

SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Revised January 5th, 2011

Welcome to the Master of Arts in English at Sonoma State University. We offer options of completing your degree with an emphasis in literary criticism, creative writing, or in rhetoric and English education. As a whole, we seek to create a community of engaged scholars and writers engaged in a dialogue that crosses and transcends imaginative and theoretical boundaries. We encourage all of our graduate students to widen the scope of their interests by exploring opportunities in our curriculum, by reaching out to their peers and finding mentors among the English department's graduate faculty, and by participating fully in the life of the department. This online handbook provides information on how to apply to the M.A. in English and helps newly admitted students gain a sense of what to expect as they navigate their way through the program.

Once you are admitted as a candidate, there are four basic steps and three forms you will need to complete in a timely manner to ensure your success in the program:

1. Pass all required coursework, fulfill your language requirement, and successfully take either the department's qualifying exam or achieve a 65th percentile score on the GRE Subject exam in Literature.
2. Before the term you plan to finish your degree, select your completion option, constitute your committee, and file an "Advancement to Candidacy" form (GS01) with Graduate Studies.
3. File an "Intent to Graduate" form at the outset of the year you wish to graduate with the Office of Admissions and Records.
4. Complete your thesis, creative project, or comprehensive exam, and file the "Completion of Requirements" form (GS02) with Graduate Studies

These four steps are explained in detail below, together with supplementary information you may find useful in obtaining your degree. Meeting requirements and published deadlines is your responsibility, and we hope this guide will assist you to do so. It is most important for you to maintain frequent contact with the graduate advisor, and, as you advance through the program, your thesis or creative project supervisor.

Congratulations upon your decision to pursue a Master's in English. We look forward to working with you.

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Application Information: Candidates for admission must apply simultaneously to the University through its **Office of Admissions and Records** and to the **Department of English**. The deadline for fall 2011 is January 7th, 2011. The English Department does not offer deferred admission; admitted students who do not matriculate must reapply if they wish to be readmitted.

1. Official copies of all transcripts and the university's application form must be sent to the Office of Admissions and Records. Applicants are responsible for completing both in a timely fashion, but may file the application form online at: [\[www.csummentor.edu\]](http://www.csummentor.edu).

2. Official or unofficial copies of transcripts, a statement of purpose not longer than two pages or 500 words and which identifies the applicant's proposed completion option (see MA Completion Options, below), a sample expository prose sample or professional paper (10-20 pages, please), and three letters of recommendation should be sent to the Department of English. We prefer that two of those letters be from referees who are familiar with your academic work. Students who wish to focus their degree in creative writing should send in addition samples of their poetry (10 pages maximum), or their fiction or nonfiction prose (or a combination of genres—20 pages maximum).

Note: SSU Graduate students in other disciplines interested in applying for a Masters in English, post-baccalaureate students without departmental affiliation, and

current SSU students pursuing a second BA need not apply through Admissions and Records (step one above), but must complete all of the English Department's requirements (step two above). Applicants taking courses through Extended Education or Open University must apply to both Admissions and Records and the Department of English (steps one and two above).

The minimum GPA required of applicants within the last 60 units of undergraduate coursework is 3.0.

M.A. Completion Options: Although all admitted students earn the MA in English, the Department offers students three options for completing their degree: a thesis that involves literary criticism, theory or an English Education/rhetorical focus; a creative writing project of significant fictional, non-fictional or poetic work, ; or a comprehensive examination in the discipline.

For questions about the Creative Writing Option, please click on: [ma cw faqs.pdf](#)

Admission: Students may be admitted as **classified** graduate candidates, and may immediately begin on their program of study (see "Program Requirements" and "Recommended Timeline" below). Students may be required to undertake additional coursework at the undergraduate level, if, for example, they have a Bachelor's degree in a discipline other than English. In such cases they are admitted as conditionally classified. If you are **conditionally classified** you will be required to complete any pre-requisite coursework by the close of your first year in the M.A. program, unless you have made other arrangements with the Graduate Advisor. If you are admitted as conditionally classified, it is your responsibility to:

- contact the graduate advisor early on to discuss your pre-requisite coursework.
- complete this additional coursework by the close of your first year, unless you have been granted additional time by the graduate advisor.
- contact the graduate advisor to file a "Change in Graduate Status" form with the Graduate Division to establish your status as a classified student.

