



Graduate Handbook
for the
Master of Arts in English
2025–2026

Updated September 2, 2025.
All information is subject to change.
Students are responsible for checking relevant University
websites for current deadlines and updates.

ENGLISH M.A. HANDBOOK

2025 - 2026

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

I.A. The Master of Arts in English

Portland State University's M.A. in English is designed for students who are prepared to undertake advanced work in the field of literary studies. The program provides a range of courses in literatures in English, including British, American, and Anglophone literature; composition and rhetorical theory; cultural studies; and literary history, criticism, theory, and methods.

The motives and destinations of the students in the program vary. Some enter the program open to the different paths to which the M.A. might lead, while others gear their course of study towards very specific career objectives. After completing their degree, some have gone on to work in humanities-related fields in both the private and public sectors (e.g., marketing, arts administration, non-profit work). Others are planning to teach high school language arts. Many have entered the program concurrently while teaching in high school with the goal of expanding their knowledge base in literature and the teaching of literature. Some have gone on to teach at community colleges, and some have successfully pursued their doctoral degree. Finally, many students enter the program solely for their own interest and enrichment.

I.B. Getting Started

When you are accepted into the program you will be assigned a faculty advisor. You should make contact with your advisor as early as possible. This faculty member will guide you through the early stages of your program. If you have questions that your advisor cannot answer, contact the department's Academic and Program Coordinator, Chloe Bobar (grdstudy@pdx.edu), or the M.A. in English Director, Dr. Anoop Mirpuri (amirpuri@pdx.edu). This Handbook, and the English Department [website](#), may also provide answers to many of your questions. It's important to stay in touch with your advisor and/or the Director. Checking in for a short visit or email once per term can be a good way to see if you are on-track for the program requirements and to foster a professional relationship with your advisor that will pay off as you move through the program and have questions or concerns.

Make sure that you have a university [ODIN](#) account and email address as soon as possible. To get started, read the instructions on your university letter of admission or, for help, contact the Office of Information Technology at 503-725-HELP (4357). The Department of English uses a listserv to communicate important information to our graduate students. We will use your official PSU email address for our listserv and for all correspondence, and you are expected to check your PSU email regularly using the web interface at mail.pdx.edu. (See APPENDIX 8: DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LISTSERV for detailed information.)

Find out the date that you can begin registering for courses. Students entering the program should take **English 500: Problems and Methods of Literary Study**, in their first term.

We strongly recommend that you attend our graduate student orientation, usually held the Friday before classes begin. This event will introduce you to our faculty and other students, inform you

about the program and its requirements, and acquaint you with the resources available at the university and in the city of Portland.

Other important resources on campus include the [Graduate School](#), which provides information on university requirements, the [Career Center](#), which offers valuable guidance on graduate education and professional development, the [Writing Center](#), which can help you with any stage of your writing process (from coming up with an idea for a paper to proofreading), and the [Department of World Languages and Literatures](#). You should also get into the habit of checking the [English Department](#) website regularly so that you can keep up with departmental news and events.

SECTION II: PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

II.A. Overview of Program Requirements

NOTE: *Requirements for the English M.A. occasionally change. If the current requirements are different from those in place when you entered the program, you may choose to fulfill either the current requirements or the requirements that were in place when you entered the program.*

Students in the English M.A. program must complete the following requirements:

- **45 credits of graduate coursework.** These must include
 - English 500: Problems and Methods of Literary Study (only offered fall term)
 - At least one course in pre-1800 British or American literature
 - One course in literature or rhetoric, whether Anglophone or in translation, before 1900.
 - One critical theory course
 - At least one ENG 507/graduate seminar (graduate seminars can also be used to fulfill the pre-1800, pre-1900, and/or critical theory requirements)
 - At least 32 credits in English (courses listed as “ENG”)
 - No more than 13 credits outside of English (these require advisor approval)
- **University Second Language Requirement.** This may be completed through coursework or examinations administered by the Department of World Languages and Literatures (see “Second Language Requirement”).
- **Oral Field Exam.**

II.B. Coursework

The English M.A. Degree requires a minimum of 45 credits of graduate-level coursework. Qualifying graduate-level coursework (whether taken inside or outside the PSU English Department) must be taught by an instructor with a Ph.D. or a terminal degree in his or her field,

such as the MFA for Creative Writing classes. All coursework must be taken for a letter grade and students are expected to maintain a minimum 3.25 cumulative GPA in the program. Students who fail to do so for at least three consecutive terms will not be allowed to complete the M.A. Program and may be asked to leave.

Both the student's advisor and the Program Director must ultimately approve the list of courses students plan to use to fulfill the program's requirements. The student will list coursework used for degree completion on the Degree Completion Plan, to be submitted by the fifth week of the student's fourth term of study. Students should meet with their advisors regularly to make sure that they are interpreting the requirements correctly and keeping on track.

II.B.1. English 500: Problems and Methods of Literary Study

Required of all English M.A. students, ENG 500 introduces students to the methods of analysis and interpretation they will use throughout the program. Students take the course in the fall quarter of their first year of study. ENG 500 is designed to help students:

- Develop and expand close reading skills as an entryway into larger questions of interpretation
- Understand and appreciate the significance of formal elements and rhetorical devices, including genre and generic conventions
- Understand critical arguments and scholarly conversations, including the ability to identify and summarize critical positions and use secondary material strategically
- Refine writing skills: constructing interpretive questions, crafting arguments, organizing paragraphs, using appropriate evidence, developing style, assessing rhetorical situations, addressing specific audiences, and writing with purpose
- Engage with theoretical essays and approaches.

II.B.2. 4-credit Graduate Courses

There are three types of 4-credit graduate courses:

- 400/500 level courses are larger classes that include both undergraduate and graduate students. Though all students participate in discussions and lectures, the classes have separate requirements for graduates and undergraduates.
- 500-level graduate-only courses are small classes that concentrate on wide reading and focused writing in advanced topics.
- Graduate seminars (507) involve extensive independent research around a central theme and set of readings.

II.B.3. 1-credit Graduate Courses

Some student loans, scholarships, and grants require full-time status. At PSU, a full time course load at the graduate level is 9 credits or more per term. Half time is 8 credits or less per term. This means that if you enroll for two 4-credit courses you will not have full-time status. In addition to the By-Arrangement options (explained below), the department offers a range of ENG 531 selected topics for 1-credit to help fill out your schedule. These include English 531: The Field of English, a course designed for first-year English M.A. students, and English 531: Professional Development, a course designed for second-year students in the program. Other 1-credit options are offered periodically, and students may also arrange a 1-credit Reading & Conference (ENG 505) as they prepare for their oral field exam (see below).

II.B.4. By-Arrangement Course Work

The English department recognizes that By-Arrangement study can be a valuable means of expanding the curriculum and allowing students to pursue special interests. By-Arrangement study may be arranged under several course titles. The following limitations apply:

- ❖ Students may take each By-Arrangement course for between 1 and 4 credits.
- ❖ Students may take no more than 9 credits of By-Arrangement in any given term.
- ❖ Students can only apply a combined maximum of 8 credits in 501: Research, 502: Independent Study, and 505: Reading & Conference towards the M.A. degree. This limitation is a combined maximum for all 501, 502, and 505 credits with all course prefixes, including ENG, WR, and those for other departments.
- ❖ Students can only apply a combined maximum of 9 credits in 504: Internship, 508: Workshop, and 509: Practicum towards the M.A. degree. This limitation is a combined maximum for all 504, 508, and 509 credits with all course prefixes, including ENG, WR, and those for other departments.

Students wishing to pursue By-Arrangement study should seek the approval of a faculty member willing to undertake the arrangement. To register for these courses you must fill out an online [By-Arrangement Request Form](#). Faculty's time to supervise independent study is limited. Please keep in mind that professors choose to take on these courses on top of their regular workload.

