Department of English

Graduate Student Handbook

2026-27 Edition

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I. MA Program

NOTE: PLEASE SEE SECTIONS III-VII BELOW FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELEVANT TO ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS IN ENGLISH. THE CURRENT SECTION ADDRESSES INFORMATION PERTAINING TO MA STUDENTS EXCLUSIVELY.

Students enrolled in the MA Program in English may come with different kinds of preparation and with different objectives going forward, and the program is designed to cater to individual students' needs and goals. Students may obtain a strong grounding in the study of literature and/or film, which will allow them to go on to work in teaching, publishing, or other fields in which critical reading and writing are prized. Students may also choose to focus on creative writing (poetry or fiction), and for these students the program offers a broader-based alternative to an MFA. Others are looking to use the MA as a starting-point for an eventual PhD: we are proud to report that our MA alumni frequently go on to PhD programs at institutions such as the the University of Indiana, the University of Nebraska, and SUNY Buffalo. Our own PhD program also includes a handful of former MAs, though our MA program should by no means be considered a "feeder" or "pipeline" to the PhD program.

A. Overview of the Program: Typical Timeline

The MA program is designed to be completed within one calendar year. There are three tracks for completing the MA: the MA in literary and media studies, the MA in creative writing, and the MA in digital humanities. (For the MA in the Selznick Film Preservation program, please see the dedicated handbook for that program.) A typical timeline for the degree appears below. Note that it is possible to enroll in our MA programs as a part-time student; in this case, you will have a unique program of study and credit structure that you will create with the MA Advisor. Please check with the Graduate Coordinator to confirm exact dates and deadlines each year.

First Semester

- Register for three 4-credit courses at either the 400 or 500 level. See Section III below for more information on these designations and what they mean. Please note that each track will entail specific credit distribution related to required coursework. (For example, creative writing MA degrees will require creative writing courses.)
- Begin to contemplate whether your summertime completion of the MA will consist of writing an MA essay—either scholarly or creative—or preparing for an MA exam. (See below for details on these various options.)
    - *Essay: Start identifying potential faculty advisors and thinking about possible essay topics.
    - *Exam: Review the exam lists (for your exam, you will need to select two lists, representing two fields) and receive list approval from the MA Advisor.

Second Semester

- Register for three 4-credit courses at either the 400 or 500 level.
- Make the final decision as to whether you're going to complete the program with an MA essay or MA exam.

  *Essay: Consult with possible faculty advisors, and consider seminar essays that might serve as the start of the MA essay. **By one month prior to end of classes:** submit a form to the Department listing your proposed topics and faculty advisor(s).

  *Exam: Discuss the exam process with the MA Advisor, confirm your two exam lists, and consult regarding your exam committee. Each exam will be supervised by two English faculty. The MA Advisor will be available to help secure examiners if any of your preferred examiners are unavailable. **By one month prior to end of classes:** finalize exam details with the MA Advisor.
- Arrange a deadline with your instructors to finish any Incompletes so that your final grade to the dean's office can be submitted no later than the end of your second semester.

Capstone Semester (usually summer for MA students who start in the fall semester)

- Register for 6 credits of ENG 491, Master's Reading Course, plus ENG 897 (this does not carry credits, but needs to be added for full time status in the summer).
- Essay: Work on your MA essay in consultation with your faculty advisor(s). **The submission deadline for the MA Essay is August 1 for those starting the program in the fall semester. Other deadlines will be established for students starting in the spring semester.**
- Exam: Complete the MA exam by **August 1 for those starting the program in the fall semester. Other deadlines will be established for students starting in the spring semester.**

For those students unable to finish their degree within the established timeframe, consultation with the MA Advisor and/or DGS will need to take place to determine further steps. An additional semester to complete outstanding work is typically available with the support of the department.

B. Capstone Project

- **MA Exam (for literary / media studies track only)**

The MA exam is designed to reflect a broad training in literary (and broader media) studies, and may be appropriate for those students wanting their capstone project to pick up more directly on the work they have done in their courses. *Either the exam or the essay can provide an excellent basis for continuing on to a PhD*. Students opting to take the exam will choose two fields to be examined in (e.g., Early Modern, Eighteenth Century, Nineteenth Century British or American, Twentieth Century British or American, Film and Media, etc.). See the Department website for complete lists. In addition to the field lists, students will be able to use thematic lists on an individual basis and with the approval of the DGS. For instance, if a student took a course on

Utopian fictions, they could ask to be examined in this area. Not all such requests will be viable, given faculty and time constraints, but students are welcome to ask.

The exam is written and evaluated by an exam committee, consisting of one faculty member per field. Students may assemble the committee themselves or ask the MA Advisor to do so. It is recommended that students consult with each member of the committee at least once prior to the exam in order to get a sense of the kinds of questions he/she might put on the exam, and to talk through sample answers.