All graduate students are asked to apprise the department Administrative Coordinator, Merle Williams, of any changes to their mailing address or to their current email address. Note that all students are provided with an e-mail account by the university, and this SSU account is the default address to which the university will send information about registering and other campus information. The department maintains an M.A. listserv, through which departmental and program information is disseminated. The "English-grads" listserv circulates job and course announcements, deadline notices, reminders of ESA events, and other information deemed useful to the graduate community.

Maintaining Graduate Status: To graduate, you must maintain **continuous enrollment** at SSU while you take coursework, after advancement to candidacy, and during the semester in which you expect to have receive your degree. You can take a one-semester leave from the university without endangering your status. If you

choose to take two or more semesters leave, you will need to submit a full application to reinstate yourself as a student in good standing. In extraordinary circumstances and with the support of the graduate advisor, students may petition the Graduate Studies Office for a leave of absence not to exceed two years.

Students advanced to candidacy (discussed below), who are working on their completion projects and who do not require additional units to complete their degree may enroll through the Office of Extended Education in project continuation (598) for 1 unit. This low-cost option enables students to remain in good standing and entitles them to library privileges. The unit does not count toward financial aid.

Finally, it is important to remember that no courses taken more than seven years prior to completion of your degree may count toward the MA.

Working with Faculty: Newly admitted students should set up appointments to meet with the graduate advisor at the outset of the term. Thereafter, continuing students should consult with the graduate advisor as they plan their research or coursework each semester. In general, it is best to make arrangements to meet with the graduate advisor in person.

Your relationships with faculty mentors are perhaps the most important associations you will develop during your career here. There are two kinds of mentors: 1) the formal affiliations you establish with the faculty members you select to serve on your completion committee and 2) those informal relationships (which may develop earlier) with other faculty with whom you share research interests or with whom you have taken classes. These mentoring relationships are described below:

1. The faculty committee. Selecting your committee, which consists of a **supervisor**, or first reader, and a **second reader**, is your responsibility, although you may find consulting with informal mentors as well as other students helpful. It is also your responsibility to set up regular meetings with your committee, to keep them informed of your progress, and to ensure that you provide your readers with adequate time in which to read drafts of your work (a good rule of thumb is to allow a two-week turn-around-time, though it is best to clarify expectations with each member of your committee). Once your committee members agree to serve, they bear responsibilities toward you in turn. You can expect to work most closely with your **supervisor**, who will read and critique drafts of your work as it develops, and who will guide you as you undertake the revision process (for further information on the comprehensive exam option please read this section, below).

The responsibilities of the **second reader** are less extensive, although in individual cases, second readers too, may expect to read multiple drafts of your work. Typically, however, your second reader will critique your work after you have finished a complete draft. **(In the end, however, it is up to you and your mentors jointly to determine how often each expects to meet with you and to review your work. Make sure to get from each a clear sense of their expectations at the outset.)**

Students writing theses will meet formally with both members of their committee during the oral defense, which follows approximately a week after the thesis itself is turned in, as will those who select the comprehensive exam option as their completion project.

2. Informal Mentors: The relatively small size of our English department encourages a great deal of informal exchange between faculty and graduate students. New students often find mentors in their classroom teachers. One way to get to know faculty who share your scholarly or creative interests is to work as a **Research Assistant**. Research assistants are unpaid, but receive between one and four units of English 460 as credit for their time. (You and the faculty person you are working for should meet before the course begins to clarify the type of work expected and how many units it will receive. **IMPORTANT:** the units do not count toward the degree; they do count toward unit totals for the semester, however, so can be useful for students on financial aid.) The department is relaxed and collegial, so you should also feel free to take advantage of faculty office hours, as well as to introduce yourselves when you find an open door.

