University of Massachusetts
Amherst
Department of English

Graduate Student Handbook
MA, MA/PhD, PhD and
American Studies Track

Fall 2015
## Contents

Welcome from Graduate Students and the Graduate Office ........................................... 2

MA/PhD Degree Calendar................................................................. 4

PhD Degree Calendar................................................................. 5

MA/PhD with an American Studies Concentration Calendar................................. 6

PhD with an American Studies Concentration Calendar........................................ 7

Program Requirements for All Degrees............................................... 8

Second Language Requirement.................................................. 10

The Advisory Session.................................................................. 11

The Two-Area (Doctoral) Exam.................................................... 13

American Studies Concentration Requirements........................................ 16

The Dissertation....................................................................... 19

Chair
Prospectus
Committee
Defense
Scheduling and Formatting
Common Difficulties

Advising and Professional Development............................................. 23

Thinking about Your Future
Workshops and Advising
Professional Organizations
Conferences
The Job Market

Teaching................................................................................. 26
Welcome from Graduate Students

This handbook is a collaborative effort of graduate students and the Graduate Office. In putting it together, we graduate students wanted to answer many of the questions we ourselves had but could not find written answers for. The oral tradition helped, but it can be a slow and piecemeal way of obtaining guidance. While we know that we can’t answer every question in this handbook, we hope that you’ll find what’s included useful, especially in the sections of informal advice that are based on previous students’ experiences and input. The English Department at UMass is big, and navigating your way through can sometimes be complicated. The handbook seeks to make the process easier.

You will quickly notice that the emphasis of this handbook is on careers in academe. We acknowledge that this is a limited scope, particularly during a period when the market is changing and graduate students are seeking various possibilities for their career choices. We foresee that future revisions of this handbook will take this into account and will assist people who want to pursue professional avenues other than teaching in colleges and universities.

We’d like to thank all of the graduate students who contributed their ideas. We tried to incorporate as many suggestions as possible. We also want to thank Pennie Ticen who helped spark this project and provided much practical input at the start.

Elizabeth Bachrach-Tan
Jackie LeBlanc
Welcome from the Graduate Office

This Graduate Student Handbook contains University regulations, department policy and practices, and informal advice to graduate students at all levels of degree work. The graduate faculty and students who prepared it suggest that you keep it for reference throughout your years at the University of Massachusetts. The guide provides answers to the most common questions, issues, and problems faced by graduate students in our program. However, it cannot address individual and unique problems that may arise. In such cases, please feel free to contact the graduate office or arrange to meet with the graduate director.

Professional preparation, of course, is more than a matter of programs, courses, and examinations. Graduate student life, like the professional life for which it prepares you, is always a matter of exploration and testing. Define your career goals as early and as specifically as you can, but then keep them flexible while you take courses of various kinds, try out different critical methodologies, and work with a range of faculty. The program is designed to encourage timely completion of the degree, with broad exposure to the field quickly narrowing through the Advisory Session, the Area Exams, and the dissertation. Each step in this process is meant to anticipate choices that need to be made for the next step.

Graduate work in English often leads to teaching careers, but this is by no means the only career path. Other jobs in which highly skilled reading, speaking and writing are essential—in college administration, publishing, library work, government work, business, or social service—are also possibilities. Practice what you think you might do, either by teaching or by applying for assistantships or internships. Attending conferences, presenting papers and publishing articles have also become important aspects of career preparation. Please remember that the graduate office, along with faculty and other graduate students, is eager to offer advice and to help you make choices that will best serve your own educational goals.

Joseph Black, Graduate Program Director
Nicholas Bromell, Associate Director

Revised spring 2015
**English Department Graduate Program Calendar / DEADLINES**

**MA/PHD**

First year:
- Meet with GPD
- File plan for fulfilling language requirement
- Coursework (2 courses per semester)

Second year:
- Advisory Session scheduled with GPD
- Coursework (2 courses per semester)

Third year:
- **DEADLINE** for completion of Advisory Session
- Meet with GPD about Two-Area Exam
- Finish language requirement
- Coursework (2 courses per semester)