The exam consists of two parts, to be taken on two consecutive business days; each part covers one field. Each day, students will respond to two questions from among a selection of four or five per field. For each question, the student is given 30 minutes to read and plan out an answer, plus 90 minutes for writing. (*Note: a presumed one-hour break is calculated into the exam timing, thus bringing each day's total to five hours—two 2-hour sessions with the break in between.*)

Students taking the exam should communicate with the Graduate Coordinator prior to the exam date in order to arrange all necessary logistics. Unless otherwise specified, the Graduate Coordinator will e-mail the exam to the student as an attachment, and will expect to receive the completed exam from the student in electronic form as well. Exams will typically run either from 10 am to 3 pm or from 12 pm to 5 pm; again, this should be worked out with the Graduate Coordinator ahead of time.

- **MA Essay**
    - **Literary & Media Studies track**

The MA Essay allows students in the literary and media studies track the opportunity to explore one particular scholarly, critical, or aesthetic question in some depth (~50 pages). The topic for the essay may be inspired by work that a student did in a course, though it should not simply be an expansion of a seminar paper. The essay is expected to show the student's critical and analytical skills at their most developed, and should demonstrate a real mastery of a body of literature and criticism. Essays should include a bibliography or a list of works cited, and must demonstrate thorough and up-to-date knowledge of appropriate scholarship in the field.

Below is a sampling of recent MA Essay titles:

"The Laughing Margin: Comic Motion in the Luttrell Psalter"

"Judith and Her Biblical Sisters: Female Agency in Middle English Literature and Modern Feminist Thought"

"Technicolor and the Women Behind the Curtain"

"The Origins of the Soviet Ukrainian Film Stock and Its Influence on the 1930s Cinema"

"Amplifying the Voices of the Silenced: A Comparative Analysis between Svetlana Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl* and Han Kang's *Human Acts*"

"What Makes a Complex Jewish Character?: Evaluating the Family and Edgar Rosenberg's Shylock Rubric through the characters Fagin, Ezra Cohen, Mr. March, and Charles March"

"In Defense of Amy March: Rethinking Femininity and Agency in Lousia May Alcott's *Little Women*"

- **Creative track**

Students in the creative track will produce a Creative Writing portfolio as their MA Capstone. The MA exam is not an option for the creative track. The finished project may constitute a collection of poems, a one-act play, a novella, or the rough equivalent of these. Particulars should obviously be worked out in concert with the faculty advisor. Students in the literary / media studies track may also do a creative project with the approval of the MA Advisor (which may include the requirement that students submit sample work to the potential advisor before the project is approved for the capstone). Note that a literary / media studies student interested in writing a creative capstone should develop a working relationship with a potential advisor.

- **Digital Humanities track**

Students in the digital humanities track will produce a digital humanities project for their MA capstone. Such students will work with faculty advisors who specialize in digital humanities—and/or, as relevant, in archival studies, public-facing research, book history, scholarly editing, etc. The MA Advisor is available to assist in those communications.

C. Good Standing for MA Students

To remain in good standing, MA students should receive B grades or better in coursework and should not have received more than one Incomplete grade at any one time. In addition, it is expected that all incomplete work be submitted within six weeks of the end of the semester in which it was originally due. Students not meeting these standards may no longer be considered to be in good standing. Exceptions to this rule may be made at the discretion of the DGS and the MA Advisor; however, in such cases a written agreement must be filed articulating the reasons for the exception and outlining a concrete plan for bringing the student back into accordance with program requirements.

II. PhD Program

Due to its small size, the English PhD program at the University of Rochester offers students a rare combination of opportunities: on the one hand, students may avail themselves of a wide array of intellectual, scholarly, and cultural resources of the kind that define a major research institution such as ours; on the other hand, students receive more individualized attention from faculty and are able to pursue more highly personalized programs of study than they would in a larger program.

A. Overview of the Program and Timeline

Year One

- Fall Semester
  - Three 4-credit courses (12 credits)
    - At least two of these 4-credit courses should consist of 500-level offerings taught within the English Department. Exceptions can be requested by petitioning the DGS.
  - ENG 500 Graduate Colloquium (1 credit)
- Spring Semester
  - Three 4-credit courses (12 credits)
    - At least two of these 4-credit courses should consist of 500-level offerings taught within the English Department. Exceptions can be requested by petitioning the DGS.
  - Either take, or prepare to take, the Language Exam (you are strongly encouraged to complete this by the summer after year one).

Note: Students who arrive with an MA degree may petition the DGS to transfer up to 24 credit-hours toward their programs of study, thus essentially reducing the required period of coursework from two years to one. Talk with the DGS early on if you are interested in pursuing this path. Transfer credit will not be considered until your first year of coursework is successfully completed.