Program Requirements: The MA in English requires 34 units. If you have selected the thesis or creative project as a culminating option, 28 of these units will be completed through your coursework and the remaining 6 will be taken either as thesis units (599) or as directed writing units (535). If you have selected the comprehensive exam as your culminating option, you will take 32 units of coursework **plus** an additional 3 units of English 597 (directed reading) during your final semester for a total of 35 units. No more than 4 units of directed writing units (535) may be counted toward the degree prior to the culminating option.

All graduate level seminars are 4 units, so you can expect to take a minimum of seven courses toward completion of your degree. All options require candidates to take English 500 and two 500-level seminars. Students who complete with the creative writing option should take at least two creative writing seminars. One course may be taken at the 400 level (senior undergraduate) for degree credit. The 494 advanced survey reading course is recommended for all graduate students studying for the Qualifying Exam—the exam that qualifies you for advancement to candidacy in lieu of the GRE subject exam in Literature (see details about the Qualifying Exam under “Further Important Information” below). Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant units (460 and 462, respectively) and the 494 course do not count toward the 34-unit total; nor, except at the discretion of the graduate advisor, do independent study units (595).

Up to 9 units of graduate coursework may be transferred from another institution or transferred from Open University or Extended Education units taken on campus. Additionally, two courses (8 units) of work outside the discipline of English may be counted toward your MA. All of these require approval from the graduate advisor.

To count toward the M.A., coursework must be completed at the level of B- or higher.

Example Course Paths:

- For students electing the literary critical or Rhetoric and English education completion options, who select the **thesis** as their culminating project: 1 core course (500): 4 units; 6 seminars: 24 units; thesis units (599): 6 units

- For students electing the literary critical and English education completion options, who select the **exam option** as their culminating project: 1 core course (500): 4 units; 7 seminars: 28 units; Directed reading units (597): 3 units
- For students electing the creative writing completion option: 1 core course (500): 4 units; 6 courses, including at least 2 seminars (500-level coursework) for 8 units; at least 2 writing workshops (530) for 8 units; one directed writing course (535) for 4 units, and one more seminar or workshop for 4 units; Creative project completion units (535): 6 units

Suggested Two-Year Timeline for the MA:

- Fall semester, year one, suggested courses: 500, 494, One 500-level seminar or graduate writing workshop
 - The required core course in theory and methods (500), one seminar (or a graduate writing workshop), and 494. The latter tutorial course is P/NP and will not count toward your unit total, but it will provide you a framework within which to study for the Qualifying Exam. (For further information on this course and the exam, see "Advancement to Candidacy" below). You should expect to schedule your Qualifying Exam at the close of this semester or the beginning of the next term. English 500 also serves as proof of your having met SSU's WEPT requirement. Proof of competency will not be automatically recorded. Instead, submit a WEPT waiver form (available at the WEPT office), with unofficial transcripts to show completion of the course. (For further information on the WEPT, see "Employment Opportunities.")
- Spring semester, year one, suggested courses: Three elective 500-level seminars or, for creative writers especially, one 500-level seminar, 4 units of directed writing (535), and one writing workshop (530).
 - In addition to your coursework, you should begin to think about your culminating project. When you have arrived at a focus for this project at the close of the term, you should constitute your committee. You should have passed the Qualifying Exam (or the Literature GRE) and be working to fulfill the language requirement.
- Over the summer: Continue with fulfilling your language requirement or study to take the language exam. Refine the scope and focus of your project by drafting an abstract of your project (thesis option) or compose a bibliography (exam option).
- Fall semester, year two, suggested courses: For those writing a thesis, two 500-level seminars. For those pursuing a creative project completion, one 500-level seminar, 4 units of directed writing (535) and/or one writing workshop. You may also wish to divide your thesis or creative project work into two semesters; in this case, you may register for three units of either 599 (thesis) or 535 (creative project directed writing). For students who've selected the Comprehensive Exam option to complete the degree, at least two 500-level seminars. Students who have selected the exam option should consider

beginning their bibliography of primary readings for their exam this semester.

