

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**  
**THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA**

**Handbook for the Master of Arts Degree**

Updated August 2022

## **Overview**

The Master of Arts in English program is a freestanding, one-year course of study that provides students with a rigorous foundation in literary studies. Our graduate seminars, taught by our world-class faculty, are designed to introduce students to literary traditions and major theoretical frameworks, while honing students' skills in literary analysis and academic writing. Our M.A. students have the freedom to take seminars that serve their intellectual and professional interests. The M.A. may be used a preparatory degree to then apply to doctoral programs, but our alumni also go on to have careers in both the public and private sectors.

## **M.A. Requirements**

M.A. students are required to successfully complete:

1. 8 graduate seminars (4 in the fall semester, 4 in the spring semester), including:
  - a. 1 7000-level graduate seminar
2. 1 foreign language exam or equivalent (see policies below)

## **Policies & Guidelines**

Please be aware of the following policies and guidelines for the Master of Arts program. If you are unsure about any aspect of these policies and guidelines, or if you have a special case, please consult the Graduate Chair and Graduate Coordinator.

### **A. Coursework Policies**

1. The majority of grad seminars are divided into two levels: 5000 and 7000.
  - a. 5000-level seminars are broader in conception and aimed at coverage of a particular literary period, genre, or author(s). In 5000-level courses, instructors are encouraged (but not required) to include assignments that venture away from conventional academic writing (public-facing, creative, creative-critical, multimodal, etc.).
  - b. 7000-level seminars will be narrower in conception and will address more circumscribed problems, themes, objects, or methods. Instructors are encouraged to assign a full-length (20+ pages) academic essay as their final assignment.
  - c. M.A. students are required to take at least 1 7000-level course, and are encouraged to balance 5000- and 7000-level courses so as to not overload themselves with writing during a single semester.
2. Each semester, M.A. students may take up to 1 graduate seminar out of the English Department. Permission from the instructor or the host department may be required. Please be advised that other schools at Penn, such as the Graduate School of Education and the Law School, have different policies about allowing outside students into their graduate

seminars, so students should plan and communicate with the course's professor as early as possible.

3. Master of Liberal Arts (MLA) courses in literature may count, with permission, as courses within the English Department. These courses are often taught by English faculty members, but are not actually run through our department. Students interested in a literature-focused MLA course should consult the Graduate Chair about whether or not the course will count, and decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.
4. M.A. students are not permitted to take Independent Studies.
5. M.A. students are welcome to take ENGL 6000, the department's Proseminar, in their fall semester, but it is not a requirement. The Proseminar is an introduction to graduate study in literature.
6. All graduate students are allowed to audit a maximum of 2 courses per semester. This includes undergraduate- and graduate-level language courses in other departments.
7. All graduate students are allowed to take up to 1 incomplete per year. See the policy below for more information.
8. Students will receive a letter grade for their seminar performance. M.A. students must maintain a 3.0 (or B) average to be considered in good standing.

## **B. Incompletes**

1. All students are allowed one incomplete per year, though exceptions may be granted in unusual circumstances.
2. SAS has the following guidelines for short and long incompletes.
  - a. A short Incomplete (I) must be made up by the end of the fourth full week of the next term (summer session included).
  - b. A long Incomplete (II) must be made up by the end of the next regular term in which the student is enrolled (summer session excluded).
3. Short Incompletes will be granted with the permission of the instructor. Long Incompletes or exceptions to the one-per-year rule must be discussed with both the instructor and the Grad Chair. The Grad Chair may ask the student to produce a timeline for completing the work.
4. M.A. students have less time in the department than their Ph.D. counterparts, and therefore less time to satisfy incompletes. We strongly recommend that M.A. students only take an incomplete in the case of true emergencies, and that they work closely with their instructor and the Graduate chair to make a reasonable plan for completing the work.

### **C. Distribution of seminars**

1. M.A. students are not required to fulfill distribution requirements and can instead prioritize the courses that best serve their short- and long-term goals. M.A. students are encouraged to discuss their goals and course of study carefully with their advisor, the Graduate Chair, at the start of each semester.