Note: Students who are native speakers of a language other than English are exempt from the language exam.

Year Two

- Fall Semester
  - Coursework for those students in the program without credit transfers (8 credits) – at least four of the eight credits taken this semester should be at the 500 level.
  - Departmental Teaching Apprenticeship, ENGL 580 Pedagogical Training (4 credits).
  - PhD Research, for those students in the program with transfer credits, ENGL 595 (4 credits)
  - Begin thinking and talking to the DGS and your advisors about your qualifying exam if you have not done so already.
- Spring Semester
  - Coursework for those students in the program without credit transfers (8 credits) – at least four of the eight credits taken this semester should be at the 500 level.
  - Departmental Teaching Apprenticeship (ENGL 580 Pedagogical Training [4 credits]). Students may petition the DGS for an alternative assignment in a digital humanities project (this is dependent on department needs).
  - PhD Research, for those students in the program with transfer credits (ENGL 595 [4 credits])
  - Complete Language Exam no later than the end of this academic year. Students who fail to meet this benchmark will be on academic probation.

    - Compile your qualifying exam lists and consult with your examiners to finalize those lists before the summer.
- Summer
    - The Scheduling Form for the Qualifying Exam (to which both reading lists must be appended) is due June 1st at the end of your second year.
    - Use the summer to read and prepare for the Qualifying Exam.

Year Three

- Fall Semester
    - Departmental Teaching Apprenticeship (ENGL 580 Pedagogical Training [4 credits]) or ENGL 581 Digital Apprenticeship (4 credits).
    - PhD Research for exam preparation, ENG 595 (11 credits).
    - Students will take the Qualifying Exam this fall.
        - Students must complete the exam, including potential retakes, by January 15 in order to ensure their enrollment in the Dissertation Practicum.
        - Students will automatically be on academic probation if they have not completed the Qualifying Exam by the end of this semester.
    - Students should begin planning to complete the Dissertation Prospectus, if they have not done so already.
        - Note that the Dissertation Prospectus must be completed by the end of year three.
    - Attend WSAP informational sessions (emails will be forthcoming).
- Spring Semester
    - Register for ENGL 585 Dissertation Practicum (4 credits).
    - The Dissertation Prospectus **must be filed absolutely no later than** the end of the spring semester of the third year.
        - Students who fail to meet this benchmark will be automatically placed on academic probation.
    - PhD Research, if needed, ENGL 595 (variable credits - consult with the Graduate Coordinator).
    - For those intending to teach for the WSAP in the fourth year (strongly encouraged), now is the time to apply; deadlines (usually the very beginning of the spring semester) and details are set by the WSAP.
      (If, for some reason, you are already certain you will not be entering a profession that involves teaching of any kind, talk with the DGS about alternative options for department service.)
- Summer
    - WSAP training.
    - Dissertation writing.

Year Four

- Fall Semester
    - Dissertation Writing: Students generally register for ENG 999, receiving 0 credits but retaining their full-time status.
        - Students should aim to draft one chapter per semester, including summer.
    - If teaching for WSAP, register for Writing Pedagogy, ENGL 571 (5 credits).

        - Teach one course through the WSAP.
    - Consider inviting your advisor to observe your teaching at some point this year, so that they may comment on it when recommending you for jobs.
- Spring Semester
    - Dissertation Writing: Students generally register for ENGL 999, receiving 0 credits but retaining their full-time status.
        - Students should aim to draft one chapter per semester, including summer.
    - If teaching for WSAP, register for Practicum in Teaching Writing, ENGL 572 (2 credits)
        - Teach one course through the WSAP.
    - If appropriate, begin assembling job-application materials for next fall, in preparation for placement workshops. (See your advisor, the DGS, and/or this year's faculty placement officer for more details.)
    - Begin researching external funding sources: in order to apply (in Fall of Year 5) for a competitive Dean's Dissertation Fellowship to cover Year 6, you will need to have applied for external funding first. See DGS for more information.