Fourth year:
- Areas approved and scheduled by GPD
- Area lists and rationales submitted to Graduate Office
- Complete Area exams (recommended)
- Meet with advisors about dissertation
- Coursework (2 courses per semester)

Fifth year:
- **DEADLINE** for completing Area Exams
- Submit Dissertation Prospectus (recommended)
- Work on dissertation

Sixth year:
- **DEADLINE** for submitting Prospectus
- Meet with Assoc. GPD about job search
- Work on dissertation

Seventh year:
- Finish dissertation
- Job search
English Department Graduate Program PhD Calendar

First year

Meet with GPD
Finish language requirement
Coursework (2 courses per semester)

Second year:

Discuss and schedule Area Exams with GPD
Coursework (2 courses per year)

Third year:

Area lists and rationales submitted to Graduate Office
DEADLINE for completing Area Exams

Fourth year:

DEADLINE for submitting Prospectus
Meet with Associate GPD about job search
Work on dissertation

Fifth year:

Finish dissertation
File degree paperwork with Graduate Program Office
Job search

Note: All PhD students are required to take a minimum of six classes, two 3-hour Area Credits, and 18 dissertation credits. Dissertation credits make up the additional 6 hours in year one to fulfill the Grad School residency requirement. Dissertation credits and area credits must be signed up for with Wanda in the Grad Office. Students are not, of course, prevented from taking additional classes and may want to use a class to help them work on an area exam rationale.
English Department Graduate Program MA/PhD in English with an American Studies Concentration Calendar

First Year:

File plan to finish language requirement
REQUIRED Coursework completed (2 courses per semester)

Second year:

DEADLINE for completion of Qualifying Exam
Coursework (2 per semester)

Third year:

Establish Areas with Director
Coursework (2 per semester)

Fourth year:

Area Exam credits or courses (2 per semester)
Schedule Area Exam (recommended)

Fifth year:

Area lists and rationales submitted to Graduate Office
2 courses (or Area Credits) this year.
DEADLINE for completing Area Exams
Submit dissertation prospectus (recommended)

Sixth year:

DEADLINE for submitting Prospectus
Meet with Assoc. GPD about job search
Work on dissertation

Seventh year:

Finish dissertation
File degree paperwork with Graduate Program Office
Job search
English Department Graduate Program PhD in English with an American Studies Concentration Calendar

First year:

- File plan to finish language requirement
- REQUIRED coursework completed (2 courses per semester)
- DEADLINE for scheduling and completing Qualifying Exam

Second year:

- Establish Areas in conversation with Director
- Coursework (2 courses per semester)

Third year:

- Area lists and rationales submitted to Graduate Office
- DEADLINE for completing Area Exams
- Sign up for dissertation credits

Fourth year:

- DEADLINE for submitting Prospectus
- Meet with Associate GPD about job search
- Work on dissertation

Fifth year:

- Finish dissertation
- File degree paperwork with Graduate Program Office
- Job search
Program Requirements

A. Masters Degree

1. 10 graduate courses (30 credits); or 8 courses (24 credits) and a Masters thesis (6 credits). Note: Students may transfer credit for two graduate-level English courses taken at other schools (if not counted toward a completed degree) or they may receive credit for two graduate English courses taken at UMass before their formal admission to the Graduate English program. Once enrolled in the program, they may take two courses in graduate programs other than English.

B. Pre-Doctoral Masters Degree

1. Ten courses in five semesters:
   1 theory course (usually Theorizing the Discipline), taken during the first year
   2 courses in English or American literature pre-1800
   2 courses in English or American literature pre-1900
   5 elective courses

   For students in the Rhetoric and Composition concentration:
   1 theory course (usually Theorizing the Discipline), taken during the first year
   3 courses in literature, exclusive of the theory course above
   6 elective courses (may include core courses in the Rhetoric and Composition PhD program)

   Note: Students may transfer credit for two graduate-level English courses taken at other schools (if not counted toward a completed degree) or they may receive credit for two graduate English courses taken at UMass before their formal admission to the Graduate English program. Once enrolled in the program, they may take two courses in graduate programs other than English.

