

**THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE HANDBOOK  
2017-2018**



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## **THE GRADUATE PROGRAM IN ENGLISH**

The Graduate Program in English and American Literature at Boston University provides comprehensive training in all areas of English studies. The English Department offers programs leading to the Master of Arts and the Doctor of Philosophy degrees. Course work is offered in historical periods, individual authors, important literary movements, literary theory and the history of criticism, and philology and linguistics. All students develop a broad competence in all literary periods while moving to a more specialized knowledge of a single area or topic.

The faculty in the Department of English is large and diverse in its teaching and research interests, but the Graduate Program is nonetheless relatively small and intimate. About five students enter the Ph.D. program every year, while the number of MA students varies. Graduate seminars usually have seven to fifteen students. Individually designed tutorials are available for doctoral students.

### **MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM**

The M.A. degree is ordinarily completed in one academic year. It is a terminal degree, and students should not enter the M.A. program with the expectation of moving into the doctoral program. (M.A. students may apply to the doctoral program but are given no advantages over external applicants). M.A. requirements include:

- Eight graduate-level courses. Of these eight semester-courses, at least six must be 700-level graduate seminars, and up to two may be 500- or 600-level courses that include undergraduate students.
- Demonstration of a reading knowledge of one foreign language at an intermediate level. This can be done in one of the following ways: 1) scoring a minimum 530 on the SAT II test; 2) passing a translation test; 3) passing a noncredit graduate reading course in an appropriate foreign language (such courses are currently numbered 621); or 4) receiving a B or better in a graduate level literature course taught in a foreign language (4 credits, numbered 500 or higher; one of these courses can count toward the eight courses required for the degree). Note that courses taken for credit cannot be taken as a fifth course in any semester. The foreign language requirement may also be satisfied by receiving at least a B in a graduate-level course in Old English, if and when it is offered (Old English courses count toward the eight courses required for the degree).
- Candidates for the degree in English and American Literature are required to take at least one course that focuses primarily on critical theory, critical method, or the history of criticism (courses that fulfill this requirement are so identified in their course descriptions).

### **Selection of Courses**

Eight semester-courses are required for the degree, of which not more than four may be taken in one semester. All courses are chosen in consultation with the candidate's adviser. Candidates must demonstrate by their proposed program of courses, together with their completed undergraduate degree program of courses, a reasonably comprehensive coverage of English and American literature from the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century. Candidates are not permitted to take Directed Study courses as part of their M.A. program.

### **Course Credit in Related Fields**

As part of the total program of eight semester-courses required for the degree, candidates may, with the adviser's written approval, elect a single one-semester course at the graduate level outside the English Department in a related area.

### **Academic Standards**

To be awarded the M.A. degree, the candidate must maintain a grade point average of 3.0 in both semesters. The Department reserves the right to discontinue at any time the registration of students whose work or progress is judged unsatisfactory.

### **Residence Requirement**

M.A. students must be in residence during the academic year.

### **Further Information**

For more information pertaining to M.A. students, see "General Policies for All Graduate Students" (below).

## DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM

In the Ph.D. program, students move toward specialization in a particular area of English studies. Students ideally complete the Ph.D. in five or six years, combining their study with Teaching Fellowships and duty-free dissertation fellowships.<sup>1</sup> The requirements include:

- A successful review by the Graduate Committee upon completion of the M.A.
- Eight graduate-level courses beyond the M.A.
- Demonstration of a reading knowledge of one foreign language at an advanced level (may be the same language used for the M.A.) or two foreign languages at an intermediate level (one of which may have been completed as part of the M.A. degree). Advanced knowledge is demonstrated by scoring a minimum of 650 on the SAT II test. Intermediate knowledge can be demonstrated in one of the following ways: 1) scoring a minimum 530 on the SAT II test; 2) passing a translation test 3) passing a noncredit graduate reading course in an appropriate foreign language (such courses are currently numbered 621); or 4) receiving a B or better in a graduate level literature course taught in a foreign language (4 credits, numbered 500 or higher; one of these courses can count toward the eight courses required for the degree). Note that courses taken for credit cannot be taken as a fifth course in any semester. The foreign language requirement may also be satisfied by receiving at least a B in a graduate-level course in Old English, if and when it is offered (Old English courses count toward the eight courses required for the degree).
- Two 2-credit pedagogy courses (these credits do not count toward the degree)
- Completion of a Qualifying Oral Examination
- Submission and approval of a Dissertation Prospectus
- Completion and defense of a Ph.D. dissertation

### **Ideal Progress to Degree**

- Year 1:** M.A. year.
- Year 2:** Course work and study toward the completion of the language requirement.
- Year 3:** Completion of course work and language requirements. In the spring of Year 3, an examination area is defined, the Qualifying Oral Examination committee formed, and a reading list drawn up.
- Year 4:** Fall: Students should take the Qualifying Exam early in the Fall semester.  
Spring: Prospectus submitted and dissertation writing begins.
- Years 5+:** Dissertation.