### **D. Research Requirement Policies**

1. Our M.A. program does not have a thesis requirement. Like many of our peer institutions, we've moved away from the traditional model of a forty- to eighty-page mini-dissertation in favor of requiring students to write shorter, self-contained research essays.
  - a. These essays are built into our coursework structure. Each 7000-level course will require students to write a research paper of twenty- to twenty-five-pages, and each 5000-level course will require a research-driven piece that may be academic, creative, or public-facing.
  - b. At the end of the program, each M.A. student will have eight pieces of research-driven writing to develop into articles, writing samples, or future chapters of a dissertation. We've found that this model of research and writing better serves our M.A. students as they continue their careers beyond Penn.

### **E. Language Requirement**

1. MA students are required to pass 1 foreign language requirement.
  - a. In this case, a “foreign language” is any written language besides English. Students with native fluency in languages other than English may take exams in those languages.
2. To satisfy this requirement, M.A. students must demonstrate intermediate reading comprehension in the foreign language. They may do so in one of the following ways:
  - a. Pass a departmental language exam.
    - i. The exam is offered once per semester.
    - ii. Examinees receive 2 short passages (usually a scanned page of a book for each) in the language of their choice. They have two hours to produce English translations of each passage. They are allowed to use a physical and/or online language dictionary.
    - iii. There is no oral component of the exam.

- iv. Exams are graded on a pass/fail basis and examiners don't generally correct or mark the exam.
  - v. Students may choose any language: in rare cases, if there are no available instructors to create and grade the exam, the language may be unavailable, but we generally strive to find someone qualified to administer an exam in the language of your choice.
- b. Obtain permission to pass the requirement by passing a language class. This is permitted on a case-by-case basis and should be proposed to the Grad Chair.
- 3. The Summer Language courses offered by the Grad Division are, unfortunately, not open to M.A. students.

## **F. Working Groups**

- 1. The English Department is home to several interdisciplinary working groups. You can find a full, up-to-date list of groups on the department's website.
- 2. As M.A. students, you are welcome to attend and/or participate in these groups. We particularly encourage exploration for M.A. students, who often use this year as an introduction to unfamiliar fields.

## **G. Graduation**

- 1. M.A. students will apply to graduate in the May degree cycle in the spring semester. Reminders to apply will go out mid-semester.
- 2. Once you have applied for graduation, the Grad Coordinator will work with students to complete all necessary forms.
- 3. Penn has only one Commencement ceremony per year, in May. Students are not required to attend Commencement, but they may choose to do so. Diplomas are mailed to your permanent address a few months after your degrees are conferred.

# Time Management and Etiquette

## Time Management

1. Prioritize curricular requirements (coursework and exams) over extracurricular activities (working groups, department social events, etc.). This does not mean that you shouldn't attend the latter, but rather the former needs to be done or scheduled to be done first.
2. Expect delays. Quality research and writing takes longer than we think it will, often because we underestimate how many revisions need to be built into the process of producing a quality draft. Build delays, make-up days, and revision days into your timeline when you're planning out your semester.
3. Your work expands to fill the time you give it. If you give yourself 2 hours to read a theoretical essay or all afternoon to read the same essay, it will take that long. It is not easy to give yourself enough time but not too much time, but it's a balance worth working towards.
4. Make time for administrative tasks. Success in grad school, as in any other working environment, will depend in part on your ability to hand things in on time, communicate promptly and clearly with your colleagues and supervisors, and to follow directions. We highly recommend using a calendar (either web-based or physical versions will do), scheduling short blocks of time per day to read and answer emails, scheduling deadlines as soon as you have them, and utilizing to-do lists (or an equivalent).