Following are the course numbers for By-Arrangement:

- ❖ Eng 501: Research. Students may take from 1 to 4 credits of English 501 as they prepare for their Oral Field Exam. Students should arrange to work with a faculty supervisor, preferably their advisor. See above for the limit on the number of English 501 that students can count toward their M.A..
- ❖ Eng 502: Independent Study
- ❖ English 504 or Writing 504: Cooperative Education/Internship. Academic work with a faculty advisor or mentor in conjunction with either paid or unpaid employment outside the university. Please see PSU's [Handshake](#) database for internship opportunities.
- ❖ English 505: Reading and Conference. One-on-one reading/discussion on a special topic with single students. If a group of students wants to gather together and propose a

topic to a faculty sponsor, it is better to use English 508: Workshop. See above for the limit on the number of English 505 that students can count toward their M.A..

- ❖ Writing 505: Writing and Conference. One-on-one work with a faculty advisor or mentor on a student writing project; this may also include reading and discussion. There is a limit of 12 credits of WR 505 that students can count toward their M.A.
- ❖ English 508: Workshop. Workshops are organized around a shared area of interest between a professor and a group of students (and sometimes additional faculty). The faculty role is supervisory; students produce their own discussions, with the faculty members as guides in choosing materials and organizing the group.
- ❖ English 509: Practicum. For students who are assisting a faculty member in a research, writing, or community-based project, or in teaching a lower division course.

II.B.5. Taking Undergraduate Courses for Graduate Credit

In some cases, faculty may allow a student to take an undergraduate course for graduate credit. You will need to take the course as an English 505 or Writing 505 Reading and Conference, not the undergraduate course number offered, and the professor will give you enhanced assignments appropriate for the graduate level. Again, this should be regarded as a “last resort” when no appropriate graduate-level courses are available.

II.B.6. Courses Taken Outside of the Department

While students must take at least 32 credits in English (ENG), the remainder of the program (up to 13 credits) may include graduate coursework in related fields, with advisor approval. Some common related fields are Writing (courses in the department prefixed “WR”), Applied Linguistics, World Languages and Literatures, Communication, History, Philosophy, Theater Arts, and Education. It is the student's responsibility to confirm that courses taken outside the department are eligible to be used for credit towards the M.A. degree.

II.C. Second Language Requirement

All Master of Arts students at Portland State are required to demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English. They may do so either by taking an exam or by providing transcript evidence that they have completed at least two years of college level coursework in a language other than English with a cumulative grade of C- or above. We strongly encourage students to fulfill the language requirement early in their program. This exam must be passed before scheduling the written and the oral M.A. examinations. Options for satisfying the Second Language Requirements can be found on the [World Language and Literature Department](#) website. Students are responsible for completing the [Second Language Proficiency Exam Request Form](#) or the [Second Language Requirement Verification Request Form](#) (for native speakers) and requesting evaluation and certification of language equivalency.

For students who would like to fulfill the language requirement with Spanish or French, we recommend you take the WebCAPE exam, rather than the CLEP, which is more costly. If you are testing in other languages taught at Portland State, your exam will be conducted for free with a professor in that field. If you are testing in a language not taught at Portland State, you may need to take the BYU test. These exams are administered by the World Languages and Literatures Department, and you should consult them for more information.

II.D. Culminating Course of Study

NOTE: *The program requirements for the culminating courses of study changed in Fall of 2020.*

Students who matriculated before 2020 may choose which culminating option to pursue. All students matriculating in fall 2020 or after must complete the oral field examination detailed in this section. To view the "old" requirements for the previous culminating course of study, see Appendix 5.

New Requirements (for students matriculating fall 2020 or later)

To finish the program, all students must undertake, and successfully pass, an **ORAL FIELD EXAM** with supplementary written notes.

I.D.1. Oral Field Exam

The **oral field exam (OFE)** is based on well-defined and well-established fields in English studies (e.g., African American literature, composition and rhetoric, Modernism, postcolonial literature). Each field will have an associated reading list of approximately fifteen items. These lists will be available to students as soon as they enter the MA program and each student will choose one field as the focus of their OFE. We recommend selecting your field no later than the fifth week of your fourth quarter in the program (generally, the fall of your second year); your selection should be noted on your Degree Completion Plan.

I.D.2. Supplementary Written Notes

The OFE also includes the submission of **supplementary written notes** in two parts. These notes will be submitted to the oral field exam committee a week before the oral field exam. The committee will read this document and use it as a springboard for discussion during the exam.

- a. To prepare for the oral field exam, students will write 1000-1500 words in response to the following questions: What, according to you, is the most important unifying feature of this list? What formal, theoretical, historical, or cultural considerations do you use to map the texts' relation to one another? These questions may be supplemented with others provided by the student's committee.

- b. Students will also write 1000-1500 words in response to the following questions:
What are the most useful critical skills or reading practices you acquired during the MA program? How are they useful and in what contexts? How did the ideas or writing of others influence your own writing?

The oral exam takes the form of a conversation amongst the two faculty members and the student. The committee will expect to see evidence of your intellectual curiosity, your awareness of the major issues and topics in the chosen field, your attention to scholarly methods, and your knowledge of the primary and key secondary texts in your field. Although the oral exam is often a source of anxiety, students tend to report afterward that it was an enjoyable experience. Indeed, it is not everyday that students have the opportunity to discuss their work, ideas, and interests with two faculty experts in their fields, so we encourage you to approach the exam with enthusiasm, optimism, and care.

The oral field exam is administered by a committee of two faculty members and graded on a Pass/Fail basis. If students fail the exam on their first attempt, they will be given a second opportunity to take the exam at a later date. If the two examiners disagree on the outcome of the exam, then it is graded as a Fail and the second exam will include an additional faculty examiner appointed by the MA Director.

The oral field exam will normally be scheduled during the last quarter of the student's course of study. It will take 75 and 120 minutes to complete.

Students should plan on meeting periodically with their committee members to discuss expectations for the oral exam and get advice on how to prepare.

I.D.3. Optional M.A. Essay

Students may also choose to write an extended essay as part of their culminating experience. The optional M.A. Essay gives students the opportunity to engage in advanced research to explore a specific topic in depth.

A. The Form of the M.A. Essay

The English M.A. Essay should be an essay of publishable quality and length – approximately **10,000 words** – that makes an original contribution to a field of study. Students should write the M.A. Essay with a particular publication venue in mind, such as an academic journal. Although students are not required to submit their M.A. Essay for publication, they are encouraged to do so.

The M.A. Essay should accomplish the following:

- ❖ Present a well-defined, detailed problem appropriate to the time frame and page constraints of the Department's requirements. The argument should be well organized and show an understanding of the intended audience. It should be written with care for

style and balance, use sophisticated and appropriate vocabulary, and use MLA-style formatting.

- ❖ Demonstrate a wide reading of pertinent background material, historical and current, especially regarding theoretical and cultural issues that bear upon the M.A. Essay topic.
- ❖ Demonstrate understanding of the critical conversation in the field relevant to the problem, and how the M.A. Essay contributes to that conversation.
- ❖ Demonstrate familiarity with the methodologies currently used in the discipline, in relation to both the content of the M.A. Essay and the form of its research methods.
- ❖ Aim to be publishable.

A student's M.A. Essay advisor and/or examining committee may have other suggestions and requirements for the writing of a particular M.A. Essay.

B. The M.A. Essay Proposal

Students who wish to write a M.A. Essay must submit a draft proposal to their examining committee defining a focused topic ideally one term before they submit the Degree Completion Plan. This provides the committee time to review and suggest revisions to the M.A. Essay Proposal. The approved M.A. Essay Proposal must be submitted as part of the Degree Completion Plan by the end of the fifth week of their fourth term of study. The proposal must:

- ❖ be two to three pages in length
- ❖ consist of a clear, concise statement of the M.A. Essay project or problem to be explored, its significance in the context of previous scholarship and criticism (identify a gap in our understanding of the particular topic and suggest the benefits of improving our knowledge of this topic), and an account of the methodologies or critical approaches to be used
- ❖ include a preliminary bibliography, including both primary and secondary materials.

Students should seek the help of their advisor/s in writing the proposal. When the proposal is completed, the proposal becomes part of the Degree Completion Plan. The Director of the M.A. in English will review the proposal, and may have questions or suggest changes before approving the project.

Approval to write a M.A. Essay is not automatic; students may be asked to revise the proposal, and only superior proposals will be approved.