2. Intermediate proficiency in one foreign language. (See “The Foreign Language Requirement” for details.)

3. The Advisory Session

   During the fifth semester of course work for the MA, each student will participate in an Advisory Session to review the candidate’s preparation, projected course of study, timetable, and goals. The Session is conducted by a committee consisting of four faculty members chosen by the Graduate Program Director in consultation with the student. The student prepares a five-page statement or narrative synthesis of their accomplishments and submits it together with two papers two weeks in advance of the session. American Studies students (including incoming PhD students) currently take a qualifying exam rather than participate in an advisory session, although the function is similar.
C. Doctoral Degree

1. Six courses (18 credits)
   1 course with a theory component. To fulfill this requirement, most students take 791 “Theorizing the Discipline.” Consult with Graduate Director to determine which other course(s) might count as fulfilling this requirement.

   5 elective courses.

   Notes:
   - A student entering our program with the MA from another program may be required to take one or two courses pre-1800 or pre-1900 if his or her MA is seen to be deficient in breadth of preparation.
   - Students entering with an MFA are expected to complete an MA in English before advancing to the PhD.
   - Graduate courses from other departments at UMass fulfill elective credit with approval of the Graduate Program Director.
   - Creative Writing workshops cannot be applied towards the degree.

2. Two Area (doctoral) Exam (6 credits). Note: This exam is called the “Preliminary Comprehensive Exam” in Graduate School Regulations.


6. If the MA has been received elsewhere, intermediate proficiency in one foreign language. (See “Second Language Requirement” for details.)

7. Residency requirement: At least one academic year of full-time graduate work (nine credits per semester) in consecutive sequence (Fall-Spring or Spring-Fall) at UMass. Summer sessions do not count as part of the two-semester sequence.

8. Upon completion of MA and PhD degrees, students must complete the Degree Application/Eligibility Form and have it signed by the Graduate Director and Department Chair and submitted to the Graduate School's Office of Degree Requirements. The Graduate Secretary has these forms. (Note: the instructions for the form come at the end of the form and are quite specific. Read them before filling out the form.)
Second Language Requirement

A student must demonstrate intermediate proficiency in one language other than English for the MA, the MA/PhD, or the PhD program. Intermediate proficiency should enable a student to read a language with the aid of a dictionary. Plans to complete the language requirement should be approved in advance by the Graduate Program Director. Students who provide appropriate documentation may fulfill the program’s language requirement in the following ways:

1) Being a native speaker of a language other than English.

2) Having a double major or minor in a second language from one’s undergraduate institution, or having recently completed three full semesters of second language courses.

3) Successfully participating in a pre-approved study abroad year or semester if the courses were taught in the second language.

4) Successfully completing a pre-approved, accelerated, intensive summer language program (either on site or online).

5) Passing a graduate-level language course in a second language with the course professor attesting in writing that the student has demonstrated intermediate proficiency.

6) Completing a longer independent study or course project to produce a polished translation of a previously un-translated text. Such projects must be approved by the GPD.

7) Passing a standardized language placement examination, administered on or off campus under the auspices of a foreign language department.

8) Taking the department language exam.

The department Language Exam

The language exam lasts one hour, at the beginning of which students will be given a literary or critical text selected by the English Graduate office to be translated with the aid of a dictionary. Anyone who fails the exam may retake it a later date.

Please note that the department does not have funding for students who wish to participate in summer courses or programs to fulfill their language requirement.

[Rev. 6/5//2012]
The Advisory Session

The Advisory Session is a two-hour, academic conversation with four faculty members held toward the end of an MA/PhD student’s fifth semester. The session provides the student with focused guidance from the faculty before advancing to doctoral course work. Students scheduling their Advisory Session must have at least a 3.5 GPA in the program and have no incompletes. See below for details about choosing a committee and scheduling the session.

The conversation that constitutes your session will be structured by three papers: two that you have written for courses taken in the program, and one that you write specifically for this occasion. You may choose any two papers, and different students make different choices. For example, you may choose an early paper and a recent one; or you may choose two papers on one topic, or in one field, or in one genre; or you may choose two papers that represent seemingly unconnected research interests in hopes that the session will help you decide which to commit to. When you meet with the Graduate Director, he or she will advise you on ways to make your selection.