Year Five

- Fall Semester
    - Dissertation Writing: Students generally register for ENGL 999, receiving 0 credits but retaining their full-time status.
        - Students should aim to draft one chapter per semester, including summer.
    - Prepare materials to apply for a competitive Dean's Dissertation Fellowship for next year (NOTE: requires that you also apply for external funding: see DGS for information).
    - In addition, students may teach or engage in some other form of professionalization.
    - Students on the job market will participate in faculty-led placement workshops.
    - Apply to teach for the WSAP in your sixth year as a Dudley Doust Fellow; deadlines and details set by the WSAP. Note that the Doust is fairly competitive; fifth-years who anticipate needing a sixth year of funding, then, should also apply for external fellowships and other support (see the Department website for more details; talk also with the DGS, your advisor, etc.).
- Spring Semester
    - Apply for a Dean's Dissertation Fellowship for next year (requires that you also apply for external funding). (Note: this internal fellowship through GEPA application falls very early in the spring semester).
    - Dissertation Writing: Students generally register for ENGL 999, receiving 0 credits but retaining their full-time status.
        - Students should aim to draft one chapter per semester, including summer.
    - In addition, students may teach or engage in some other form of professionalization.
    - At the end of this year your two-year contract with the WSAP will expire. You will now need to decide whether to re-apply to the WSAP (and continue to receive the WSAP's supplemental stipend Doust fellowship).

Years Six and beyond

- Fall Semester
    - Dissertation, as above.
    - Apply for competitive WSAP Doust Fellowship, competitive Dean's Dissertation Fellowship (early spring semester), or other external funding as described above.
- Spring Semester
    - Dissertation, as above.
    - Prepare to defend or discuss continuation with the DGS.
        - Students are expected to defend by the end of the 6th year (students should discuss their dissertation timeline with the DGS if they are not on track to defend in or before year 6).

B. Good Standing for PhD Students

PhD Students must meet a number of requirements and deadlines in order to remain in good standing.

As a member of the University community, PhD students are expected to complete required modules related to University policies. For instance, on-boarding every semester prior to registration, University Conduct at Work, and Harassment Training are frequent requirements. Students who do not complete these modules are automatically administratively withdrawn and the stipend is terminated. Please complete these before the deadlines as extensions are not guaranteed.

During their years in coursework, students must not be in receipt of more than one Incomplete at any one time, and all outstanding assignments must be submitted no later than one semester after the Incomplete was granted. Additionally, it is expected that students not receive more than one B grade within a single academic year.

Students should have passed their Language Exam by the end of the first year.

Students should have completed their Qualifying Exams before the beginning of the spring semester of the third year.

The dissertation prospectus must be filed following the Dissertation Practicum, and no later than the summer of the third year.

Students writing their dissertations should demonstrate measurable progress on a semesterly basis, to be documented in detail on the self-evaluation portions of their Annual Assessment forms (see below).

Students who do not meet these standards will no longer be considered in good standing. This could result in the forfeiture of a student's stipend, eligibility to teach within the University, and/or eligibility for fellowships and funding opportunities. Exceptions may be made to these expectations at the discretion of the DGS. In such cases a written agreement must be filed with the Department and GEPA articulating the reasons for the exception and outlining a concrete

plan for bringing the student back into accordance with program requirements.

C. Language Exam

The English Department requires that all PhD students possess a proficient reading ability in the literature and scholarship of at least one foreign language, as assessed by the language exam.

The language exam must be completed prior to the scheduling of the Qualifying Exams. The Department thus recommends that it be taken some time in the first year of study.

Students who feel they are ready to begin studying for the exam must first consult with a member of the English Department who has been designated as an examiner for a particular language. (Please consult the website for this list.) If no one in the Department has been so designated for a particular language, candidates should consult with the DGS in order to identify an approved examiner outside the Department.

Students will translate, with a dictionary (non-digital), one page each from two texts in their target foreign language. One text will be a primary source, and the other a secondary source. Texts will be selected by the examiner. Students will have two hours to complete the exam. The language exam form must be submitted to the Department after the exam has been completed.

D. Pedagogy Training

Students in their second and third years will be assigned as teaching assistants to members of the English faculty. These assignments are based on enrollments and department needs. They are not based on your field of study. That said, if you have a strong preference regarding your assignment, you are free to express this to the DGS in advance of the semester in question.

Duties and expectations for teaching assistants will vary depending on the course and the instructor. Typical expectations may include taking attendance, participating in (and/or helping to facilitate) class discussions, responding to student assignments, grading, and leading one or more class sessions. All teaching assistants will have the opportunity to engage in ongoing conversations with the instructor regarding syllabus design, teaching style, goals for assignments, rubrics for assessment, etc.

E. Qualifying Exams

Students typically take their qualifying exams during the fall semester of the third year of study. By the end of the second year, students must submit their exam scheduling form with reading lists. Please note that the Qualifying Exam cannot be scheduled unless the Language Exam has been passed.

The Qualifying Exams are intended to evaluate a student's mastery of a certain group of texts, but also, more importantly, his or her ability to discuss those texts within the kinds of larger critical frameworks that define our discipline. The exams assess a student's ability to read and think independently, to formulate relevant arguments based on literary evidence and in dialogue with recent scholarship, and eventually (therefore) to write a compelling dissertation.