- **Advancement to Candidacy:** Students are advanced to candidacy when they have 1) completed their coursework (save for completion units), 2) passed either the department's Oral Qualifying Exam or the GRE Subject Exam in Literature (minimum score at the 65th percentile), and 3) completed the language requirement. Your advancement to candidacy is formalized by the filing of a GS01 form with Graduate Studies. The "Advancement to Candidacy" form (GS01) is available in the department office or can be downloaded online, and is filed with the university office of Graduate Studies.
- Make sure your GS01 is filed before registering for the degree. File your "Intent to Graduate" form by SSU deadlines, so that you will receive your MA degree at the end of the year you expect to finish
- Spring semester, year two: For those students who've selected the Comprehensive Exam option to complete the degree, one 500-level seminar and register for three units of 597 (exam option). For students who've selected either the thesis or creative option to complete, register for six units of 599 (thesis) or 535 (directed writing completion). If you've already completed three units in the previous term, then register for only three during this term. This semester, your last if you intend to graduate at the close of two years, should be spent writing and revising your thesis or creative project or reading for your exam. You should stay in very close touch with your director, with whom you should set out a writing schedule at the outset of the term. Make sure to allow time for your committee to read drafts of your work, and ensure that you schedule your thesis defense before the end of the semester. To complete the degree, you must have a thesis defense (thesis option), a public reading (creative option), or a written and oral comprehensive exam at the end of this semester. File the GS02 ("Completion of Requirements" form) with the Graduate Studies office when you have finished both the written and oral components of your project

Suggestions and Other Important Information:

- If you are not teaching, consider working as a research assistant with a professor whose interests are pertinent to your research area. You might also consider working as a Teaching Assistant in an undergraduate course pertinent to your research area.
- Remember that you must earn a B- or better in all of your coursework.

The Qualifying Exam. This one-hour oral is best taken at the close of the first semester or the beginning of the second semester, but must be completed by the end of your first year of study. The exam is Pass/No Pass, and is scheduled through the graduate advisor, who should be notified of your intent to sit your exam at least two weeks before your exam date. You will sit your exam with two faculty members (whose names you will not know until the outset of the exam). Please note that the Qualifying Exam consists of readings in both British and American literature (to be

read by all students) and, in addition, shorter lists organized by emphasis. Although you may study for this exam independently, it is strongly recommended that you take the 494 course, which will serve as a tutorial as you prepare to take your exam. This course, to be taken on a P/NP basis, requires you to meet with a cohort once each week and to take a minimum of two mock-oral exams with the graduate advisor. Units do not count toward MA degree requirements. To see or print a copy of the ENGL 494 Advanced Literary Survey reading for the Qualifying Exam preparation list please click on: http://www.sonoma.edu/english/494_Exam_List_10-2009.pdf

- **Foreign language requirement:** This demonstration of competence may either be satisfied by two years of college-level modern language courses, one year of college-level classical language courses, or the successful completion of a translation exam administered at SSU. Consult the graduate advisor to determine which option is best for you. Language coursework can be taken on a Pass/No Pass basis. If taken for a grade, coursework must be at the level of a C- or better. Coursework must be documented on your undergraduate or graduate transcripts. If you take the translation exam, you should file your demonstration of competence with the graduate advisor.

Completion Options: With the help of your mentor(s) and the graduate advisor, students select one of three completion options for the MA degree.