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<sup>1</sup> These guidelines are relevant for students entering the Ph.D. program after 2013. For previous guidelines, consult the Director of Graduate Studies.

## **Financial Aid/Fellowships**

All students officially entering the Ph.D. program receive five years of guaranteed funding, including a mix of teaching and duty-free fellowships, that covers the full cost of tuition and basic health insurance, and also pays a living stipend. Additional funding may be available in the form of summer fellowships. Teaching Fellows are required to teach one course each semester, under faculty supervision. Ph.D. students making good progress to degree may also qualify for additional funding beyond the fifth year; however, such support is not guaranteed. For more information on fellowships and prizes, see the “Financial Aid” section of the departmental website (under the “Graduate” menu).

## **Teaching**

Boston University graduates entering the job market benefit from their pedagogical experience, including teaching self-designed courses in both literature and composition for which they have served as the official instructor. New Teaching Fellows sometimes assist faculty in large lecture courses by leading discussion sections, grading, and giving guest lectures. Advanced Ph.D. students design and teach their own introductory literature courses for non-majors and design and teach topic-based courses in the Boston University Writing Program. Some senior doctoral students may occasionally teach other courses as well. Each semester, every Teaching Fellow is assigned a faculty supervisor who meets with the student and visits the class, offering feedback and advice on such matters as syllabus design, course materials, teaching techniques, and grading. New teaching fellows in the department receive training at both the departmental and college level. In preparation for teaching in the Writing Program, students take two one-semester preparatory courses with the Program’s Director; these courses are 2-credits each and do not count toward the degree. Students teaching in the Writing Program also receive supervision while teaching.

## **First-Year Review**

First-year students provisionally accepted into the Ph.D. program officially enter the Ph.D. program after completing the requirements for the M.A. and being successfully reviewed and recommended by the Graduate Committee. Reviews typically take place within a month of the student’s completion of the M.A. and are meant to ensure that students have performed well enough to enter into the Ph.D. program. The department expects that students provisionally accepted into the Ph.D. program will be successfully reviewed, but reserves the right to deny entrance to the Ph.D. if in the committee’s judgment the student should not continue. Assuming all M.A. requirements are fulfilled, students who do not pass the First-Year Review will leave the program with an M.A.

## **Selection of Courses**

Eight semester-courses beyond the M.A. degree are required for the Ph.D. degree (for a total of 16 courses), of which not more than four may be taken in one semester. Of the eight semester-courses, at least seven must be elected from courses numbered 700 or higher. Doctoral students must take at least one course that focuses primarily on critical

theory, critical method, or the history of criticism (courses that fulfill this requirement are so identified in the course description). This requirement is considered satisfied if such a course was included in the student's M.A. degree program. All doctoral students are also required to take EN 794 (professionalization seminar), usually in their final semester of coursework. EN 794 counts toward the eight required doctoral courses.

Course work for the doctoral program (taking into consideration courses taken for the M.A.) must include at least two courses in each of the following categories:

1. Medieval literature—1660 or History of the language/linguistics
2. Literature in English 1660—1860
3. Literature in English 1860—present

A student cannot use a single course to satisfy more than one category requirement. For a course with significant content in more than one category (as determined by the DGS), students choose which single category the course will count toward. Since specific courses do not always fit neatly into these categories, consultation with the faculty adviser is essential.

All doctoral students are expected to take EN 698 and EN 699 (supervised teaching of English language and literature) if they hold a Teaching Fellowship.

### **Directed Study**

Ph.D. candidates may elect to take one Directed Study course as part of the degree program; a rationale and a reading list signed by both the student and the faculty member who agrees to direct the project should be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies for approval.

### **Course Credit in Related Fields**

As part of their total program of eight semester-courses required for the Ph.D. degree, doctoral students may, with their adviser's approval, elect two semester-courses at the graduate level in related areas. A literature course elected to fulfill the Foreign Language Requirement (see above) may be counted as a related course.

### **Transfer of Credit**

No transfer of credit for graduate work completed prior to admission to the Ph.D. degree program in English and American Literature is granted toward the eight semester-courses required for the Ph.D.

### **Qualifying Oral Examination**

To be admitted to doctoral candidacy, the student must pass a Qualifying Oral Examination in a major area(s) of literary study defined by the student in consultation with the adviser. The area chosen for examination is normally related to the student's anticipated dissertation topic.

