fee, not a class).

Important Courses

All MA students are required to take ENGL 201 and ENGL 297, which are offered only in the Fall. Students planning to apply for TAships should complete ENGL 259, which is also offered only in the Fall.

Graduation Deadlines

Please consult the GAPE website for current candidacy and graduation deadlines: www.sjsu.edu/gape/deadlines/index.php. Note that if you are planning to graduate in May 2027, you should have filed your official "Petition for Advancement to Graduate Candidacy" by Oct. 1, 2026. Applications (or reactivations of applications) for May 2027 graduation must be filed by February 1, 2027. The relevant forms can be found at the GAPE forms website: www.sjsu.edu/gape/forms/index.php.

Enrolling for Fall 2027

MySJSU should give you appointment times and information on how to register for next semester's courses in May. Registration for continuing graduate students will begin in late April. Registration for new graduate students begins in June. It is important that you register as early as possible. If there are not enough people signed up for a course, even a graduate course will be canceled.

Conditionally Classified Students

Conditionally classified students must complete required undergraduate course work before enrolling in graduate seminars. When you are eligible for classified status, see your advisor to file the necessary form (www.sjsu.edu/gape/forms/). The change is not automatic.

Writing Workshops

MFAs need to be sure to sign up for any workshops they need for their degree as soon as possible. Due to high demand, the fiction workshop (ENGL 241) is accessible by permission only. Add codes are available from the English Department Office (english@sjsu.edu) and will be distributed according to the following priority order: 1) Incoming Fiction Primary students; 2) Continuing Fiction Primary and Fiction Secondary students; 3) Approved MFA students (send work sample to nicholas.taylor@sjsu.edu for review). After a certain point, space permitting, the fiction workshop will be opened up to all graduates on a first come, first served basis, regardless of program (MA, MFA, or graduate students from other departments). Fiction Secondary students who cannot find space in ENGL 241 are encouraged to take the upper-division undergraduate fiction workshop, ENGL 130 (this course will be counted as one of the two required secondary-genre workshops).

Taking Undergraduate Classes

At least 21 of the 30 units of classes required for the MA program should be in 200-numbered English courses. Of the 30, only 6 units can be taken as credit/no credit independent study or thesis units. Upper-division English coursework (100 level) may count for graduate students if you have received permission from the instructor as well as the MA or MFA Coordinator. Check the schedule for upper division undergraduate course offerings that may be of interest and that will not be covered by the graduate curriculum. Conditionally classified students must complete their required undergraduate course work before enrolling in graduate seminars. When you are eligible for classified status, the change is not automatic; you need to contact the MA Coordinator, file the necessary form, and await approval. Classes taken outside the department will not count except in unusual circumstances. Get prior approval from your advisor before you take such courses.

MA Language Requirement

The MA Program requires demonstrated proficiency in a language, other than English, equivalent to 2 semesters or 3 quarters of college-level coursework. If you have not already satisfied this requirement at the time of admission, you may be admitted to conditional standing, but you will need to satisfy the requirement by completing the required number of units OR by passing a test given by the World Languages Department before graduating from the MA program. For questions about this requirement, or to satisfy this requirement in a language other than French, German, or Spanish, please contact the MA Advisor.

Spring 2027 Schedule of Classes

Here are the tentative courses, meeting times, and faculty for our Spring 2027 graduate course offerings.

Course	Day	Location	Time	
ENGL 204	M	Online	4–6:45 PM	Revathi Krishnaswamy
ENGL 207	R	Online	4–6:45 PM	Meghan Gorman-DaRif
ENGL 240	T	FOB 104	4–6:45 PM	J. Michael Martinez
ENGL 241	W	FOB 104	4–6:45 PM	Shanthi Sekaran (Lurie Chair)
ENGL 242	W	FOB 104	7–9:45 PM	Brook McClurg
ENGL 291	R	Online	7–9:45 PM	Brook McClurg

Spring 2027 Course Descriptions

ENGL 204 Seminar in Modern Approaches to Literature

M 4–6:45 PM Online (Professor Krishnaswamy)