Each student will be examined in one field. Examinations will comprise two lists:

- a field-specific, pre-established list of **primary texts**, to which approximately twenty additional texts will be added by each student-advisor team in accordance with student interests

  and

- a field-specific, pre-established set of **secondary texts**, called critical backgrounds, to which ten additional texts will be added by each student-advisor team in accordance with student interests.

Both lists will be constructed by the candidate in close consultation with a committee consisting of two or three faculty members from the Department of English, and one faculty member from outside the Department. Fields generally include those traditionally recognized within the discipline. Sample lists are available on the Department's website and will be customized according to a student's interests.

The exam process itself comprises two parts: a written component and an oral component.

The written exam will take place over two consecutive business days, approximately one week prior to the oral exam. On each of the two days, students will be presented with four to five questions emphasizing one of their lists, though students may be asked about any text on either list on either day. The student will respond to two questions for each list. Students are given four hours to complete each set of questions, with a presumed one-hour break in the middle (for a total of five hours). Exams are open-book.

Students should communicate with the Graduate Coordinator prior to the exam date in order to arrange all necessary logistics. Unless otherwise specified, the Graduate Coordinator will e-mail the exam to the student as an attachment and will expect to receive the completed exam from the student in electronic form as well. Typical timeframes for the exam will range from 10 AM – 3 PM or 12 PM – 5 PM, but students should plan with the Graduate Coordinator ahead of time.

The Department does not, as a rule, provide students with practice exam questions beforehand. However, a properly prepared student should not be surprised by the type of questions posed: a sense of the sorts of questions that appear on these kinds of exams should become clear as the student consults with the committee members and discusses the readings with them.

Faculty are expected to be in-person for the oral exam unless they are traveling or in case of medical or family emergency. In such cases, Zoom accommodations may be possible. The oral

exam often begins by providing students with the opportunity to expand on their written responses. It then tends to move in additional directions—ideally, it takes the form of a lively dialogue rather than an interrogation—and often ends by inviting the student to talk about their ideas toward a possible dissertation. Students should be prepared to discuss any and all of the works on their lists. The oral portion of the exam typically lasts about two hours.

The Qualifying Exams may result in one of several outcomes:

1) The student passes the exam and is deemed to be qualified to continue on to the prospectus and dissertation.

2) The student *fails the written portion of the exam*, and, accordingly, the committee does not feel it is appropriate to hold the oral exam. In such cases the student will be invited to retake the written exam (with new questions) in hopes that a satisfactory result will enable the student to move on to the oral portion of the exam. The written exam may be retaken only once and must be retaken within three months of the first exam.

3) The student *fails the oral portion of the exam*, and is asked to retake the oral exam. This retake can occur only once and must be retaken within three months of the first exam.

4) The student *fails the oral portion of the exam*, and is deemed *ineligible* to retake the oral exam, and is thus deemed not to be qualified to continue on to the prospectus and dissertation. In this situation, the committee will meet to determine if the failed exam demonstrates a level of competency deemed to be generally equivalent to that required of a successful MA Exam. For failed exams meeting the competency equivalent, the committee can opt to award the student a terminal MA.

5) The student *fails the exam and fails the retake*, and is thus deemed *not* to be qualified to continue on to the prospectus and dissertation. In this situation, the committee will meet to determine if the failed retake demonstrates a level of competency deemed to be generally equivalent to that required of a successful MA Exam. For failed exams meeting the competency equivalent, the committee can opt to award the student a terminal MA.

Note: Students may ask their committee to receive a terminal MA after failing an exam, rather than retaking it. This request will be granted at the discretion of the committee in consultation with the DGS.

Note: The oral portion of exam retakes must be held in person during regular Department hours of operation, and the student and primary advisor must be in attendance. All other members may be remote.

F. Choosing an Advisor

The DGS serves as the default advisor to all PhD students still in their course-taking years. The dissertation advisor is then selected via an often somewhat organic process once the student reaches the exam preparation stages. As students begin to put together their reading lists, they will do this in regular consultation with their committee. This process, in addition to the exam itself, should give or confirm for students a sense of which faculty member(s) are best suited to serve as their advisor(s). In the days and weeks following the exam, students will follow up with one or more of their committee members to discuss their dissertation. During this period, students will ask one English faculty member to direct the emerging dissertation.

Dissertations will also have a second reader, usually within the English Department. Second readers should be involved in reading chapter drafts and offer feedback as relevant. Students may also consult their external readers as these are established.

Students should expect to receive feedback from their advisors within one or two months of submitting drafts. If students find that they are not receiving reasonably prompt feedback or regular correspondence from their advisor, they should contact the DGS to facilitate communication. Likewise, if any issues emerge, academic or otherwise, that prevent students from making expected progress, they are encouraged to contact the DGS and/or the Chair with any concerns.