C. M.A. Essay Timeline Considerations

Realistically, the M.A. Essay is a long project, and unless you have a great deal of it already done when your proposal is accepted, it is at least two terms of work. Since the M.A. Essay must be given to your committee two weeks before the Oral Field Examination, and University policy is that the absolute last date to schedule an oral is in the 9th week of any term, the first four weeks of the term in which you are defending the M.A. Essay should be used only for final editing and proofreading. Optimally, a student would distribute the M.A. Essay to their committee at the end of the term prior to the one in which s/he intends to graduate.

In sum, you should give yourself at least a full calendar year, following the approval of your M.A. Essay proposal, in which to write the M.A. Essay. For example, to graduate in spring of 2025, the M.A. Essay proposal should ideally be written and approved by the end of spring term 2024.

II.E. Planning Your Program of Study

II.E.1. Advising

Students should plan to meet with a faculty advisor early in their first term of study to discuss their options for a coherent M.A. program and confer in general about the culminating course of study. The student should contact the Director of the M.A. in English if the student's assigned advisor is on leave or otherwise unavailable. The Director is always ready to meet with students who feel they need advice or information about any aspect of the program, or to check in about their progress.

We do not expect students entering the program to know in advance what specific areas within the field of English they would like to study. Our goal is to train our students as generalists, rather than specialists, meaning that we train students to use a variety of materials, methods, and approaches as they pursue their study of English both before and after graduation. At the same time, we find that it is beneficial for students to have a deeper knowledge of a particular area of study. Students need not come into the program knowing what this will be. However, by the end of their first year in the program (or, for those attending part-time, after finishing roughly 25 credits) they ideally will have found an area of interest which can become the basis for their Oral Field Examination and/or the M.A. Essay, if they choose to write one.

Once you decide upon an examination field, you may find that your advisor's field of expertise is not compatible with your exam field. In this case, you will need to select a different advisor who will agree to serve as Chair of your committee. With their approval, you must submit a [Change of Advisor](#) form to the Department of English. (See Section II.E.2 "The Examining Committee" below.)

Once you have put together your examination committee, you will work closely with your advisors during this last part of the M.A. program to prepare for your Oral Field Examination and, if applicable, to work on your M.A. Essay. Failure to have regular communication between student and advisor can result in missed deadlines and delayed graduation, so stay on top of all the preparations and foster this relationship.

II.E.2 The Examining Committee

Each student's examining committee consists of 2 faculty members:

- ❖ The student's advisor, who also acts as the Chair of the student's examining committee,
- ❖ One additional member chosen by the student, in consultation with their committee Chair.

Students are responsible for obtaining the support of a faculty advisor willing to assist with preparations for the Oral Field Exam, and who will be the chair of the Oral Examination. The student's advisor must be tenured or tenure-track with an appointment in the English Department at Assistant Professor rank or higher. Consult the English Department website for a list of tenure-track professors and their specialties. It is expected that the first committee member/Chair should be affiliated with the student's chosen field list. (Each OFE list notes specifically which faculty members have volunteered to administer the exam in that particular field.)

Ideally, the Chair of your exam committee is someone with whom you have taken a course (or otherwise worked in some capacity). (e.g., by taking a course with them). The second committee member should be chosen by the student in consultation with their advisor/committee Chair. This could be any permanent faculty member who feels qualified to oversee an examination in the student's chosen field.

Your second committee member may be a tenure-track or fixed-term faculty member who teaches in the Graduate English Program. Please note that fixed-term faculty are not required to serve on Master of Arts in English committees. Part-time/Adjunct faculty with Ph.Ds may be approved to serve on a committee if the faculty member in that specialty is on leave; however this appointment is also voluntary.

Although it is rare, a student may choose to write an M.A. Essay in a field that is different from their oral field exam. In this case, your M.A. Essay advisor will be your committee Chair, and the second committee member will be a tenure-line faculty member affiliated with the student's chosen exam field list.

The committee members are formally appointed via the student's Degree Completion Plan, which is typically due two terms before the student's planned graduation (usually, the end of week 5 of fall term for students graduating in spring).

Students should meet regularly with their chair (and, ideally, their second committee member) to discuss ways of adapting or focusing the chosen list, or substituting texts, based on student and faculty interests.

II.F Requirements for Degree Completion

Students must ensure that they have completed **both** the departmental **and** the university requirements for the M.A. Degree, including all associated paperwork, before they will be able to graduate.

II.F.1. English Department Requirements: Degree Completion Plan

Students must notify the M.A. in English Committee of their intent to complete the program by submitting an approved [Degree Completion Plan](#) to the Program Coordinator by the fifth week of their fourth term of study. The Degree Completion Plan must include indication of the chosen field for the Oral Field Exam, as well as a proposal for the M.A. Essay (if applicable).

At the beginning of the term in which they intend to complete their degree, students must communicate their intention to take the Oral Field Examination to the Program Coordinator. If there are changes to the Program Requirements Worksheet, a new Worksheet must be approved by your advisor. **Before taking the exam, students must have fulfilled the second language requirement and have checked with their faculty advisor to assure completion of all degree requirements.**

A week before the exam, students must submit their completed **supplemental written notes** to their examination committee. Students receive an email in advance stating the place and time of the oral field exam.

II.F.2. University Requirements

No later than the first week of the term they wish to graduate, all students must also:

- ❖ Submit an [Application for Awarding a Master's Degree](#) to the Graduate School
- ❖ Submit all forms except the Application for Degree to the Department of English so that they can be signed by the Chair and copied to the student's file before they are submitted to the Graduate School. A summary of Graduate School forms is appended to this Handbook as Appendix 3.

If you wish to participate in the University Commencement, you should check commencement deadlines on the University's [commencement](#) web page. The English Department holds a separate "capping ceremony" which you are encouraged to attend. Event details will be announced during winter term.

SECTION III: UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

III.A. Enrollment Status

III.A.1. Deferral of Enrollment

According to University policy, students admitted to a graduate program who fail to matriculate at the beginning of the first term of the first year will have their admission canceled by the University unless they have been granted a deferral of enrollment from the program for no more than one year. You may request a deferral by emailing the English Department Graduate Program Coordinator at grdstudy@pdx.edu.

III.A.2. Conditional Admission

Any student admitted conditionally should notify their advisor as soon as the conditions outlined in the admissions letter have been met. Students will not be allowed to take the Oral Field Exam or begin an M.A. Essay for the M.A. Degree until their Departmental Conditional status has been removed.

III.A.3. Leave of Absence

A student in good standing may petition for a leave of absence. Leave of absence status assures the student a continuation of admission in the program during a period of absence. The cumulative amount of leave may not exceed one calendar year. Students on an approved leave of absence do not register for courses and are not required to pay instructional or other fees. During a leave of absence, access to university or program facilities and services and use of faculty or staff time is restricted according to policies established by the university and each program. A leave of absence does not constitute a waiver of the time limit for completion of the graduate degree at PSU, nor does it extend the regular one-year limit for completion of a course.

A leave is not automatic, but is only awarded to a student in good standing and must be approved by the student's advisor and Program Director. Students wishing to take a leave should fill out a Request for Leave of Absence form and have it signed by their advisor and Program Director before submitting it to the Program Coordinator. If the student fails to submit this form, s/he will be listed as inactive and administratively withdrawn from the program. Students are responsible for keeping their contact information current with the Department's Program Coordinator during their leave. A student planning to return from a leave of absence should contact the Program Coordinator and their advisor at least three months prior to returning to school. Students who fail to return to the graduate program within 12 months of initiating a leave of absence may be administratively withdrawn from the program.

III.A.4. Continuous Enrollment

Students admitted to a graduate program must be continuously enrolled until graduation, except for periods during which they have been approved for a leave of absence. Taking a minimum of 1 graduate credit per term during the regular academic year (fall, winter and spring terms) will constitute continuous enrollment. Registration during the summer term is not required. Failure to meet the continuous enrollment minimum may result in administrative withdrawal of the student from the program.