## Writing Guidelines

1. More isn't better; better is better. Observe word limits for seminar papers.
2. Everyone loves to read clear, elegant, understandable prose. Focus on communicating with your reader, rather than on constructing something that sounds impressive. Remember that the foundational and theoretical essays you will be reading in your graduate seminars are not necessarily models for your own seminar paper. Look to literary-focused essays in major academic journals to find inspiration for your own writing style.
3. Ask for help / advice on your writing when you need it. While first and final drafts are often written alone at our desks, the act of producing a piece of academic writing is a fundamentally social act, so don't be afraid to swap and comment on each other's writing. You should also feel free to ask advice on reading and setting timelines to complete papers. Your advisor is a good source of this information.
4. Always follow any formatting guidelines provided by your instructor. If no guidelines are provided, generally include the following on all your papers:

- a. A basic heading (name, course title, assignment title)
  - b. A title (unless it's a shorter assignment, like a response paper, in which case the assignment title will do)
  - c. Page numbers
  - d. A properly-formatted bibliography or works cited (if required)
  - e. An easy-to-find file name, something like: lastname, response paper 2.
5. Proofread. Then proofread again. If you have difficulty spotting errors in your own writing, consider using a third-party proofreading software like Grammarly or swapping drafts with a friend to identify errors. If you're having concerns about your writing, do meet with your instructor and advisor to discuss resources for improving.

## **Etiquette**

- 1. Be kind, patient, and courteous to faculty, administrators, and peers.
- 2. Strive to be a generous contributor in graduate seminars and at talks. Generous, here, means preparing well and offering sincere questions, but also giving space to others' questions and ideas. It is tempting in our field to always critique and challenge, but you and everyone else will get more out of your academic conversations if you lead with genuine curiosity and try to think with the texts you are reading.
- 3. Respond to emails within 24 hours, even if just to acknowledge receipt.
- 4. Arrive on time for seminars, meeting, and talks.
- 5. Thank faculty and peers for comments on seminar papers, exams, chapters, and any work-in-progress. Thank administrators when they help you.
- 6. Turn in administrative forms and applications on time. Give faculty as much lead time as possible for letters, signatures, etc. (generally at least a month for letters, a week for signatures and basic forms). Please do not assume that lack of preparation on your part will translate into an emergency on anyone else's.
- 7. Err on the side of formality rather than familiarity. Most of our faculty prefer to be addressed by graduate students by their first name, but it helps to address anyone you haven't met yet as "Professor \_\_\_\_." When writing faculty at other institutions for the first time (with a conference invitation or a request to meet), address them as "Professor \_\_\_\_."

## **Helpful Acronyms we Use**

<b>GEA</b>	Graduate English Association
<b>GEC</b>	Graduate Executive Committee, Department of English
<b>SAS</b>	School of Arts & Sciences
<b>GAS or GSAS</b>	Graduate Division, School of Arts & Sciences
<b>GAPSA</b>	Graduate and Professional Student Assembly
<b>SAS-gov</b>	Student Government of the Graduate Students at the School of Arts & Sciences
<b>SHS</b>	Student Health Services
<b>CAPS</b>	Counseling and Psychological Services
<b>SIS</b>	Student Intervention Services
<b>OSC</b>	Office of Student Conduct
<b>GSC</b>	Graduate Student Center
<b>ISS</b>	International Student Services
<b>OGC</b>	Office of General Council
<b>ABD</b>	All but Dissertation
<b>WIP</b>	Work-in-Progress

## **English Department Contact Information**

### **Faculty Leadership**

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## **FBH Building Management**

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## **Discrimination Policies and Violence Prevention**

The University of Pennsylvania has strict rules on discrimination and violence prevention. The University values diversity and seeks talented students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, creed, national or ethnic origin, citizenship status, age, disability, veteran status or any other legally protected class status in the administration of its admissions, financial aid, educational or athletic programs, or other University-administered programs or in its employment practices.

Below is a list of useful University websites outlining policies as well as available resources:

Sexual Harassment Policy

<http://provost.upenn.edu/policies/pennbook/2013/02/15/sexual-harassment-policy>

Racial Harassment Policy

<http://www.upenn.edu/affirm-action/policies-handbooks.html>

Office of Student Disabilities Services

<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/>

Gender Neutral Restrooms

[http://www.facilities.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/gender\\_map\\_5\\_3\\_lr.pdf](http://www.facilities.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/gender_map_5_3_lr.pdf)

Penn Violence Prevention

<https://secure.www.upenn.edu/vpul/pvp/definitionsandpolicies>

Reporting Responsibilities for Sexual Violence

<https://secure.www.upenn.edu/vpul/pvp/staffandfaculty.php>

For a Complete List of University Policies and Regulations

<http://www.upenn.edu/services/policies.php>.