Both the advisor and the DGS are available to establish a calendar and deadlines for dissertating students. These can be very helpful in keeping students on pace.

There may come a time when a student feels that, for one reason or another, they would work better with a different advisor. In these cases the student should speak with the DGS about possible resolutions.

G. The Dissertation Practicum

In spring of the third year, students who have successfully completed the qualifying exam will enroll in ENGL 585, a practicum course intended to guide them through the process of developing, refining, and describing their dissertation projects. Format will vary according to the instructor, but in any case students will complete by the end of the Practicum a polished draft of their dissertation prospectus (10-15 pages), plus a sample draft of at least twenty-five pages of a first chapter.

Students are strongly encouraged to complete their qualifying exam, including retakes, before the Practicum begins in the spring semester. If a student still needs to complete a retake when the Practicum for their year is underway, they may enroll at the discretion and with the permission of their committee and the DGS.

H. The Dissertation Prospectus

The dissertation prospectus should be submitted to the Department by the end of the spring semester of the third year. The prospectus should be approximately 10-15 pages long and should

discuss in general terms what the central claims of the dissertation will be, as well as what the focus of each chapter will be. It should include a bibliography of approximately 30 works, as a starting point for research and writing. Note that the final dissertation may depart substantially from the prospectus, but the prospectus provides a general roadmap for student and advisor alike.

I. The Dissertation

After submitting the dissertation prospectus, students begin writing the dissertation itself. In general, a reasonable rate of progress might be considered to be one chapter draft (approximately 40-50 pages) per semester, including summers. Dissertations differ in their organization and structure. One typical structure is to devote each chapter to a different author; alternatively, chapters could be centered around a particular genre or formal question. Chapters may be ordered chronologically or according to some other schema, but together, the chapters ought to trace an argumentative arc, so that they build on one another, rather than providing isolated case studies of one static idea. Students should take the initiative to communicate directly and clearly with their dissertation directors about questions of progress and process.

J. The Dissertation Defense

As students reach completion of their dissertation, they should assemble a dissertation defense committee. This committee consists of two faculty members from within English, a third faculty member from outside of English, and a fourth faculty member (also from outside of English) who serves as chair (and whose role is simply to ensure a fair and unbiased process in accordance with University guidelines; the chair may or may not engage substantively with the dissertation itself). The defense committee may or may not be comprised of the same faculty who served on the exam committee. Defenses last approximately two hours. Committees will ask students to defend their arguments and claims, will assess the overall strength and quality of the dissertation, and may discuss possible avenues for revision and expansion.

Students must adhere to formatting and filing guidelines as detailed by the Office of the University Dean of Graduate Studies. The registration of the defense must be planned with a six-week waiting period built in, during which the approval of the completed dissertation passes through the committee, the department administration, GEPA, and finally, the Office of the University Dean of Graduate Studies. Students should work closely with the Department's Graduate Coordinator to determine defense plans.

https://www.rochester.edu/College/gradstudies/phd-defense/index.html

K. Annual Assessment Process

In accordance with GEPA policy, the English Department conducts an annual assessment of each PhD student's progress through the program. The assessment process offers a regular opportunity for students, the faculty with whom they're working, and the DGS all to check in

with one another and reaffirm goals/timelines. Note that this process is not meant to substitute for students' ongoing conversations, throughout the year, with their instructors, mentors, advisors, or other faculty. Note, too, that the specific results of the assessment will not be reviewed by the Graduate Dean: rather, the DGS simply indicates to the Dean each year that an assessment process has been completed for all students.

The annual assessment is intended, above all, to ensure that all students are receiving direction, feedback, advice, support, and other resources in an equitable and timely fashion. It also provides students with a chance to reflect back and look ahead.

The process runs as follows:

1) Each student fills out a self-evaluation reflecting on progress-to-date and goals.

2) The DGS reviews these evaluations and, in a dedicated faculty meeting at the end of the academic year, presents a summary of each one. Faculty may then volunteer additional information that might be helpful to the DGS in assessing each student's work overall. Depending on any given student's year in the program, the volunteered information may relate to the student's coursework, Teaching Apprenticeship, performance on exams, work with the Blake Archive or Lazarus Project, research assistantship, and so on. For many students, of course, the primary feedback of relevance will be from the student's advisor, and need not be discussed at length with the entire faculty.

3) The DGS, having taken notes during the faculty evaluation-review meeting (these notes will remain confidential), will then meet with each student in the pre-dissertation years to convey any helpful feedback from the meeting. Students in their post-exam years should meet with their advisors directly to receive their feedback. In some cases the DGS may opt to convene a meeting with student and advisor together, if it seems like this would be useful.