Your third paper is a five-page reflective essay which discusses your graduate career to date, and outlines some possible directions for future study. Consult with your Advisory Session chair as you complete this essay, and before submitting it. It should probably include those issues, texts, theories, ideas and experiences that have been most formative for you here at UMass, and it should evaluate your own sense of where you are in your graduate study and what you feel you have left to do and learn. More than anything else, this document should be specific about what intrigues you about literary and interdisciplinary studies. It should reflect careful self-analysis of your strengths and those areas where strength can be built. It should project some hopes and aspirations for your course of doctoral study. It is an occasion for you to undertake some self-reflection about what you have accomplished, and what you hope to accomplish, in your graduate career. Be sure to turn in a copy of your five-page reflective essay for your file in the Graduate Office.

At the beginning of the Advisory Session, the student is invited to speak briefly (5-10 minutes maximum), perhaps highlighting what s/he feels is most important in the 5-page reflection essay, or narrating an intellectual trajectory thus far, or adding any further thoughts since the paper was first turned in. Hereafter, discussion develops organically, yet it will include two main elements: discussion of the student’s skills (especially as indicated by the seminar papers), and exploration of the student’s intellectual interests, with an eye to areas and dissertation. Often the session begins with a review of the student’s strengths, weaknesses, and progress as exemplified in the seminar papers. Committee members may point to specific passages or elements in the papers in order to commend or to raise questions about such matters as: close reading of textual evidence, use of historical evidence, skills in argumentation, and handling of criticism and theory. The other main focus of the session is an exploratory dialogue about the student’s intellectual interests and possible areas of concentration. This discussion typically builds on the submitted materials, yet it may also develop from ideas that have emerged in the
session. By the end of the session, the student and committee will together consider some preliminary possibilities for areas and the dissertation. Within that framework, the committee will offer advice about remaining coursework and suggestions for independent reading that the student should pursue.

Toward the end of the two-hour period, the student is asked to leave the room briefly while faculty members discuss the session and prepare to summarize their advice; the student then returns for a final conversation. At that time the committee may make recommendations regarding possible additional coursework, potential faculty advisors, helpful professional organizations and outlets for completed work, suggestions for area exam studies, and even potential dissertation topics. In most cases, recommendations will be guided by the specific questions the student has raised during the session.

Please bear in mind that the Advisory Session is not an examination. The department has designed it to be a springboard that helps you advance more quickly and effectively through the program. We encourage you to bring any and all questions you might have to the session and to regard it as an opportunity, not an ordeal.

To date, American Studies students do not participate in an Advisory Session, but must take a qualifying exam, which serves much the same purpose as an Advisory Session. The American Studies program is currently under review, and its requirements may change over the next year.

**Scheduling the Advisory Session**

MA/PhD students should schedule a meeting with the Graduate Director in their fourth semester to discuss the session and begin selecting faculty participants. American Studies students should meet with the Graduate Director on the same schedule, unless they already have their MA, in which case they should schedule a meeting at the end of the first year in the program. Wanda Bak will help organize a time when all the faculty participants can attend, checking first with you for possible dates. As soon as the date for the session has been fixed, and no later than three weeks before it is held, you should give copies of your three papers to the four faculty members. The graduate office needs only a copy of your statement.

[Rev. 6/5/2012]
The Two-Area (Doctoral) Exam

Overview
The two-hour oral examination for the PhD is required of students in all programs with the exception of American Studies, which will be described later. The two-area exam is based on two reading lists developed in collaboration between the student and faculty members. The exam should be taken in the 4th semester of the PhD program (9th semester of the MA/PhD Program). The examining committee consists of four faculty members: one the student’s chosen advisor for a First Area (this faculty member will also serve as chair of the exam), one the student’s chosen advisor for a Second Area, and two chosen by the student in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies. Each reading list will culminate in a 15-page written work which the student will present in hard copies to members of the committee no later than two weeks before the scheduled examination. As a rough guide, the student should submit a combined maximum of 30 written pages and a pair of bibliographies for the areas consisting of a minimum of 30 works each.