III.A.5. Time to Completion

Although the Department recognizes that students enter our programs with differing plans and obligations, we expect full-time students to complete the English M.A. program in two years, and part-time students to complete the program within 4 years. Students who have not completed the program by the end of their seventh year may be administratively withdrawn by the Program Director or Department Chair. The University will not count graduate credits that are more than seven years old toward any master's degree (e.g., a course started in the fall term of 2017 may be used to graduate in Fall 2024 but not thereafter) unless those credits are validated through the University's formal validation exam process. Under no circumstances may any courses more than 10 years old be applied to a master's degree.

III.B. Sharing and Transferring Credits

III.B.1. Pre-Admission Credit and Transfer Credit

A maximum of 16 approved graduate credits earned before admission to the program may be applied to the MA degree. This "pre-admission credit" limit applies both to transfer credits earned outside PSU and to credits earned at PSU prior to admission to the MA. It is also possible to transfer (with program and university approval) up to 16 credits of coursework, whether taken pre- or post-admission, to count towards the MA. In total, however, a maximum of one-third of the required coursework for the degree (16 combined credits) may be pre-admission or transfer credits (pre- or post-admission); while the other 29 required credits must be earned at PSU after admission to the program. (The one-third limit is actually 15 credits, but the Graduate School will not split credits for four-credit courses, and allows up to four four-credit pre-admission/transfer courses to be applied to the degree).

To count courses taken outside PSU towards a degree, students must fill out a [Proposed Transfer Credit form \(GO-21M\)](#) and meet with their advisor or the Program Director for credit evaluation and approval.

All Pre-admission and Transfer credits must be graduate level and must be: 1) letter graded B- or higher; 2) not be used for any other degree at any institution; 3) no more than seven years old at the time the Master's degree is awarded; 4) applicable to a Master's degree at the originating

institution without qualification. Refer to the PSU Bulletin for information on transfer of courses from international institutions, distance learning programs, etc.

III.B.2. Dual Master's Degrees

No credits applied toward a completed Master's degree may be applied toward earning another Master's degree, except in the case of a Dual Master's degree. A graduate student may work concurrently toward the completion of the requirements of two PSU Master's degrees in complementary disciplines where an overlap of coursework occurs. The dual degree program is planned in consultation with, and approved by, the advisors from each program. For example, it is possible to undertake a Dual Master's degree in English and Book Publishing. For any Dual Master's, you need to apply and be accepted by both programs and fulfill all the requirements for both, including the culminating exams or project.

More information on Dual Master's degrees is available in the [University Bulletin](#).

III.C. Satisfactory Progress

Students enrolled in the English M.A. Program must make satisfactory progress toward the degree or they may be administratively withdrawn from the program by the Program Director or Department Chair.

To make satisfactory progress, you must do the following:

- ❖ Be registered for each term of the academic year following your admission to the program. The exceptions are if you are granted approval to defer matriculation, or if you are absent during an approved Leave of Absence. See the sections of this handbook on Deferral of Enrollment and Leave of Absence for specific departmental policies and procedures.
- ❖ Maintain a minimum 3.25 cumulative GPA throughout the program. Students who fail to maintain this minimum GPA for at least three consecutive terms will not be allowed to pursue an M.A. Essay or take the Oral Field Exam and may be asked to leave the program. Students who fail to maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA, and/or maintain a GPA above 2.67 for any given term will be placed on academic probation by the Graduate School.
- ❖ Earn a B- or higher in your classes. You will not earn graduate credit for a class in which you receive a C+ or below unless you have specific written approval from the Program Director or Department Chair.
- ❖ Make up any incomplete prior to the agreed deadline or within one year, whichever comes first.
- ❖ Satisfactorily complete the work for any Practicum, R & C project, or M.A. Essay hours arrangement you have with an instructor or your advisor.

- ❖ Avoid getting two or more Xs or Ws in a given academic year.
- ❖ Get approval from your advisor if you plan to take elective courses outside of the English program that do not meet the program requirements. This restriction does not apply to students in a dual degree program.
- ❖ Abide by the requirements of PSU's Graduate School, and the Student Conduct Code.

SECTION IV: SUPPORTING YOURSELF IN GRADUATE SCHOOL AND BEYOND

IV.A. Establishing Residency

PSU tuition is significantly lower for Oregon residents than it is for those from out of state. To establish Oregon residency, you must reside in the state for one year; however, this is not the only requirement. For a synopsis of residency requirements, call the Admissions office or see their [Residency Requirements](#) page.

IV.B. Financial Aid and Scholarships

Information on graduate financial aid is available on the [Office of Financial Aid website](#).

For graduate students both in-state from out-of-state, the Laurels Graduate Award is available. Information about the Laurels and other competitive scholarships is available on the Graduate School [Financing Your Education](#) page.

English department nomination is required for three all-University competitions: the Oregon Sports Lottery, the University Club, and the Underrepresented Minority Graduate Student Pipeline scholarships. Any student who would like to be nominated for one of these scholarships should speak to their advisor or Program Director about the qualifications. A computerized database of national and local scholarships is also available in the Millar Library.

IV.C. Graduate Assistantships

University [Graduate Assistantships](#) are scholarships that come with a complete tuition remission (this covers tuition only, **not** additional University fees) and stipend. The student, in turn, is expected to work part-time for the university. The English Department offers a small number of GAships to its students every year; students are also eligible to apply for other GAships offered across the campus. These include University Studies Mentorships and other GAships in various departments.

IV.C.1. English Department Graduate Assistantships

The Department has a very limited number of Graduate Assistantships. Graduate assistants receive both tuition remission and a stipend for the academic year (Fall, Winter and Spring Terms). The English M.A. Program generally has around 2 Graduate Assistantships to offer to incoming students. These assistantships represent a contract for one year with the possibility of renewal for a second year, and usually require the student to teach composition courses and work in the Writing Center. To apply, students check the relevant box on their applications to the program and write a statement (in addition to the statement of purpose) detailing their interest in and/or experience with teaching. The Graduate Admissions committee awards assistantships based primarily on students' academic merit. In the second year of their GAships, some students work as assistants to Program Directors or assist faculty in teaching undergraduate English courses.

IV.C.2. University Studies Mentorships

University Studies is PSU's General Education program. The University Studies Department offers Graduate Assistantships to graduate students to work as mentors for Sophomore Inquiry courses. Mentors plan and facilitate 50-minute mentor sessions, assist the course instructor, and act as student advisors. Applications are due in January of each year. Before beginning to teach in Fall term, all new mentors must enroll in a four-credit Education course that is offered in the Spring and a two-week Fall training prior to the start of school. Mentors work 10-20 hours per week. For more information see the [Mentoring website](#).

IV.C.3. Other Graduate Assistantships outside the English Department

Many non-academic divisions of the University offer Graduate Assistantships, including: University Communications, Campus Recreation, University Housing, The Office of International Affairs, the Women's Resource Center, the Queer Resource Center, and Student Health and Counseling. A list of some of these GAships is available through the Graduate School [Graduate Assistantship page](#). Some open GAships are also announced on the English Graduate Listserv. However, we suggest that you regularly contact likely departments to see if there are any positions available. Students with non-English language skills may want to contact the Department of World Languages about teaching opportunities.

IV.D. Other Job Opportunities on Campus

IV.D.1. Learning Center Tutor

The Learning Center hires writing tutors on an ongoing basis throughout the academic year as existing tutors graduate. For more information see the [Learning Center website](#).

IV.D.2. Work Study Positions

If you qualify for the federal work-study program, you may apply for a variety of jobs with the English department or elsewhere on campus, including writing, website development, and office work. These jobs are also posted on the [Career Center website](#).

IV.D.3. Adjunct Positions

Recent graduates of the English M.A. Program are sometimes hired as adjunct composition instructors or Writing Center tutors soon after they have graduated. It is our general practice to hire former students for no more than one calendar year after graduation (the number of courses they teach or hours they work may vary within that time period). After that time, we generally do not re-hire former graduates from the M.A. program until they have had substantial relevant work experience outside PSU.

IV.E. Professional Development

The English Department at Portland State University believes in the inherent value of scholarly and creative work, but we also recognize that students want to put their degrees to practical use once they graduate. We believe that an English degree is one of the most versatile and useful that a student can have, and we are committed to offering opportunities for students to prepare themselves for work in a variety of fields.