Literary Theory & Criticism is a vast and complex multilingual, interdisciplinary field that cuts across disciplines like philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics, political science, history, and biology, and encompasses many different literary traditions with long, diverse histories across the world. This course, however, focuses primarily on contemporary Western theory and criticism, though relevant connections to other traditions will be signaled to situate Western theory in a global historical context and raise questions about epistemic justice. Our goal will be to understand influential schools of Western Theory/Criticism such as New Criticism, Structuralism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, Marxism, Feminism, Postcolonialism, Ecocriticism, etc., and engage with fundamental questions about language, literature, reading, and writing. You will engage with complex materials and ask fundamental questions about reading, writing, language, and literature. You will also be introduced to a lot of new terms/concepts that you must learn to define and use. The goal is to give you a deeper understanding of literary study and equip you with the tools you will need as a professional in the field. Patience and Perseverance are critical to success!

ENGL 207: Global Anglophone Literatures: Violence, Resistance, and the Postcolonial Novel

R 4–6:45 PM Online (Professor Gorman-DaRif)

"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing"
– Arundhati Roy
What can violence and resistance tell us about colonialism's legacies and the possibilities for change? This graduate seminar explores how postcolonial novels situate violence within a world shaped by colonialism and capitalism. How does violence emerge from struggles over land, labor, resources, and freedom? What are postcolonial novels telling us about the capacity of violence to transform the conditions that produce it?
This course examines novels from India and across Africa through four broad units that connect political resistance to the social relations it seeks to transform. We will study novels of anticolonial struggle and national liberation, alongside works that explore how gender and caste shape the relationship between everyday oppression and revolutionary politics. Turning to extraction, militancy, and piracy, we will consider how struggles over land, labor, and resources connect resistance to unequal global relationships. We will end with oceanic histories and possible futures, asking how novels confront the violence of the past while imagining new forms of collective life. We will pay special attention to how authors work with literary form and language to connect individual lives to larger historical forces and examine the possibilities of political action. Reading novels alongside selected critical essays, we will consider how fiction makes the conditions and ambitions of resistance intelligible, and what it contributes to understanding and imagining change in the postcolonial world.

ENGL 240: Poetry Writing Workshop

T 4–7:45 PM FOB 104 (Professor Martinez)

Addressing issues and reading texts addressing neurodiversity and the sacred and the profane (as understood by Simone Weil and George Bataille), writing poetry navigating Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ideas of the visible and invisible, SJSU's Spring 2027 ENGL 240 Graduate Workshop in Poetry will, overall, seek to comprehend trauma and the limits of language. We will be looking at multimedia poetics and cross-genre forms.

ENGL 240 is a seminar on poetics and poetry writing as preparation for the graduate thesis. Includes theory and practice of major trends in contemporary poetry. Intensive workshop experience. May be repeatable for credit for up to 12 units.

ENGL 241: Fiction Writing Workshop

W 4–6:45 PM FOB 104 (Professor Sekaran)

This course will revolve around weekly intensive workshops of student writing. In addition, we will explore craft through the study of canonical and contemporary fiction, as well as some YA and screenwriting principles. May be repeatable for credit for up to 12 units. Taught by Lurie Chair, Shanthi Sekaran.

ENGL 242: Nonfiction Writing Workshop

W 7–9:45 PM FOB 104 (Professor McClurg)

Few literary objects so consistently defy easy categorization as does The Essay: is it a genre or anti-genre? Is it a mode or form? Is it a mediation of knowledge or a way of seeing the world, and does it operate from a place of knowing or unknowing? In this course, we will track the personal essay from its earliest iterations to its evolution in an American context (including its generic cousins, magazine writing and the academic essay), and more recently, to its lyric variations, noting how it changes, adapts, and continuously reinvents itself over time. We will balance our reading of literary texts with craft and critical works as we seek to better understand and articulate the parameters of this complex literary lineage. While the essay will be our primary object of study and point of entry to Creative Nonfiction more broadly, you will be welcome to write in any form of Creative Nonfiction that you wish.