The Areas
The main aim of the two-area exam is to assess the student’s readiness for dissertation work. To this end, the area papers will be based on wide reading in fields that will support future work. It is meant to demonstrate knowledge and it therefore typically includes a review of key critical and primary texts; it is also meant to demonstrate critical and synthetic thinking, so the review typically takes the form of a mapping of the field within coordinates defined by the student. Even as an area paper presents and frames a field, it can be written so as to raise questions or possibilities for intervening in a field (more than strictly developing an argument, as a seminar paper or prospectus might).

The scope and substance of the two areas will vary, but in general at least one area will be a stepping stone towards the dissertation; often both are, as outlined below. The relation between the two areas should be developed in consultation with faculty advisors, including the two area advisors and the GPD. Students are encouraged to pursue their strongest interests where feasible, yet also to be guided by advisors about what is likely to be practical and successful. Students are also encouraged to ask Wanda Bak for sample copies of area topics and papers.

The two areas should cover substantially different materials, and should avoid being either too narrow or too broad. The “novel in English” is too broad. The “short stories of William Faulkner” is too narrow. (In general, excluding very prolific writers, a single-author area would include most or all of the author’s main works, even though the student may also include and discuss a set of that author’s less canonical works.) For those studying literature, one typical—but not prescriptive—pairing is to combine a literary area (including some major criticism in that field) with a critical/theoretical/methodological area. Thus a literary area on the “19th-century American novel” might include 15-20 key literary texts as well as a selection of the major criticism in the field; it might be combined with an area in “Trauma Theory” or “Antebellum and Civil War History.” For those studying rhetoric and composition, the two areas (independently or together) may combine theory with pedagogy, research methodology, histories of writing and writing education, and/or current trends in literacy practices. Here, a pedagogically
focused area such as “The Circulation of Writing in Composition Classes” might include key texts presenting diverse critical perspectives on how circulation is conceptualized. A second area might be “Feminist Research Methodology” or “Applications of Marxist Theory in Composition Studies.” These are just a few samples of many other kinds of combination. Again, students are encouraged to ask Wanda Bak for sample titles and papers, in addition to consultation with the GPD and the faculty in their field.

Well before the exam, students should meet with the exam chair to discuss the exam process. Typically, the student speaks briefly at the start of the session (suggested maximum 10 minutes), perhaps narrating the intellectual trajectory that led to these areas, or highlighting key points and questions raised in the papers, especially as these might lead to a dissertation. These are just two of several possible directions for an opening statement, and students can consult with the chair about others. As with the Advisory Session, discussion in the Area Exam develops organically, yet it will typically focus at length on the materials and ideas in the area papers. While students should, of course, be familiar with the texts in their bibliography, questions tend to be less concerned with testing knowledge of specific texts than with soliciting evidence of the student’s ability to think and converse flexibly and thoughtfully about those texts.

Selecting the committee and scheduling the exam
In the student’s last semester of coursework (3rd semester of the PhD, 8th of the MA/PhD), the student meets with the Graduate Program Director (GPD) to discuss the areas. By that time, the student should have begun identifying two potential area topics and the advisors for each. The GPD may either approve the area topics or suggest further consideration and revision. At this time, the student and GPD will also consider two additional faculty members to complete the committee.

Note: Though the two area exams commence in earnest only once coursework is completed, students should not wait until this time to begin thinking about their area topics and lists. In their last semester of coursework, students should consult with their advisors for advice on what to read, while being aware that the lists may change through the process of focusing on the area and preparing for the exam. More generally, throughout their graduate careers, students should read as widely as possible in their likely areas of specialization; it should become a habit to read authors and pursue research interests beyond assigned coursework reading.

By the middle of the 4th semester of the PhD (9th of the MA/PhD), the student should be ready to set a date and time for the exam in consultation with two-area advisors and the two additional examiners. Once a date is established, the student should inform Wanda of the date and time so that she can reserve a room; she will also send out a reminder to all committee members two weeks before the exam.