4) Students will, while meeting with their advisors, fill out an Academic Planning Worksheet for the coming year. This worksheet is intended to help students and their advisors (or exam committees) to articulate specific tasks and deadlines for the months to come. This worksheet is optional while the student is engaged in coursework, but is strongly recommended as a tool to stay on track.

5) Students who do not complete the annual assessment by departmental deadlines will face a loss of good standing and academic probation.

L. Conditions for Receiving the PhD Stipend

PhD students are guaranteed a stipend for the first five years of the program, provided that the student remains in good standing and in residence. Students may receive additional funding in their first five years, but this does not extend the terms of the stipend, which applies only to years one through five.

III. Course-Taking

Students should consider a variety of factors in selecting their courses each semester, including the course topic, the course number, and the faculty member teaching the course. Even in cases in which a course's particular intellectual focus may not fit exactly with a student's interests, other factors—such as whether the course is an all-graduate seminar, or whether it is being taught by a professor the student may wish to work with in the future—may ultimately weigh in the course's favor. Many students benefit from perspectives provided by courses outside of their area of focus.

The Department's graduate-level courses are designated by two different sets of numbers.

400-level courses enable the Department to offer additional curricular variety to our graduate students. While the **500 number** indicates a traditional graduate seminar (open exclusively to graduate students, and convening for three hours once per week), the **400 number** indicates an upper-level course that may enroll both advanced undergraduates and any interested graduate students (with the balance usually, but not always, tipping toward undergraduates). Graduate students enrolled in a 400 are expected to complete supplementary readings; to write a longer, graduate-level paper; and to meet with the instructor for some amount of time outside of the usual class sessions.

The 500s offer several distinct advantages: a group of fellow graduate-student discussants, an intense seminar-style format, a strategic mix of primary and secondary readings, and an explicit focus on methodology. ***It is in the 500s that students are practicing the kinds of thinking, analysis, and discourse that define graduate-level work in the humanities.*** **The 400s** offer a different set of benefits: because they tend to differ in scope from 500s—focusing on topics as specific as, say, Jane Austen; Arthurian Traditions; Studies in Literary Translation; or African-American Drama—these courses allow students to customize more fully their program of study.

PhD students must petition the DGS in order to take more than one 400-level course per semester. Given their more compact timeline, and thus their more limited curricular flexibility, MA students may opt to take two 400-level courses per semester; however, by the time they graduate, MA students should aim to have taken at least two-thirds of their total courses at the 500 level.

Both MA and PhD students may take courses outside the Department (whether in History, Art History, Philosophy, and so on), but should limit these to one per semester. (A handful of such courses will be cross-listed with English each term, and these do not count toward the one-course-per-semester maximum.) Note that students should communicate clearly with instructors outside the Department prior to enrolling in any course that is not specifically a graduate seminar. In any non-English-Department courses that is also open to advanced undergraduates, it is the responsibility of the student to work with the instructor to adjust assignments appropriately.

Both MA and PhD students are welcome to set up Independent Study courses with willing faculty. Again, these are typically limited to one per semester.

IV. Graduate Certificates

Both MA and PhD students may choose to pursue Graduate Certificates in the following areas:

a. Digital Humanities (through the English Department)
b. Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies (through the Susan B. Anthony Institute)
c. African and African-American Studies (through the Black Studies Department)
d. Literary Translation Studies (through the Modern Languages and Cultures Department)

Please see the English Department, SBAI, Black Studies, and MLC websites for more information. All certificates require a combination of course-taking and a final project or portfolio of assembled work.

V. The Role of the DGS and MA Advisor

The DGS, sometimes in consultation with the faculty-comprised Graduate Studies Committee, oversees the Department's graduate programs. The DGS serves as an advisor to all incoming PhD students up until they take their qualifying exams. In addition, the DGS is available to mediate any miscommunications between students and their instructors, exam committees, or dissertation advisors. Moreover, even after a student has selected a dissertation advisor, the DGS continues to help students navigate the broader worlds of the Department, graduate school, and profession (assisting in applying for fellowships, coordinating workshops on publication and other topics, and generally offering advice as needed). Students unsure about aspects of studying for the qualifying exam, writing a dissertation prospectus, preparing for the job market, or other matters should always feel free to consult with the DGS. Likewise, any questions regarding the guidelines outlined in this handbook should be referred to the DGS.

The MA Advisor helps the DGS to oversee the MA program, and serves as the primary advisor to all MA students prior to their beginning work on the capstone. The MA Advisor assists students in choosing courses, choosing a capstone, and (in the case of the MA Essay) finding a capstone advisor. The MA Advisor is also the person to whom an MA student may turn with questions regarding Department or University policies, deadlines, and other matters. MA students should always feel free to consult with the DGS as well.

Please note that students are always welcome to consult with *any* member of the faculty, not just the DGS or MA Advisor, to discuss academic, intellectual, and professional questions of any kind.