ENGL 291: Literary Practicum

R 7–9:45 PM Online (Professor McClurg)

This course prepares Creative Writing graduate students to take the MFA exam and develop and begin writing an MFA thesis, customize the MFA exam reading list, prepare to take the MFA comprehensive exam, draft the thesis abstract and thesis preface.

Spring 2027 Graduate Student Conference

The Department of English and Comparative Literature welcomes proposals for 15-20 minute paper presentations on any topic related to literary studies or creative writing for a hybrid one-day conference in April 2027 (specific date and location TBD).

To apply to become a presenter, please send a 250-word abstract of your paper to allison.johnson@sjsu.edu by March 25, 2027. The abstract can be from a seminar paper you have already completed or from a work in progress that you intend to finish before April. If you have never submitted a proposal for a presentation before, don't be intimidated! Feel free to contact me if you need help or have questions about what to do. Here are two sample abstracts that you can use as a reference.



Important Dates & Deadlines, 26-27

November 9	Deadline for December 2026 graduates to submit signed thesis to College of Graduate Studies.
December 1	Last day to sign up for Spring 2027 MA Part 2 exam.
December 7	Last day to enroll in 1290R for Fall 2026.
January 29	Deadline for Fall 2026 graduates to submit theses for publication.
February 1	Deadline for May 2027 graduates to submit graduation application in MySJSU OR request change in graduation date.
February 1	Deadline for Summer 2027 graduates to submit Petition for Advancement to Graduate Candidacy to GAPE.
February 8	Last day to sign up for Spring 2027 MFA exam.
March 1	Deadline for Summer 2027 graduates to submit graduation application in MySJSU OR request change in graduation date.
March 2	Applications for 2027-28 TAships due to Prof. Rena Perez.
March 12	Spring 2027 MA and MFA Comprehensive Exams distributed (9 am).
March 15	Spring 2027 MA and MFA Comprehensive Exams due (5 pm).
April 1	Deadline to submit thesis proposals for Fall 2027 credits.
April 6	Applications for GAships due to Prof. Alli Johnson.
April 19	Deadline for May 2027 graduates to submit signed thesis to College of Graduate Studies.
May 1	Last day to sign up for Fall 2027 MA Comprehensive Exam.
May 8	MFA Thesis Reading and Celebration, MLK Library 225/229, 2-5pm.
May 17	Last day to enroll in 1290R for Spring 2027.
May 26-29	College of H&A Commencement, Event Center, time and day TBD.
May 26	Degree Conferral.
TBD	English Department Awards Ceremony.
July 12	Deadline for Summer 2027 graduates to submit signed theses to College of Graduate Studies.

MA/MFA Reminders and Guidelines

Stay informed!

Please be sure to sign up for the google group for our English Graduate Program. To sign up, send a blank email to: enggrad-group+subscribe@sjsu.edu. Key information is sent out via the google group that is essential for all MA and MFA students. Program descriptions, course descriptions, the most recent Newsletter, and other documents are posted on the English Department website: www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate.
The SJSU Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations (GAPE) Office website publishes important deadlines, forms, and information for current students at: www.sjsu.edu/gape.

MFA Exam

To sign up for the MFA exam, students should first have successfully achieved MFA candidacy status and have formed a three-person thesis committee.
The MFA exam will be distributed on Friday, March 12th (9:00 a.m.), and will be due on Monday, March 15th (5:00 p.m.).
Contact the MFA advisor, Professor Nick Taylor (nicholas.taylor@sjsu.edu), by February 8th to receive a link to sign up.

Deadline to sign up for Spring 2026 MA exam – Dec. 1, 2026
Full details including deadlines and reading lists:
https://www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/ma/comp-exam.php

Join Reed Magazine!



Join a 155-year legacy—and earn marketable credits toward your degree! English 133—Reed Magazine, California's oldest literary journal—eagerly encourages graduate students to enroll. This unique, four-credit course exposes students to the work of thousands of writers and offers real-world experience in editing and promoting a publication that has held fast through world war, cultural revolution, and the turns of two centuries. See www.reedmag.org. Email Editor-in-Chief Brook McClurg for an add code: brook.mcclurg@sjsu.edu.