At least three weeks prior to the exam, the student submits both essays and bibliographies to the two chief faculty advisors and to the GPD for approval and signatures. The signature sheet is available from Wanda in the Graduate Office. Once the areas have been approved and any final revisions made, and no less than two weeks before the exam, the student should then distribute copies of his/her papers and bibliographies to his/her full committee.
Registering for exam credits
The student receives three credits for each of the two areas (796W, 796X: Independent Area), making a total of six credits toward the necessary twenty-four (eight courses) for doctoral course work. The best time to register for these credits is the semester of the exam. However, scheduling of two area credits is flexible: should you need or want a particular course during the semester you would otherwise be preparing your exam areas, consider signing up and beginning your areas a semester earlier. Registration forms for the areas are available from Wanda, and must be turned in to Wanda during registration (upon which she will enroll the student).

During and following the exam
As the exam begins, the student will be asked to leave the room for a couple of minutes while faculty members consult. When the student re-enters, he/she is invited to make an opening statement; then the exam commences and generally lasts for about two hours. The tenor of the exam is usually collegial and conversational. After the exam, the student will be asked to leave the room once more; he/she will receive the results of the exam immediately after this. The Examination chair completes a report on the exam, circulates it to the participating members for their approval and any necessary revisions, and then sends the final report to Wanda for inclusion in the student’s file. The student now moves on to his/her dissertation prospectus.

[Rev. 6/5/2012]
American Studies Concentration Requirements

The following changes have been made in the American Studies Concentration:

1. One of the formerly required American Studies seminars—“Materials for the Study of American Culture”—has been dropped.
2. The formerly required dissertation workshop has been dropped.
3. Students entering with an MA degree in a field other than American Studies may now officially count the two required American Studies seminars toward their PhD coursework.
4. The comprehensive examination has been changed from a three-area written exam to a two-area oral exam.
5. The foreign language requirement has been made identical to that of the English Department.

A. Masters Degree

Coursework: The following list has been devised to give the student some background in American literature and history at the same time to allow maximum flexibility in designing an individual program of interdisciplinary study. To insure coherence in individualized programs, each student must work with an American Studies advisor in selecting courses.

2 American Studies seminars: “Major Texts for the Study of American Culture” (791A). This course surveys major current texts in the field as well as some classic texts. “Methods for the Study of American Culture” (791B). This course is designed to study a single text in all of its contextual possibilities—economic, social, artistic, etc. Note: Students admitted with an MA in a field other than American Studies must take these introductory American Studies seminars, but they may count them toward their Level 2 course requirements.

2 courses in American literature
1 course in American history
1 course in comparative cultures or cultural theory (from any university department)
4 courses selected in consultation with an American Studies advisor

B. Doctoral Degree

The Qualifying Exam: All students going on for the PhD—including students admitted into the graduate PhD program with an MA in a field other than American Studies—must take a two-hour oral qualifying exam. In consultation with an American Studies advisor, each student develops a list of 12-15 key works for the study of American culture; he or she will be examined upon that list. In developing this list, the student will need to answer the following: 1) Explain the theme, concept, or idea that informs your choice of
materials for this exam. 2) Which disciplinary perspectives (at least three) and/or theoretical positions are involved in this choice of materials? 3) What 12-15 authors, works, studies, or artifacts are involved in this exam? After the advisor approves the list, and at least four weeks prior to the exam, the list must be submitted (through the director of American Studies) to the American Studies Advisory Committee for approval. The student will have the option of preparing a written opening statement of no more than three pages to be presented to the examining committee two weeks prior to the exam. The examining committee will consist of four members, one the student’s advisor, at least one from the American Studies Advisory Committee, and two others—who may be from other departments where relevant to the student’s interests—chosen in consultation with the student’s advisor and the director of American Studies. It is expected that the qualifying exam will be taken no later than the fourth semester in residence (or the second semester in residence for students admitted with an MA in a field other than American Studies). Passing this exam qualifies a student for work as a PhD candidate in American Studies.

Coursework should provide the student with some depth in three fields of study and prepare the student for the dissertation: 2 courses in each of 3 fields of study, one of which will be American literature, and the other two chosen in consultation with an American Studies advisor. (Students entering with an MA degree in a field other than American Studies may count “Major Texts for the Study of American Culture” [791A] and “Methods for the Study of American Culture” [791B] among these six required courses.)