From time to time, the English Department offers events to introduce students to different career options. We also encourage students to use the PSU Career Center. The Center has an impressive collection of resources especially for English students. The center will help you with planning a job search, preparing job search materials, applying for further graduate study, and exploring career options. Visit both their [website](#) and the actual center in 402 University Services Building (612 SW Montgomery).

IV.E.1. Courses Stressing Professional Development

a. WR 394: Writing Careers for English Majors

This course is also available for graduate credit if you enroll as ENG 505 (Reading and Conference). The course covers career possibilities, internships and community service. Each student gets individual attention and the goal is to identify possible career paths. This course is particularly helpful for those who wish to pursue non-teaching careers. Contact Dan Deweese (deweese@pdx.edu) for more information.

b. ENG 513: Teaching and Tutoring Writing

This course offers theoretical and practical strategies for teaching composition and tutoring. The focus is on preparing participants to teach in a variety of contexts. Contact Professor Hildy Miller for more information.

c. ENG 531: Professional Development

This 1-credit course is designed for second-year students in the English M.A. program. In addition to mentoring you through your Culminating Course of Study, the course also introduces you to a range of career options and gives you practical assistance in preparing for the job market.

IV.E.2. Important Information on Some Common Career Choices

a. Teaching High School

An M.A. in English will enhance your ability to teach critical thinking and writing in the high school English classroom. The M.A. alone does not, however, license you to teach public high school. To obtain a license, you will have to complete a separate graduate teacher education program, such as [PSU's GTEP program](#). Note that you will need to complete certain course prerequisites, gain work experience teaching children and young adults, and pass statewide exams in order to be considered for GTEP programs. If you wish to earn your M.A. in English and immediately go on to get your teaching license, we recommend the following schedule:

Summer, Year 1: Fulfill all prerequisites for the GTEP program and PSU's second language requirement for M.A. degrees.

Fall, Year 1: Enroll in PSU's English M.A. program, take at least 9 credits of courses. Apply to PSU's GTEP program by the December deadline.

Winter, Year 1: Take at least 9 credits in PSU's M.A. English program.

Spring, Year 1: Complete 9 credits of coursework for PSU's M.A. in English program; coordinate M.A. exam committee.

Summer-Spring, Year 2: Complete PSU's GTEP program; with your M.A. advisor's approval, apply 13 credits of graduate courses from this program toward your M.A. in English.

Summer, Year 3: Complete the remaining 5 credits of coursework needed for the English M.A.; study for M.A. exams.

Fall, Year 3: Begin your first teaching job, and take your M.A. exams in mid-October.

Please note that if you wish to apply credits from the GTEP toward your English M.A. you will need to get your English advisor's approval. It would be best to do this before you begin the GTEP. Students interested in pursuing high school teaching should also consider whether they are willing to move outside the area for a job. Job availability in Portland, as in other popular metro areas, is tight. To get a sense of what statewide job availability is like, check out the [website for the Oregon Labor Market information System](#). Also think about setting up informational interviews at local high schools and education programs to get a better sense of employment opportunities.

b. Teaching at a Community College

An M.A. in English qualifies you to teach lower-division (freshman and sophomore) courses in either two- or four-year colleges. Most jobs teaching lower-division courses mainly involve composition instruction, with some opportunities to teach literature and other subjects. Two-year colleges look for teachers with previous classroom experience, the ability to work with diverse populations, and advanced training in literature, pedagogy, and literary, rhetorical, and composition theory. For more information on the kinds of knowledge and skills community colleges are looking for, see the [Guidelines for the Academic Preparation of English Faculty at Two-Year Colleges](#), available through the [National Council of Teachers of English website](#).

Be aware that a large percentage of lower-division teaching jobs are part-time, adjunct positions. Portland, like many other popular metropolitan areas, has an especially tight market for full- and even part-time positions for college instructors. Consider whether you are willing to move to a different area or supplement your teaching income with another kind of work. For more information on the market for college English teaching, check out the Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit on the [Modern Language Association website](#). To get a sense of the Oregon job market, you can also explore the website for the Oregon Labor Market information System and contact community colleges in your area to find out more about employment opportunities and requirements.

c. Working in Public Relations, Marketing, and Other Humanities Related Fields

Many of our graduates have gone on to successful careers in fields such as marketing, community outreach, and media relations, to name only a few. The Department regularly organizes informational events with alumni/ae who work in these fields. We can also put you in contact with local organizations and assist you in finding internships and other sorts of employment. To learn more about these opportunities, ask your advisor, the Directors of the Department's various graduate programs, your GLO Coordinators, and/or Career Center advisors.

d. Obtaining a Ph.D.

Many of our students have gone on to excellent PhD programs. In recent years, our graduates have entered doctoral programs at Cornell, Rice, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Michigan, Northwestern, UMass-Amherst, USC, SUNY-Binghamton, and the University of Texas at Austin, as well as other similar programs.

Nevertheless, we advise anyone considering doctoral study to learn more about job prospects after graduation. Most Ph.D. programs are geared towards training doctoral students for a job that is quickly becoming obsolete (i.e., a tenure-track professorship). This means that if you are serious about pursuing doctoral study in the humanities, it is best to go in with eyes wide open: in other words, to pursue this goal without the expectation that you will end up landing a job as a professor. Part of the reason universities have continued to enroll doctoral students despite the precipitous decline in the academic labor market is because of [their need for low-cost teaching labor](#). This also explains why the majority of humanities Ph.D.'s who remain in

academia end up in non-tenure track positions, which usually have very high teaching loads, little or no job security, and low salaries.

Another important consideration is that obtaining a doctoral degree can take 6-9 years or more. Thus, even with a teaching assistantship, students often go into debt to pursue their degrees, making doctoral study a truly significant financial investment without the likelihood of a financial payoff. Importantly, the financial investment of deciding to pursue a Ph.D. isn't just about the resources required to pursue the degree. Perhaps more important are the opportunity costs of deciding against dedicating these years to gaining experience in a different (and more remunerative) line of work.

If you are interested in learning more about the academic labor market, you can obtain more information through the Modern Language Association website (www.mla.org), which features an Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit as well as reports on PhD job placement for the last several years. Other sources of information include the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#), the [ADE Bulletin](#), [Academe](#), and several recent books on the academic profession (one of the more clear-eyed analyses is [How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation](#)). There is some evidence that certain specialties within the field of English are more sought-after than others, so seek advice from these sources as well as professors in the fields that interest you. Also, flexibility about where you would be willing to live is always an asset when seeking academic employment. Most academics do not get to choose where they end up living.

If you are committed to pursuing a doctorate, you should think about how you can use your M.A. experience to gather materials for applications: usually a substantial writing sample or samples and three letters of recommendation, as well as GRE and sometimes English Subject Test scores. Also think about presenting a paper at a conference to get a better sense of the academic experience, gain contacts, and add a line to your C.V.

To begin the process of deciding which schools to apply to, check out the ranked list of Ph.D. programs available through the [US News & World Reports website](#). This includes a ranking of programs by specialty (e.g., Gender Studies, Renaissance Studies, etc.). Don't take these ratings as gospel: many excellent schools are not listed at the top. You should think about what scholars you admire and where they teach, as well as whether there is a program that specializes in the subject you plan to pursue (e.g., is there a Center for the Study of Agrarian Drama at the University of Nebraska?). Try getting in touch with faculty members you might want to work with to see if you like them and to put yourself on their radar. Ask your professors for tips and learn if they have any professional contacts to whom you should introduce yourself.

Other factors to consider include:

- ❖ The program's record for placing their PhDs in jobs. Often this information is available on program websites. If it isn't, contact the department to find out.
- ❖ The types of financial aid and work opportunities that are available.
- ❖ The number of graduate credits the program is willing to transfer from your M.A. Many PhD programs in English set narrow limits on these, requiring that you do most of your coursework with them, and so the work you did for your M.A. may not significantly reduce the amount of time or money you will need to spend earning a PhD. Other programs, however, readily accept transferred credits. For example, the University of

Oregon English PhD program will allow you to transfer up to 9 courses from another institution.

With the crisis in jobs, doctoral programs are limiting the number of degrees they award and so more students are competing for fewer spots. So make sure that you don't just apply for your top choices of schools – be flexible. And make sure to ask your favorite faculty for advice on how to survive and thrive in graduate school and beyond.