1. **Thesis.** The thesis is the written product of your systematic exploration of a significant question. Your work, which when completed should run anywhere from 50 to 100 pages, should demonstrate both a breadth and depth of response. In it you should identify your own critical position by entering into a dialogue with other critics in the field. This understanding and articulation of the critical landscape should be matched by a complementary exploration of your own thinking. Although your argument should reflect your awareness of significant critics who have written on the topic in advance of your thesis, it should concentrate upon developing your own ideas in depth and detail. Approximately one week after completing your thesis you will sit a one-hour defense with your faculty committee. The defense is not interrogative in the same way that the oral Qualifying Exam is designed to be; rather, it should allow you to assess the state of your thinking at the completion of your project and to evaluate the nature of the thesis itself. Your committee may use this opportunity to suggest areas of further revision, should you intend to submit a portion of your work for possible publication.
2. **Creative project.** Your creative work should constitute a coherent body of writing within a genre (fiction, poetry, or nonfiction); or, should it blur genres, offer awareness as to the nature of its literary blendings. It should be prefaced by an introduction that explains the project's aim, influences, scope, and design. (It is a good idea to consult the finished work of other students to gain an understanding of the variety of approaches possible in the introduction, as well as to consult with your director). Your work should aim for originality as well as facility with language, and should implicitly offer illustration of significant independent thinking. Toward the close of the semester you will

take part in a public reading of a portion of your work.

3. **Comprehensive Exam.** The MA exam consists of a series of written questions posed by your committee, to which you provide written responses, and an oral defense approximately one week later in front of the same committee. Your culminating exam should be depth focused (in comparison with the Qualifying Exam which is breadth-oriented), and it should offer a comprehensive investigation of a literary problem or question you have raised upon a given topic. You should meet with your director one or two semesters preceding the exam in order to shape your subject and to fine-tune your bibliography of primary and secondary sources. The written portion of the exam typically consists of four questions developed by your director or your committee. You will have four hours in which to answer two of these. In your defense, your committee will follow up on the thinking you have developed in these essays.

Employment at the University: A number of positions are available to help defray your expenses as a student. First-year students often find employment as tutors in the campus Writing Center. Occasionally faculty may offer modest compensation in return for grading help (These arrangements are not funded by the university but are negotiated instead with individual faculty). Returning students may continue tutoring, but they may also work as Teaching Associates or in several different administrative capacities described below. Both entering and continuing students may apply for these positions. While most students do not work as Teaching Associates until their second year, these positions are open to qualified new students. All employment positions described below are contingent upon the student maintaining satisfactory progress toward the MA degree prior to and during employment.

1. Writing Center Positions:

A. Staff: Graduate students in English are eagerly invited to apply to work as staff members in the SSU Writing Center. Staff members primarily tutor students who are working on writing projects, working with students of all class levels and across the curriculum. Extensive training is offered. As of the fall term 2010, the pay rate is \$10 per hour.

B. Assistant Director, Master Tutor: Graduate students with tutoring or writing-center experience are urged also to apply for the Writing Center's graduate assistant positions: Assistant Director of the Writing Center, a half-time (20 hours per week) staff position; and Master Tutor, a 5 to 10 hours-per-week position. Both positions primarily involve extensive supervisory, training, and mentorship duties but also include some administrative tasks. The Writing Center accepts applications year-round, but most hiring occurs in the latter part of the spring term for the following fall semester. Interested students should contact the Director of the SSU Writing Center, Scott Miller, Ph.D., at scott.miller@sonoma.edu or 707-664-4402.

2. WEPT (Written English Proficiency Test) Coordinator: One position is available each year as Graduate Assistant to the faculty coordinator of the

WEPT. In conjunction with the faculty coordinator, the graduate assistant helps administer the required graduation writing exam program for fifteen hours a week at a salary of approximately \$3300 per semester. While the position is primarily administrative, advising of students is also a key component. The position thus offers valuable experience for those interested in composition and rhetoric studies. This position is announced each spring for the following academic year; applicants who can commit to work both semesters are given preference.