VI. Professionalization

The Department provides numerous opportunities, both formal and informal, for students to acquire the skills necessary for presenting themselves and their work to potential colleagues, employers, and the public, and for thereby contributing to wider critical discussions surrounding

literature and media. A primary way for students to gain these tools is to attend regularly the talks, symposia, works-in-progress seminars, and other events taking place at the University. These events serve as models of academic discourse and culture, and help prepare students to position their own work within a larger intellectual context.

The Department also holds workshops each year on topics such as academic publishing, applying for fellowships, conference-going, and alt-ac careers. In addition, the MA Advisor will hold sessions specifically tailored to the MA students regarding applications to PhD programs and related questions.

The Greene Career Center is an excellent resource for students seeking employment both within and outside of academia and provides both a series of scheduled events and drop-in hours during which students may meet with advisors.

Each September and October, the Department holds weekly job-market workshops for those students actively applying for academic positions: these workshops offer intensive feedback on each of the key documents that will constitute a job applicant's dossier.

Students can take a number of concrete steps, as they make their way through the program, to help themselves prepare for the job market:

Letters of Recommendation: Fellowships and academic jobs will often require 3-4 letters, including at least one that can speak to the applicant's teaching abilities. Accordingly, students should stay in close touch with former seminar instructors, exam-committee members, and other faculty in addition to their dissertation directors. Let faculty know early on if you are considering asking them for a letter at some point in the future, and ask what materials it would be helpful for them to see. Also in the spirit of planning ahead, it would be prudent to ask for a letter of recommendation from one's teaching-apprenticeship mentors at the end of the apprenticeship semesters, and likewise to invite one's dissertation director to observe a class-session or two during the WSAP teaching years.

Conferences and Publication: Once the dissertation is underway (and occasionally earlier than this), a student may consider applying to conferences, and seeking to publish work in journals. A publication in a top journal in one's field is perhaps the most significant item that one could add to one's CV in graduate school. Students should consult with their dissertation directors and/or the DGS about where/what/when to submit. Conference-going can be a good way to make connections with others working in one's area of focus, and to learn about recent developments in one's subspecialty. Sometimes, presenting at a conference can provide a student with useful feedback. However, conferences should be chosen judiciously and attended sparingly lest they become a distraction from a graduate student's true work of writing and publishing. A job candidate with six conference papers on his or her CV is no more competitive (all other things being equal) than a job candidate with one conference paper.

Job-Application Materials: Academic positions tend to be advertised in the fall. Students considering applying for jobs should therefore begin preparing their materials during the previous spring. These will include a cover letter (ask the DGS and/or Placement Advisor for

specific guidelines), a CV, a writing sample (usually about 20 pages), often a dissertation abstract, and sometimes a teaching statement or teaching portfolio (including sample syllabi or other documents). The Job Placement Advisor will convene a meeting in the spring for all students entering the job market in the fall, and may circulate sample materials at this time. Intensive workshops on all aspects of the application process are held weekly (and overseen by the Placement Advisor) starting in September each year.

Note that some jobs are posted in the spring each year; the job market has become more flexible in terms of timing, and many institutions have moved away from the long-standing timeline of hiring that had been built around the annual MLA conference.

VII. Conflict Resolution

Students should feel free to come directly to their instructors, committee members, advisors, dissertation directors, DGS, MA Advisor, or Department Chair with any concerns or problems at any time. The University also provides resources for conflict resolution, in those cases where a student feels that an outside mediator would be more appropriate or effective. These include Graduate School Ombudspersons and University Ombudspersons.

https://www.rochester.edu/ombuds/

VIII. University Resources:

See the links below for policies regarding academic and nonacademic misconduct, family leave, academic probation, and related topics:

- Graduate Education Bulletin: https://www.rochester.edu/graduate-education/academic-resources/graduate-bulletin/
- GEPA Forms and Policies: www.rochester.edu/college/gradstudies/policies
- Disability Services and Support: https://www.rochester.edu/disability/
- Office of University Engagement and Enrichment: www.rochester.edu/eoc
- Nondiscrimination Policy: https://www.rochester.edu/oee/eoc/
- Harassment: https://www.rochester.edu/policies/policy/discrimination-harassment/
- The Learning Center: www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/
- Gwen M. Greene Career Center: https://careereducation.rochester.edu/
- Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program: https://writing.rochester.edu/index.html
- CARE Network (for “students in, or heading toward, distress”): www.rochester.edu/care/
- University Health Services (includes counseling services): www.rochester.edu/uhs/
- Taxes: https://www.rochester.edu/college/gradstudies/costs-financial-support/taxes.html
- International Services Office: https://www.iso.rochester.edu/