SECTION V: CONCLUSION

The English Department Faculty is a group of committed teachers and scholars who love working with students. We and the Department Staff are committed to creating the best educational experience and environment for our graduate students. Do not hesitate to come to us with questions — the Directors of the M.A. in English and of Composition, as well as the Program Coordinator, may be especially equipped to answer them. And please take the time out from studying to get to know each other, our department, our university, and our beautiful city.

APPENDIX 1: ADMISSION AND APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Admission to graduate study is granted on the basis of evidence of preparedness to undertake advanced work and the probability of successful completion of the degree. All applicants must hold a B.A. or B.S. degree from a regionally accredited institution (the degree may be in progress at the time of application, but must be completed before admission can be finalized).

Applicants are expected to have extensive experience in literary studies, especially English language and literature. If you do not already have a bachelor's degree in English, we expect you to have taken 20-30 credit hours in literatures in English and writing, so that you come into the program with a knowledge of literary history, excellent writing skills, and experience doing advanced critical analysis in upper-division coursework. We also expect a minimum GPA of 3.25 in all English courses.

Our students come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and your admission file will be evaluated as a whole so that weaknesses in one area may be offset by other strengths.

The Application Process

Applications are submitted electronically through the [Graduate School](#). There is a \$65 non-refundable application fee.

The application for the M.A. in English program must include the following materials:

- ❖ **Statement of purpose:** Approximately 1,000 words explaining your reasons for choosing to undertake graduate work in English, your intellectual training, areas of interest, and why you have chosen to apply to Portland State.
- ❖ **Critical writing sample (15-20 pages total):** A 15-20 page paper representing the applicant's best writing, often a revised essay from an undergraduate course or part of a senior project. It is ideal if the paper considers works or issues identified as areas of interest in the statement of purpose. Do not send Creative Writing such as novel chapters or poetry, but you may include an additional brief piece of analytical writing done for your job, for example, if it shows your writing skills to advantage.
- ❖ **At least 2 letters of recommendation (3 letters preferred):** These should come from a professor or other professional who is qualified to comment on your academic performance and potential, or can attest to your skills as they pertain to your selected program of study.
- ❖ **Unofficial transcripts:** Submit an unofficial transcript from each post-secondary institution you have attended. Unofficial transcripts must meet the Graduate School's [transcript guidelines](#) -- they must be a scan of both the front and back of each page of an official transcript issued to you, and may not be a printout of your academic record from your school's website. If you are accepted into the program and decide to attend, you must submit official transcripts to the Graduate School.
- ❖ **C.V. / Resume (optional):** A C.V. or resume is optional but strongly recommended for applicants who would like to be considered for a Graduate Assistantship.

- ❖ **Graduate Assistantship statement (optional):** If you would like to be considered for one of the graduate assistantships, you must submit an additional statement that details your interest in and/or experience in teaching.

Application Deadlines

There is a once-a-year admission deadline for the M.A. in English on January 15 of each year for the academic year beginning that September. Late applications may be considered in special circumstances. Applications must be submitted by January 15 and include all departmental application materials. Any materials that are sent separately must also meet the deadline.

Applicants will be notified of the program's recommendation for admission by email. All applications are subject to final review and acceptance or rejection by the Office of Graduate Admissions.

Failure to supply complete and accurate information will delay the admission process and subject applicants to the University's policies governing academic dishonesty.

APPENDIX 2: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Any applicant whose native language is not English and who has not received a baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degree from a regionally accredited U.S. institution or an equivalently accredited non-U.S. institution with instruction exclusively in English must pass the Test of English as a Second Language (TOEFL) with a minimum score of 600 on the paper-based test, 100 on the internet-based test, or 250 on the computer-based test. The International English Language Testing System exam (IELTS) may be substituted for the TOEFL; the minimum acceptable score is 7.5.

APPENDIX 3: GRADUATE SCHOOL FORMS AND DEFINITIONS

- ❖ [Application for Awarding of Master's Degree](#)

The application for graduation is completed online, through Banweb. There is a \$30 fee that must be paid at the time the application is submitted. Information from this document will be used for your diploma and the University's Commencement. If you will not be graduating in the term which you had originally applied for graduation, you may defer your application one time without having to pay the fee again by emailing a request to defer to grad@pdx.edu.

- ❖ [GO-14, Dual Degree Form](#)

This form is used to designate courses that will be shared between two PSU Master's degrees.

- ❖ [GO-19, Request for Change of Program](#)

This form is used to change from one graduate degree or certificate program to another, or to add a second degree or certificate program to a program in which you are currently enrolled. Most programs on campus require a full admissions review during the regular admission cycle in order to transfer or add a program to your course of study.

- ❖ [GO-21M, Proposed Transfer Credit](#)

This form must be completed if you have taken any courses at an institution other than PSU that will be applied to your degree.

- ❖ [Graduate Petition](#)

This form is used to petition the Graduate Council for a waiver of a University graduate academic regulation or degree requirement. Please be aware that in no case will a regulation be waived or an exception granted because of ignorance of the regulation or of the assertion that the student was not informed by the advisor or other authority.

Additional University Documents Required For Graduation

Please see the [Summary of Procedures for Master's Degrees](#) for information about additional paperwork required by the University for graduation. For specific University deadlines for each term, see the [Graduate Candidates' Deadlines](#) available on the Graduate School website.

APPENDIX 4: ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FORMS

All forms are available at pdx.edu/english/graduate-forms. These forms must be submitted, with the required signatures, to the Program Coordinator.

A **Degree Completion Plan** must be submitted by the **fifth week of a student's fourth term of study, if you are graduating in the usual two academic years**. If you are working on your M.A. degree part-time, your advisor, the Program Coordinator, and the Program Director will help you ascertain the right time to file this form before graduating. This form is completed and approved by the advisor and kept in the student's academic file in the English Department. No changes in the degree completion plan should be made after the Application for Degree has been submitted.

A **Change of Graduate Advisor** form must be submitted as soon as a student has chosen a new advisor.

A **Request for Leave of Absence**, signed by the student's advisor and the Program Director must be submitted to the department if students wish to be absent for one or more terms (other than summer term).

Appendix 5: “Old” Requirements

(for students matriculating prior to fall 2020)

To finish the program, all students must complete a written General Examination, and either Option I: Focus Area Examination, or Option II: Qualifying Essay, in addition to the respective Oral Examination for each option. Students pursuing full-time studies must submit their approved Degree Completion Plan to the Program Coordinator by the **fifth week of their fourth term of study**.

<u>Option I: Focus Area</u>	<u>Option II: Qualifying Essay</u>
Focus Area Proposal	Qualifying Essay Proposal
General Examination	General Examination
Focus Area Examination	Qualifying Essay
Oral Examination	Oral Examination

For students unsure of which option to pursue, we recommend taking Option I: Focus Area. This two section exam is rigorous and gives you a firm grounding in English studies that will make you a more effective teacher, scholar, writer, administrator, or other professional. We suggest that you choose Option II: Qualifying Essay and the General Examination if you are strongly committed to a specific research project or otherwise believe that a sustained, largely self-directed writing project will best serve your educational goals.

If the candidate fails to pass any part of the Culminating Course of Study, the student’s committee will meet to recommend a course of action. The candidate’s right to retake or rewrite any or all of their culminating materials is not automatic. The University requires a wait of at least three months before retaking any failed final exam. Should the student fail a second examination, disqualification from the program is automatic.

II.D.1. The General Examination

The 4-hour General Examination, required for all M.A. students, is designed to test a student’s knowledge of the field of English. This formal written exam is held the third Friday of Fall and Spring terms (exams are not given during Winter term or Summer session). A changing List of around 15 core texts that will definitely be considered in the examination is published by the beginning of each Spring term, to be used in the Spring and Fall General Exams of the next year. (So, the List that will be used for the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 General Exams was released in Spring 2019.) See the 2020 List below.