3. Creative Writing Positions: Graduate students may also apply for two positions available in literary editing and publishing: Zaum Senior Editor and Volt Production Editor. The position of Zaum Senior entails overseeing all production, editing, and marketing of the magazine, as well as managing and guiding the Zaum editorial staff. Pay ranges from \$1200 to \$1500 a year, depending on budget allotment. Volt Production Editor entails all production (layout, proofs, design) of Volt magazine. Pay averages around \$500 a year. To apply for these positions, contact Professor Gillian Conoley: extension 664-3919; gconoley@pacbell.net

4. Teaching Associates: Graduate students are eligible to apply for positions as Teaching Associates in the Lower Division Composition program. The program provides students with an excellent opportunity to gain teaching experience in a structured setting. At the same time, graduate student instructors provide valuable service to the department. Teaching Associates serve as instructors in English 100, a year-long composition course for incoming freshman who do not pass the composition/reading placement test. English 100 courses meet for 4 hours per week, with class size limited to 16 students. Teaching Associates should plan on spending an additional 10-12 hours per week outside of classroom time upon preparation, grading and office hours. This considerable workload should be balanced with the demands of the graduate program itself as well as personal commitments.

In addition to teaching, Associates are required to enroll in English 303, a professional development seminar that meets for one hour per week and provides support and mentoring. This professional development seminar is a required condition of your employment. It does not, however, count as a course toward your degree.

Pay is approximately \$955 per teaching unit, or \$2,865 per semester. Teaching Associates also receive a fee waiver on the state fee portion of their tuition (set currently at \$1368/ semester). Teaching Associates are members of the UAW union and the terms of their employment are governed by that contact.

Preference in hiring Teaching Associates is given to students with the following:

- coursework in rhetoric or composition theory (English 491 or English 587 are SSU's recommended courses but equivalent courses from other institutions will be considered)

- experience teaching composition at the college level
- experience in tutoring writing

Students are hired annually. Teaching associates are sometimes asked to teach a second year, although priority is given to students who have not yet had the opportunity to teach.

Writing and Editing Opportunities: Graduate students may work as interns and editors for SSU's two highly regarded literary magazines through a course called Small Press Editing. Volt, a nationally distributed, award-winning (three Pushcart Prizes, two Best American Poetry Selections, Fund for Poetry Award) magazine edited by poet and professor Gillian Conoley, routinely publishes some of the best known writers in the country. Zaum, entirely student edited and produced, publishes student work and has won several Associated Writing Programs awards for editorial vision and graphic design. Students who have acted as interns have gone on to pursue careers in editing and publishing.

- for Volt's website click on: www.voltpoetry.com
- for zaum's website click on: www.zaumpress.net

English Student Association (ESA): Sponsored by the department and the university, the ESA is a haven for students (graduate and undergraduate alike) to meet with one another outside of the classroom. ESA members enjoy opportunities to discuss academic subjects in an informal setting, to consider career options, and to meet with writers, journalists, and scholars. In the past, ESA has hosted lecture series, field trips, the Shakespeare Festival, open mic poetry, and theater and movie nights. In addition to special events such as these, members meet regularly at scheduled meetings and informally. Drop by for conversation on film, literature, and life. For more information, contact: esa@sonoma.edu, or Professor John Kunat, ext. 664-3138; john.kunat@sonoma.edu

Reading Series: The creative writing faculty sponsor and host an annual reading series, which draws writers from the rich cultural milieu of the Bay Area as well as writers from all over the country and abroad. Writers who have read in the program include many award winning writers (Pulitzer-prize, McArthur Genius Award, National Book Critics Circle Award, National Book Award) as well as upcoming new voices. Recent writers have included Yusef Komunyakaa, Michael Palmer, Lyn Hejinean, Lynn Freed, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Rae Armantrout, Robert Hass, Brenda Hillman, James Alan McPherson, Lawrence Weschler, and Yiyun Li. "Each year, we also present a panel of distinguished editors, agents, and publishers to give students of all concentrations guidance in getting their work out into the world."

To see or print a copy of the ENGL 494 Advanced Literary Survey reading list please click on: [http://www.sonoma.edu/english/494 Exam List 10-2009.pdf](http://www.sonoma.edu/english/494%20Exam%20List%2010-2009.pdf)