## Guidelines for Qualifying Oral Examinations:

1) Timing. The examination may not be taken if any other program requirement remains to be fulfilled—e.g., course requirements, an incomplete grade, or the foreign language requirement. The examination should be taken in the semester following completion of Ph.D. course work.

2) Committee. To form an examination committee, the following steps are suggested: The faculty adviser should be consulted about the nature of the examination and possible faculty examiners. The student should then identify two faculty members who will agree to serve as primary examiners (there is no requirement that these faculty be prospective dissertation advisers; the faculty adviser can serve as a primary examiner). A preliminary reading list should be drawn up in consultation with the primary examiners. The student should then file the Qualifying Oral Examination form (available from the Department office) with the Director of Graduate Studies. This form, bearing the signatures of the primary examiners, asks the student to suggest other faculty appropriate to serve on the committee. The remaining two members of the examination committee will be selected by the Director of Graduate Studies in consultation with the student. The two secondary examiners may at this time make further suggestions to the proposed reading list. When all have agreed on the final reading list, it will be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies for approval. Please note that the two secondary advisers need not be specialists in the particular areas under examination; for some areas it will not be possible to gather four specialists because of the pattern of leaves and sabbaticals. Diversity of fields among the examining faculty is both normal and desirable.

3) Reading List. The examination should be an intense exploration of a concentrated area of study. The examination should therefore demonstrate thorough mastery of the texts and criticism of the area, subject, and/or question under examination. The definition of "coverage" will be the responsibility of the two primary examiners. Several issues can be thought of as elements in the formation of the reading list: What should one know if the area of interest is defined as problem or question X? What should one know before writing a dissertation on X? More pragmatically, what should one know before embarking on a professional career as a scholar and teacher of X? Students need not have clearly defined dissertation topics in mind at the point of the examination. Students are not required to write a dissertation in the area of the examination, although the examination often bears directly on the dissertation.

### **Dissertation and Final Oral Examination**

Students are encouraged to identify a dissertation subject while studying for the qualifying oral examination. The dissertation itself must be written under the supervision of two readers (listed as "first" and "second" readers). Shortly after the successful completion of the qualifying examination, a prospectus for the dissertation should be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies for evaluation by the Graduate Committee and the Chair (forms will be available from the Department office). The prospectus should be developed in consultation with the first and second readers, and may not exceed twenty double-spaced pages (excluding bibliography). Prospectuses that exceed this limit will be returned without review for condensing. Before giving its approval to

the prospectus and forwarding it to the Chair, the Graduate Committee often asks for revisions of the version initially submitted to it. Please note that the readers or the Graduate Committee may determine during the prospectus stage that the student is not ready to write a dissertation and should proceed no further. Failure to gain departmental approval for the prospectus by the end of the fourth year of the Ph.D. program can result in loss of departmental financial support. As part of completing and submitting the dissertation, the candidate provides an abstract approved by the readers for review and approval by the Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair.

After the abstract is approved and the dissertation written, the candidate participates in the final oral examination, which is based principally on the dissertation and related problems in the area of the candidate's specialization. The final oral examination provides candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to discuss clearly, objectively, and critically the methods and conclusions of the dissertation, as well as their knowledge of related materials. It can also be an occasion that explores directions the candidate could pursue in refining or extending the dissertation's argument. The final oral examination committee includes the first reader, the second reader, and three additional members selected in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies.

### **Graduate Placement**

The Department of English assists and supports students in finding suitable employment after receipt of the Ph.D. One or two members of the faculty serves each year as Director of Graduate Placement to advise all students seeking academic employment, including holding workshops on how to conduct a successful job search, reviewing all sample letters, abstracts, and c.v.'s, and setting up mock interviews. The Department of English normally provides some travel support to the MLA convention for students who are interviewing. Since the Graduate Program in English at Boston University is relatively small in size, close personal attention can be given to each job applicant. Recent graduates have been very successful in securing tenure-track jobs, post-doctoral fellowships, and short-term positions. The Department also supports and encourages students to apply for positions outside academia in humanities-related professions. A list of recent graduate placements can be found on the Department's website under the "Graduate" menu.

### **Departmental Support**

The Committee on Graduate Studies believes that the Ph.D. degree—including courses, the qualifying oral examination, and the dissertation—should be completed in five years of study beyond the M.A., if the candidate is serving as a Teaching Fellow. The normal period of Departmental support is five years of financial aid, but aid may be available to sixth-year students as well.

### **Academic Standards**

The academic standing of each graduate student is reviewed regularly. The Department reserves the right to discontinue at any time the registration of students whose work or progress is judged unsatisfactory.