The General Examination is compiled from questions submitted to the M.A. in English Committee by the Graduate English Faculty (see Appendix 5: Sample Examinations). This examination expects

that through coursework and supplementary reading, students have completed a course of study that allows them to:

- ❖ Identify and analyze issues of form, genre, and style;
- ❖ Understand how to do a close reading of a literary text
- ❖ Discuss patterns and developments in literature and culture across historical periods, including periods before 1800;
- ❖ Discuss patterns and developments across regions and nations, including North America, Britain, and other Anglophone contexts.
- ❖ Discuss the roles of political, social, and cultural forces in the production, reception, and analysis of texts; and
- ❖ Discuss the theoretical perspectives that inform your approach to English studies.

About The List:

It is our conviction that giving students some parameters and specific works that all students being examined that year might study in some depth will result in an improved closing experience for our M.A. As a rule, we expect that students will know the historical coverage model of English, American, and World literature such as that encountered in the *Norton Anthologies*, for example. "The List" should help you to focus and enrich your studying for the exam, and help you to explore interesting and influential works.

Having a list of works to study does not mean that the General Exam will ONLY include questions about the works on "The List", but we guarantee that these works will be the matter of some of the questions. Students will have plenty of leeway to discuss other texts that they have studied.

"The List" is only a core that students can count on, and faculty need not "teach to the List" during any year, while students should not feel constrained by the List in their class choice or studies. Students will know how to discuss and analyze literature and theory from their studies in classes, and can thus transpose this expertise to considering The List. We encourage students to form study groups to discuss works on the List. ENG 531 may use some of its class time discussing works on the List.

M.A. Reading List---for 2020 General Exams

This list of around 15 works of poetry, prose, and drama arises from faculty members who nominated crucial texts in the field of literature in English. The list changes each academic year. Questions on the General Exam will assuredly ask you to discuss the works listed here, but the General Exam questions will not be limited to these works, and may ask you about others. You may choose to write about texts not on the list. But, knowing well the works on this list will stand you in good stead in preparing for the General Exam.

Anon, *Beowulf* (1000?)

Anon, *Pearl* (c.1400)

William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (c.1606)
 Aphra Behn, *Oronooko* (1688)
 Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)
 Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette* (1797)
 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)
 Mary Prince, *A History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* (1831)
 Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (1847)
 Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853)
 Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896)
 Henry James, *What Maisie Knew* (1897)
 T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922)
 Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (1936)
 Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)
 Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956)
 Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (1988)
 Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (2006)

II.D.3. Option I. Focus Area

The Focus Area Option gives students the opportunity to read widely and deeply in an area of interest they share with their advisor. The following are some sample areas:

- ❖ British Women Writers, 1700-1900
- ❖ History of Rhetoric
- ❖ American Literature, 1607-1800
- ❖ Race and Modernism
- ❖ Fifteenth-Century British Poetry
- ❖ Composition Theory and Postmodern Subjectivity
- ❖ Allegorical Forms in Literature

a. Focus Area Proposal

Students who choose Option I must submit a Focus Area Proposal to their Examining Committee. This one page document— approximately 500 words — should be concise, outlining the project and providing a timeline for completion. The Focus Area Proposal must:

- ❖ Identify Focus Area (defined by certain criteria, be they generic, formal, thematic, theoretical or historical)
- ❖ Provide some questions that shape your initial approach to this Focus Area
- ❖ Attach a reading list of primary and secondary sources, at least 20 texts, that the student will be responsible for reading
- ❖ Set forth the rationale for including this particular set of texts

- ❖ Outline the project and timeline for completion (By “timeline” we mean, will you be doing it on your own, or as a part of an ENG 505? and what terms will you be engaged in this intensive study? We understand that you may be working on this Focus Area right up until your exams.)

b. Focus Area Proposal Timeline Considerations

Typically, students pursuing full-time studies submit a working draft of their Focus Area Proposal to their examining committee one term before they submit the Degree Completion Plan. This provides the committee time to review and suggest revisions to the Focus Area Proposal. The approved Focus Area Proposal must be submitted as part of the Degree Completion Plan by the fifth week of their fourth term of study.

c. Focus Area Examination

The Focus Area Examination takes two hours and tests a student’s knowledge of the specific course of study. The Focus Area Examination is created by the student’s Advisor in consultation with the student’s Examination Committee and will be administered the same day as the General Examination.

II.D.3. Option II: Qualifying Essay

The Qualifying Essay option gives students the opportunity to engage in advanced research methods to explore a specific topic in depth.

a. The Form of the Qualifying Essay

The English M.A. Qualifying Essay should be an essay of publishable quality and length – approximately 10,000 words – that makes an original contribution to a field of study. Students should write the Qualifying Essay with a particular publication venue in mind, such as an academic journal. Although students are not required to submit their Qualifying Essay for publication, they are encouraged to do so. While the Qualifying Essay is intended to be a publishable scholarly article, individual students and advisors may also elect to include supplementary written materials or activities alongside the Qualifying Essay (e.g., an Annotated Bibliography, a critical survey). Such material will be beyond the required minimum length for the Qualifying Essay.

The Qualifying Essay should accomplish the following:

- ❖ Present a well-defined, detailed problem appropriate to the time frame and page constraints of the Department’s requirements. The argument should be well organized and show an understanding of the intended audience. It should be written with care for style and balance, use sophisticated and appropriate vocabulary, and use MLA-style formatting.

- ❖ Demonstrate a wide reading of pertinent background material, historical and current, especially regarding theoretical and cultural issues that bear upon the Qualifying Essay topic.
- ❖ Demonstrate understanding of the critical conversation in the field relevant to the problem, and how the Qualifying Essay contributes to that conversation.
- ❖ Demonstrate familiarity with the methodologies currently used in the discipline, in relation to both the content of the Qualifying Essay and the form of its research methods.
- ❖ Aim to be publishable.

A student's Qualifying Essay advisor or examining committee may have other suggestions and requirements for the writing of a particular Qualifying Essay.

b. The Qualifying Essay Proposal

Students who wish to write a Qualifying Essay must submit a draft proposal to their examining committee defining a focused topic one term before they submit the Degree Completion Plan. This provides the committee time to review and suggest revisions to the Qualifying Essay Proposal. The approved Qualifying Essay Proposal must be submitted as part of the Degree Completion Plan by the fifth week of their fourth term of study. The proposal must:

- ❖ be two to three pages in length
- ❖ consist of a clear, concise statement of the Qualifying Essay project or problem to be explored, its significance in the context of previous scholarship and criticism (identify a gap in our understanding of the particular topic and suggest the benefits of improving our knowledge of this topic), and an account of the methodologies or critical approaches to be used
- ❖ include a preliminary bibliography, including both primary and secondary materials.

Students should seek the help of their advisors in writing the proposal. When the proposal is completed, the proposal becomes part of the Degree Completion Plan. The Director of Literary Studies will review the proposal, and may have questions or suggest changes before approving the project.

Approval to write a Qualifying Essay is not automatic; students may be asked to revise the proposal, and only superior proposals will be approved.

c. Qualifying Essay Timeline Considerations

Realistically, the Qualifying Essay is a long project, and unless you have a great deal of it already done when your proposal is accepted, it is at least two terms of work. Since the Qualifying Essay must be given to your committee two weeks before the Oral Examination, and University policy is that the absolute last date to schedule an oral is in the 9th week of any term, the first four weeks of the term in which you are defending the Qualifying Essay should be used only for final editing and proofreading. Optimally, a student would distribute the Qualifying Essay to their committee at the end of the term prior to the one in which s/he intends to graduate.

In sum, you should give yourself at least a full calendar year, following the approval of your Qualifying Essay proposal, in which to write the Qualifying Essay. For example, to graduate in spring of 2021, the Qualifying Essay proposal should ideally be written and approved by the end of spring term 2020.

II.D.4. Oral Examination

The Oral Examination is the final stage of the Culminating Course of Study for Option I and Option II. After the student has completed the General Examination and either the Focus Area Examination or the Qualifying Essay, there are three possible scenarios:

- The examination committee passes the student on the written portion of the Culminating Course of Study and initiates the process of scheduling the Oral Examination.
- The examination committee conditionally passes the student on the written portion of the Culminating Course of Study and initiates the process of scheduling the Oral Examination. The student may be asked to rewrite one of the examination essays, or be prepared at the Oral to discuss further why the written portion of the exam was borderline acceptable. Should the student fail to pass the Oral Examination, they may be asked to retake or revise portions of the written examination (General Examination, Focus Area Exam, or Qualifying Essay) before retaking the Oral Examination.
- The examination committee **does not** pass the student on the written portion of the Culminating Course of Study; the student must repeat some or all of this portion of the examination before proceeding to the Oral Examination.