Thesis Process

Thesis proposals must come to the Graduate Committee at least five weeks before the end of the semester preceding the semester in which you will enroll for 299 credits. If you plan to write your thesis or project in the Fall 2027 term, you must submit your proposal to the Graduate Committee no later than April 1, 2027. If you plan to write your thesis or project in the Spring 2028 term, you must submit your proposal by Nov 1, 2027.

After you have secured a thesis advisor or "first reader," and the thesis advisor has read and approved your proposal, you may submit your proposal electronically to the chair of the Graduate Committee (allison.johnson@sjsu.edu). Be sure to cc your thesis advisor in the email so that the Graduate Coordinator knows that the first reader has approved the proposal being submitted to the Graduate Committee.

When preparing your thesis, please be familiar with the latest MLA Handbook. Graduate Studies will expect your thesis to be consistently formatted and will not allow you to mix styles. If you don't follow up-to-date guidelines, they will require you to revise before they accept your thesis.

Guidelines for MFA thesis and thesis proposals: www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/mfa/thesisguidelines.php
Guidelines for MA thesis and cover sheet: www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/ma/thesis.php

MA Exam Guidelines

Guidelines and reading lists for the MA Exams are available on our website: https://www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/ma/comp-exam.php.
Note that Part 1 is an in-class exam that you will take as part of ENGL 297, a required course offered only in the Fall. Please enroll in 297 if you plan to take Part 1 in the Fall. Part 2 is a take-home essay exam in 3 specific areas, administered via Canvas. You must indicate in which three areas you wish to be examined when you sign up for the exam. The Spring 2027 Part Two exam will be distributed on Friday, March 12th (9:00 AM), and will be due on Monday, March 15th (5:00 p.m.). MA students should email the MA advisor, Professor Johnson (allison.johnson@sjsu.edu) by Dec. 1st to sign up for Part 2 in the Spring.

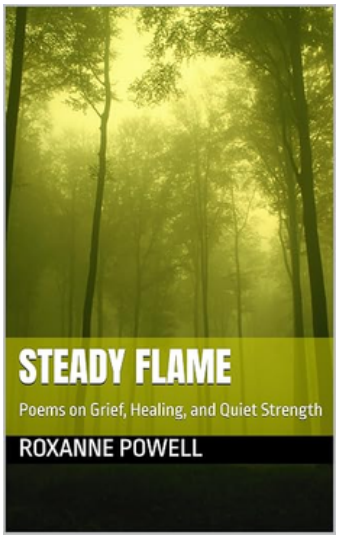
Updated Part 1 Exam

The new Part 1 exam consists of two essays: a prose analysis and a poetry analysis. Both essays require familiarity with this list of literary terms [pdf]. You will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of the terms and the ability to apply them effectively in order to support your argument. Section A is a close-reading and critical analysis of prose written after the year 1800 CE. You will be expected to formulate a specific interpretation of a prose piece, situate it within a larger literary tradition, and refer effectively to multiple terms from the list in order to support your argument. Section B is a close-reading and critical analysis of poetry written prior to the year 1800 CE. You will be expected to explicate the poem and display knowledge of poetic forms and understanding of poetic devices by effectively referencing multiple terms from the list. See scoring criteria here [pdf].

Graduate Student and Alumni Accomplishments!

Roxane Powell

MFA alum (`18) Roxane Powell has published two chapbooks, *Soil & Spirit* and *Steady Flame*. Her writing centers on grief, growth, and the soft, steady strength it takes to keep going. Both collections are available now on Amazon.





Sharmaine Sun

MFA student Sharmaine Sun published two poems in *AGNI Magazine*, "Rat Race Haibun" and "Cancel Mother Tongue."

Grad Student Lounge

FOB 113 is available to students in the afternoon, so feel free to stop by to rest, chat, or work. It closes at 5 pm.