M.A. Special Project: Guidelines for students (and their supervisors).

Your special project is undertaken within the context of a required Guided Research course, EngGA 3900, for which you will be registered during an appropriate semester of your program. It may be begun at any time during the MA program but is expected to represent a culmination of your experience here. If you are aiming to complete the program in two years, and are hoping to continue your studies in a Ph.D. program, a good time to undertake writing up of the special project is the Fall semester of your second year, since it will focus your mind on future specialization and, if at least some of the writing is finished early enough, will be available for you to use part of it as a writing sample for your Ph.D. applications. (These applications are usually due at the beginning of December, so you might want to identify a topic and supervisor at the end of your first year, so that you can start reading towards the project over the summer.)

Whenever the special project is undertaken you should expect to receive close supervision from a faculty advisor, who will meet with you regularly to help in its planning, research and writing up. Each project is different, and your supervision needs are hard to predict, but your supervisor might be expected to help you in the early stages with the identification of a focused topic, the development of a bibliography, and the writing up of a prospectus or abstract; and he or she should then read and comment on at least one draft of your writing. The project should total about 9,000 words (i.e., 30 to 35 pages. It may be a revision of a paper written for an earlier class, or an entirely new undertaking, but it should be a piece of independent research on a topic with potential to advance scholarship in the field, and it should be of a nature that allows you to demonstrate mastery of the protocols of critical, scholarly, or theoretical writing. Special projects that do not fit the rubric of a traditional thesis may also be approved at the discretion of the Director of the MA program.

Identifying a supervisor and a topic will be easier for some students than for others. By the end of your first year you may know what you want to work on, and with whom. If so, you should approach the professor concerned to discuss your ideas and the possibility of working with them. Professors in the English department expect to be working with one or possibly two students each year on their MA special projects: if they have no room to take you on they may be able to suggest an alternative supervisor. If you are unsure of the viability of your topic, or do not know who to work with on it, you should consult the Director of the MA program, who will be able to advise you.