All students must be enrolled for at least one credit hour in the term in which they take their Oral Examination and satisfy the requirements for the degree (including the Second Language requirement). If a leave of absence is taken while a student is working on either the Focus Area or the Qualifying Essay, the student is not allowed to utilize the services of their committee, and the Graduate School will process no paperwork until the student is re-registered. The Advisor arranges a convenient time for the Oral Examination with the committee, based on the term deadlines set by the Graduate School. Option I examiners may ask questions arising from either the General Examination or the Focus Area Examination. Option II examiners may ask questions arising from either the General Examination or the Qualifying Essay. The student must deliver **a complete copy of the Qualifying Essay to Committee members at least two weeks prior to the examination date in the format determined by each committee member, either electronic or hard copy**. If a copy of the Qualifying Essay is not received by the deadline, the committee has the discretion to postpone the oral exam to a following term. Passing the Oral Examination requires a favorable majority vote of the committee. The committee may recommend that the student repeat the Oral Examination, the Focus Area and/or the General Examination. For Option II students, committee members may request revisions to the Qualifying Essay before it is accepted for Graduation. Option II students must submit their completed Qualifying Essay in PDF format to the Program Coordinator.

For all candidates, the General Examination and the Focus Area Examination or the Qualifying Essay are read only by the student's examining committee and must be passed by a majority of its members.

APPENDIX 6: SAMPLE GENERAL AND FOCUS AREA EXAMINATIONS

SAMPLE GENERAL EXAMINATION

In your answers, do not repeat information from one essay in another, and be sure that in the exam as a whole you demonstrate your ability to do the following:

- ❖ Identify and analyze issues of form, genre, and style;
- ❖ Discuss patterns and developments in literature and culture across historical periods, including periods before 1800;
- ❖ Discuss patterns and developments across regions and nations, including North America, Britain, and other Anglophone contexts.
- ❖ Discuss the roles of political, social, and cultural forces in the production, reception, and analysis of texts; and
- ❖ Discuss the theoretical perspectives that inform your approach to English studies.

Choose two of the questions from this section and answer them in two detailed essays. Each essay should take you about 2 hours to complete. Make sure to pace yourself accordingly.

1. Write an essay in which you discuss and compare several works that we might label "literature of social protest," where the writer/narrative persona has as a putative agenda the criticism, satire, or amelioration of political or cultural conditions. What conclusions do you draw from this comparison?
2. Discuss the value of three pre-1800 rhetoricians to current composition theory.
3. If you could reformulate the *canon* of literature during one literary period, what work(s) would you add? Explain.
4. Explicate one of the following poems, paying attention to both form and meaning, and enriching your explication with what you may know of the aesthetics and context of each poet.

The Garden of Love
by William Blake

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore;
And I saw it was filled with graves,

And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.

In My Craft or Sullen Art
by Dylan Thomas

In my craft or sullen art
Exercised in the still night
When only the moon rages
And the lovers lie abed
With all their griefs in their arms,
I labour by singing light
Not for ambition or bread
Or the strut and trade of charms
On the ivory stages
But for the common wages
Of their most secret heart.

Not for the proud man apart
From the raging moon I write
On these spindrift pages
Nor for the towering dead
With their nightengales and psalms
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages
Nor heed my craft or art.

5. Discuss how a reading focusing on **gender** opens up interpretative possibilities. Choose one text from the List, and one text not from the List.

6. The two dramas on the List, Pinter's *The Homecoming* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, have continued to incite controversy among critics about their interpretation. Choose one play and discuss some of the different critical controversies about the meaning of the work.

OPTION I: SAMPLE FOCUS AREA EXAMINATION

Topic: Comedy

Answer the two questions below, allowing approximately one hour for each. Please use specific literary examples for your answers, and take care not to use the same examples for both of your essays.

1. In his essay "The Argument of Comedy," Northrop Frye offers the following assessment of Ben Jonson's drama:

[T]he moral quality of the society presented is not the point of the comic resolution. In Jonson's *Volpone* the final assertion of the moral norm takes the form of a social revenge on Volpone, and the play ends with a great bustle of sentences to penal servitude and the galleys. One feels perhaps that the audience's sense of the moral norm does not need so much hard labor. In *The Alchemist*, when Lovewit returns to his house, the virtuous characters have proved so weak and the rascals so ingenious that the action dissolves in laughter. Whichever is morally the better ending, that of *The Alchemist* is more concentrated comedy. *Volpone* is starting to move toward tragedy, toward the vision of greatness which develops *hubris* and catastrophe.

Do you agree with Frye's assessment of *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* and their implications for the didactic function of comedy? As you bring specific evidence to bear on your answer (from these plays, other literary works, or other criticism/theory), make sure to consider whether Bakhtin's theory of laughter can enrich or complicate Frye's analysis of the relationship between comic resolution and society's moral norms.

2. According to the entry on "Absurdism" from the *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, the "sense of a fundamental incongruity between human beings and the conditions of their existence is a recognition of the absurd and calls for a response that mixes humor and despair. The signature attitude of absurdism is therefore black humor, an ambiguous mixture of tragic pathos and preposterous comedy." The Dictionary identifies "absurdism" as a literary and philosophical movement that flourished after World War II and is exemplified in the work of writers such as Beckett. Yet in what ways do twentieth-century renderings of the absurd have antecedents in the comic techniques of earlier eras? While in your response you may refer to several literary works, you should include a discussion of Chaucer and at least one writer from the period from 1700 to 1900.

APPENDIX 7: ENGLISH M.A. STUDENT TIMELINE

The following timeline reflects the deadlines included in this handbook for those who entered the program Fall Term and intend to graduate Spring Term. The Department of English does not offer any culminating examinations during the summer.

	Fall	Winter	Spring	Fall	Winter	Spring
Meet with Advisor	Sept					
Choose Field for OFE			April			
Submit Draft of M.A. Essay Proposal (if necessary)						
Submit Degree Completion Plan				Oct		
Finalize Second Language Requirement					January	
Submit Application for Degree						March
Oral Examination						May

APPENDIX 8: DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LISTSERV

The Department of English will use a listserv to communicate important information to our graduate students. We will add your official PSU email address to our listserv for all correspondence and you are encouraged to check your PSU email using the web interface at mail.pdx.edu. OIT recommends using the web interface for several reasons.

- **Reliability:** Checking your PSU Google Mail directly ensures that you do not miss any crucial or time-sensitive communications from PSU that might be lost if there are server problems with your external mail provider, or problems with your mail filter. Note that you are required to monitor your PSU email account. For more info, check the [PSU Electronic Communications Policy](#).
- **Usability:** The web interface offers seamless integration with other components of the Google Apps at PSU suite, enabling easy document sharing, meeting creation, and communication using groups. You are also able to take advantage of Google mails many helpful mail organization features, such as smart labels and filters, as well as its popular and user-friendly interface.
- **Accessibility:** The web interface is accessible from any internet-connected computer by visiting mail.pdx.edu, and requires no special configuration or setup.

Some on-campus users choose to have mail forwarded from their PSU email account to an external email account. If you choose to set a mail forward in your PSU Google Mail, you may follow the Google-provided instructions below:

<https://mail.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?answer=10957>

The Office of Information Technology recommends that you **do not forward** your PSU Google Mail to a commercial (personal) Gmail account, as doing so will likely lead to confusion when interacting with the various facets of Google Apps. Instead, you may follow the Google-provided instructions below for Managing Multiple Accounts:

<https://support.google.com/mail/bin/topic.py?hl=en&topic=1669030&parent=1668953&ctx=topic>

If you have any questions or concerns about Google Mail at PSU, please contact the User Support Services Helpdesk at 503-725-HELP (4357), email help@pdx.edu, or stop by Smith Memorial Student Union room 18.