## **Confidential Resources**

Special Services, Division of Public Safety (DPS)  
4040 Chestnut Street  
(215) 898-6600

Penn Women's Center (PWC)  
3643 Locust Walk  
(215) 898-8611

Student Health Service (SHS)  
3535 Market Street, Suite 100  
(215) 746-3535

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)  
3624 Market Street  
(215) 898-7021

The Office of the Chaplain  
240 Houston Hall  
(215) 898-8456

Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Center  
3901 Spruce Street  
(215) 898-5044

African American Resource Center  
3643 Locust Walk  
(215) 898-0104

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)  
(888) 321-4433

Office of Sexual Violence Prevention & Education  
VPUL, 3611 Locust Walk  
(215) 898-6081

Office of the Ombudsman  
113 Duhring Wing  
236 S. 34th Street  
(215) 898-8261

## Resources for Graduate Student Life

Graduate Student Center  
<https://gsc.upenn.edu>  
3615 Locust Walk  
(215) 746-6868

Lounge & study space w/ free coffee!  
Hosts social & cultural events (including off-site trips)  
Hosts informative programming on meeting academic goals, navigating academia, student finances, and better work/life balance.

Career Services  
<https://careerservices.upenn.edu>  
3718 Locust Walk #20  
(215) 898-7531

Runs 1:1 career counseling meetings and mock-interviews.  
Provides extensive resources for every aspect of career development.  
Provides access to career-exploration tools (most are web-based).  
Available to current students and alumni.

CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services)  
<https://caps.wellness.upenn.edu>  
3624 Market Street, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor West  
(215) 898-7021

Your first stop for addressing mental and emotional health needs.  
Provides short- and long-term counseling and referrals to external practitioners.  
Walk-ins are welcome during business hours and a clinician can be reached by phone 24/7.

Weingarten Center  
<https://wlrc.vpul.upenn.edu>  
220 South 40<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 260  
(215) 573-9235

Provides learning consultations for students looking to improve their skills in a range of areas, including time and project management, organization, academic reading, research and writing, problem-solving, and exam prep.

Penn Women's Center <a href="https://pwc.vpul.upenn.edu">https://pwc.vpul.upenn.edu</a> 3642 Locust Walk (215) 898-8611	Lounge, meeting & study space with eco-friendly kitchen. Runs support services with confidential crisis / options counseling with referrals. Hosts social and academic events centered around gender justice.
African-American Resource Center <a href="https://aarc.upenn.edu">https://aarc.upenn.edu</a> 3643 Locust Walk (215) 898-0104	Provides advocacy and information to all members of Penn community, with special focus on members of African descent. Runs support activities for men and women of color at Penn, including monthly Women of Color Networking Lunch. Runs the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Symposium.
LGBT Center <a href="https://lgbtc.vpul.upenn.edu">https://lgbtc.vpul.upenn.edu</a> 3907 Spruce Street (215) 898-5044	Provides resources, advising, and advocacy for LGBT members of the Penn community. Runs QPenn, a week-long LGBTQ cultural celebration usually taking place in March. Runs workshops and programming for all Penn community members to learn more about LGBTQ issues.
Makuu: The Black Cultural Center <a href="https://makuu.vpul.upenn.edu">https://makuu.vpul.upenn.edu</a> The Arch, 3602 Locust Walk, Suite G17 (215) 573-0823	Provides student resource advising and program support for Black-identifying students at Penn. Hosts Kwanzaa celebrations and Graduation celebrations.
Pan-Asian American Community House <a href="https://paach.vpul.upenn.edu">https://paach.vpul.upenn.edu</a> The Arch, 3601 Locust Walk, Suite G22 (215) 746-6046	Network of several organizations that provide community, advocacy, and resources for Asian and Asian-American students.
La Casa Latina <a href="https://lacasa.vpul.upenn.edu">https://lacasa.vpul.upenn.edu</a> The Arch, 3601 Locust Walk, Suite G12 (215) 746-6043	Network of several organizations that provide community, advocacy, and resources for Latinx students.