Legacy of Success
UNM Honors College

Dr. Obenauf
Fall Term 2026

FINAL PROJECT

Length: No less than 8-12 full pages of well-polished text, double spaced, plus an accurate Works Cited page, all following MLA format precisely. An MLA template is still available at http://success.obenauf.net so that you can focus on the content of your project.

Due: Wednesday, December 2, 2026, in hard copy at the start of class AND by email to obenauf@unm.edu as a MS-Word document (.doc or .docx) unless we have agreed on another format.

Notes: Following the evidence is the best antidote to BS. This final project should be your masterpiece, showing off what you've discovered and how you've grown as a scholar this fall. Begin with questions that interest you, consider for yourself what the texts suggest, and let your discoveries guide your argument or creative work. Show your readers the evidence that led you to your conclusions, and explain your reasoning so that they can follow your investigation for themselves.

Your project should be original work, drawing on your own thinking rather than AI technology (even for inspiration), recycled portions of earlier essays, or summaries of the texts. In your analytical writing, use quotations and citations to make your evidence traceable, and explain what each piece of evidence suggests. (For creative projects, save the textual evidence and parenthetical citations for your analytical section.)

I encourage you to review the syllabus, my Guide to Writing, and the Revision Triage Checklist, along with my notes on your earlier papers. Use that feedback to recognize what you've already learned and identify where you need to slow down and work more intentionally. Your final project is an opportunity to demonstrate all those skills in one place.

You have the tools and the practice to succeed, and I am here to help with any questions you may have. Now, show me what you've discovered and how you've changed since August!

Instructions: Please write on ONE of the following topics:

1. This first prompt, like a response paper on steroids, invites you to use your personal reflections as a frame for a rigorous investigation of how several of our texts approach questions that matter to you.

   Begin by revisiting your reading journal and identifying one or two related themes that have interested, challenged, or surprised you this semester. Then select three to five texts from our syllabus that offer different perspectives on those questions. Follow the evidence in each work before drawing comparisons or conclusions of your own. For example, you might investigate your own ideas

about change and personal growth alongside Horace's Satires, Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography, and Frederick Douglass's Narrative of the Life. What do these authors suggest about the possibilities and limitations of personal transformation? Where do their perspectives converge or diverge from yours?

This is an opportunity to broaden your engagement with the literature, and so **if you revisit works you discussed in your Shorter Analytical Paper, they should be in addition to the minimum three texts, not in place of them.**

At least two-thirds of your essay should consist of rigorous literary analysis; approximately one-third may be devoted to your personal reflections. Your reading journal will be especially valuable here: use quotations from your earlier responses to trace how your thinking has developed, and consider how your experiences and assumptions compare with those of the authors you've studied.

As with your response papers, **the tradition of the personal essay calls for an anecdote drawn from your own experience to frame your discussion**. Use your experience to introduce the questions you will investigate, then develop an argument grounded in careful analysis of the texts and their historical contexts. Throughout the essay, find opportunities to bring your own reflections into conversation with the literature rather than confining them to the beginning and end. Ideally, your conclusion will return to your opening anecdote, allowing your essay to come full circle while revealing what your investigation has helped you understand.

Your paper need not focus primarily on success, but it should consider how your discoveries illuminate that larger theme of our course. Above all, this is an opportunity to demonstrate both your growth as a scholar and the development of your own understanding of the world through your encounters with literature.

2. **This second prompt, a longstanding tradition in UNM Honors Legacy courses, invites you to investigate the meaning of success in a historical society by creating a fictional character whose life reflects what you discover.** Your project will combine a creative story with a rigorous analytical explanation of the research and reasoning behind it.

   Begin by imagining a person who might have lived in one of the times and places we've studied this semester. What might success have looked like for this person? What circumstances, ambitions, or obstacles might have shaped their life? What might have tested their ability to succeed? As you begin developing your character and story, investigate the historical world in which you've placed them. Draw on our assigned readings and additional scholarly sources to discover what opportunities were available, what expectations shaped people's lives, and what success and failure might have meant to someone in your character's circumstances.

   Be prepared to let details of the narrative evolve as you learn more. You may discover that the story you initially imagined couldn't have happened—or that the historical evidence suggests a much more interesting story than the one you

had in mind. Let your research and your imagination work together throughout the project. Your goal isn't simply to invent a story and then find historical details to support it, but to discover what kind of story you can tell while remaining faithful to the evidence.

Your character must face **at least one significant test of success**, although the outcome need not be a triumph. The details of your character's name, age, gender, race, residence, marital status, profession, interests, family life and history, religion, and friendships should help you illustrate their circumstances and the standards by which that person might have been judged successful or unsuccessful in their society.

Use all relevant assigned readings to inform your portrayal of the period; for example, a story set in the Roaring Twenties should draw on both Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and The Great Gatsby. Your goal is a historically plausible life, not a modern character dressed in period costume. Let the evidence determine what your character could reasonably think, experience, and do rather than relying on artistic license to evade historical realities. **You will need to include a Works Cited page of the class readings plus at least five other sources that informed your project (and which you will quote in the second part of your paper).** Thus in addition to information you gather from our readings this semester, you should use the library and **reputable** scholarly internet resources to paint an accurate portrait of your time period; commercial websites, Wikipedia, Shmoop, Khan Academy, YouTube videos, ChatGPT etc. are **not** acceptable sources in an Honors term paper.

You may tell your character's story in any historically appropriate form you can carry off with rigor and grace. A series of journal entries, perhaps spanning many years, is one time-tested approach, but you're welcome to experiment with other forms. **Your creative section will probably run 6–7 pages, although you may write more.**

Then write an analytical narrative of at least 4–6 pages explaining how your research informed the decisions you made. Begin with an introduction that asserts a thesis about success and failure in your chosen society. Use relevant quotations and citations from the assigned readings and your additional scholarly sources to explain your character's background, circumstances, choices, and test of success. Show not only what evidence informed each decision, but also what those decisions suggest about the historical standards of success and failure you investigated. You may also reflect on what worked well, what proved difficult to represent, and what surprised you during your investigation. What did creating this character help you discover about the society in which that person lived?

The creative and analytical sections should work together as a single scholarly investigation. Your story should make the historical standards of success and failure visible through a plausible human life, while your analysis should demonstrate the evidence and reasoning behind your choices. This is an opportunity to exercise your imagination without compromising the intellectual rigor expected of an Honors term paper.