## **Leave of Absence**

A doctoral student may take up to two one-semester Leaves of Absence (LOA's) at any time during his/her doctoral program; they may be taken either separately or consecutively. A LOA is taken by filling out a single-page form available in the Graduate School. Although the form asks that a reason for the LOA be specified, this request is purely for informational purposes. LOA's are never turned down by the Graduate School. If a doctoral student needs to take more than a total of two semesters off, then the only recourse is officially to Withdraw from the program; after a period of two years (or more), the student may apply for re-admission to the program. The re-application process consists of filing the cover sheet of the GRS application. Any of these actions should be discussed with your adviser and the Director of Graduate Studies.

There are potential drawbacks in taking a LOA: (1) you may lose medical coverage; always check with GRS. (2) You may have to start repaying student loans; check the details of your loans. (3) You will have reduced library privileges—borrowing time of 3 weeks; however, students have been able to retain their study carrels. (4) You will not be able officially to fulfill any degree requirement, such as orals, language, and so forth. For instance, if the Department submits the GRS form saying you have passed a language exam, the Graduate School will not register it, since you would not be an enrolled student; as a way around this, we simply hold such forms until you are re-registered, and then send them in. (5) You cannot take a LOA when you are very close to finishing and defending your dissertation, because the Graduate School requires that a student be officially registered in the two consecutive semesters prior to receiving the degree. So, for a May degree, you must be registered fall and spring of that year. (6) Your TF (if you are still eligible) may not be guaranteed upon your return; check with the Director of Graduate Studies.

For new policies regarding accommodations for the birth or adoption of a child, please see <http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/grs-forms-policies-procedures/childbirth-and-adoption-accommodation-for-full-time-phd-students/>.

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## **GENERAL POLICIES FOR ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS**

### **Advising**

All incoming graduate students are assigned a faculty adviser who meets with them during the registration period just before classes begin, as part of the department's Orientation Program. As their specific interests develop, students may choose a faculty adviser who works in their specific field.

### **Transfer of Credit**

Normally, no transfer of credit for graduate work completed prior to admission to the M.A. degree program is granted toward fulfillment of the eight courses required for the degree.

### **Cross Registration**

Boston University is part of a cross-registration consortium of local graduate programs, along with Boston College, Brandeis University, and Tufts University. Students may cross-register for graduate-level courses at any of these institutions as part of their Boston University program. See the Director of Graduate Studies for more details.

### **Petitions**

Because individual situations vary, students should understand that petitions for exemption or alteration of a particular requirement can be submitted for consideration. The Department cannot overrule Graduate School requirements, however. A letter to the Director of Graduate Studies is sufficient for a petition.

### **Evaluation of Graduate Students**

In the Graduate School, passing grades for graduate students range from A to B minus. Grades below B minus are considered failing grades. A graduate student who earns less than a B minus in two semester-courses of a degree program is automatically placed on probation; the student may be removed from probation by earning a minimum of a straight B average in the following semester. The student who remains on probation more than one semester may be asked to withdraw from the degree program. Financial aid depends on continuing superior performance in courses and in the student's teaching responsibilities.

Within the English department, grading standards of course differ from professor to professor, though generally speaking A's are awarded for excellent work, A-'s indicate good or adequate work, and grades below that are reserved for subpar work.

## **Incompletes**

Students are advised to avoid Incomplete grades if at all possible; completing work in a timely manner is not only a sign of professional competence, but students often find that trying to finish an Incomplete from one semester during the next term is impossible. Also note:

1. No Incomplete will be given unless the student has made prior arrangements with the instructor, including the setting of a definite time by which the Incomplete grade will be made up. The student must also notify the adviser and the Director of Graduate Studies about the Incomplete and must specify the arrangements for its removal from the record. Under no circumstances can an Incomplete remain on the record for over one year.
2. M.A. candidates may receive no more than two Incompletes in all. Ph.D. candidates may receive no more than two additional Incompletes during their doctoral program.
3. Teaching fellows or holders of other Graduate School awards will not be reappointed if they have outstanding Incompletes.

## **Student Mailboxes**

All graduate students have mailboxes in the fourth floor mailroom. Notices of all departmental functions and policies are distributed through these mailboxes or by email. Students should check their department mailboxes and email regularly.

## **Computer Accounts**

All graduate students have student accounts (without charge) for word processing on the University's mainframe computer; additional memory space is available upon request. Graduate students may also use the word processing facilities available in the English Department. All graduate students may open (without charge) an email/internet account. Access is available from home or from various points around the campus (including computers throughout the English Department). Students should check their university email regularly.