The Comprehensive Exam: PhD candidates in American Studies will take their comprehensive examinations upon completion of at least six courses beyond the qualifying examination. Students will be examined in two fields: 1) a field primarily within American literature (e.g., American women writers, African-American novels, American literary realism); 2) an area of special interest designed to lead to a dissertation topic (i.e., documentary writing and photography in the 1930s, or representations of space in literature, architecture, and environmental psychology, 1890-1930). The first field requires depth in the content and analytical tools of literary studies; the second requires the demonstration of expertise in the student's own interdisciplinary and research skills. In both fields, students are expected to demonstrate breadth of familiarity with texts and ideas, authority and imagination in interdisciplinary thinking, and progress toward completion of the PhD degree.

For each field, students, working with an advisor, will generate a list of approximately 30 texts—primary and secondary—and will write an essay, approximately 15 pages long, that defines the field of interest, considers the pertinent methodologies, identifies the important issues, and takes stands on those issues. At least two weeks prior to the exam, the essays and bibliographies will be distributed to all members of the examining committee and will be subject to approval by the committee members. The essays and the bibliographies will constitute the basis of the examination. The essay and the bibliography for the special interest area should demonstrate its interdisciplinarity by including in its approach methodologies and texts from two or more disciplines other
than literary studies (e. g., history, media studies, political theory, sociology, anthropology, etc.).

**Registering for Exam Credits.** The student receives three credits for each of the two areas (796W, 796X, Independent Area), making a total of six credits toward the necessary twenty-four (eight courses) for doctoral course work. *The best time to register for these credits is the semester of the exam.* However, scheduling of two area credits is flexible: should you need or want a particular course during the semester you would otherwise be preparing your exam areas, consider signing up and beginning your areas a semester earlier. Registration forms for the areas are available from Wanda, and must be turned in to Wanda during registration (upon which she will enroll the student).

The examining committee will consist of the two advisors plus two other faculty members chosen by agreement of the area advisors and the Director of American Studies. After the exam, the chair will write a report to place in the student's file.

**Foreign Language Requirement:** The same as the English Department PhD requirement; see the English Department graduate program description for details.

**Dissertation Committee, Prospectus, and Defense** requirements are the same as those for the English Department PhD program; see the program description for details.
The Dissertation

Students normally begin planning their dissertation in their 9th semester (MA/PhD) or 4th semester (PhD). The steps of this process include: choosing a dissertation director (chair), putting together a dissertation committee, writing a dissertation prospectus, and submitting an approved prospectus to the Graduate Program Director and the university. Students will ordinarily have completed this process one semester later—10th semester for MA/PhD, 5th semester for PhD. Writing the dissertation itself will ordinarily take four or five semesters, and the summers in-between. (See “Planning Calendar” for details).

The Dissertation Director (Chair)

Choosing the director of your dissertation is an important decision, and the Graduate Program Director encourages you to consult with him or her about it. In general, you would like your director to be someone you trust and feel comfortable with, who is knowledgeable about your topic, and who has a professional reputation in your field. In your preliminary meetings, be sure to ask about this person’s future plans: will they be away, when does their sabbatical fall, when do they plan to retire? This is information you need to have, so it’s perfectly appropriate to ask these questions. (Again, the GPD stands ready to assist if you’d like). Bear in mind, too, that it is possible to change your director if circumstances and/or your direction changes. Such a step should not be undertaken lightly, and it is best to consult with the GPD if you are considering it.

Once you have obtained a commitment from a faculty member to work with you as the director of your dissertation, the two of you should discuss and decide:

- How often you’ll meet
- How much advice you need and welcome
- The timeline for the project: when you will submit drafts of chapters and approximately how long the director will spend on them before returning them to you. If you will not be living in the area, be sure to let your director know so that you can make the necessary arrangements. Some directors will work with you via email, phone, and skype; others will want to meet with you face-to-face. Find out early so you can be prepared.

The Dissertation Committee

As soon after the Two Area Exam as possible, you will want to put together a dissertation committee. In doing so, you should consult both with your dissertation director and with the Graduate Program Director. The Chair of your Two Area committee can also be of great help here, as can the other members of the committee. (Some students ask at least one, if not all, of the professors from the Two Area committee to continue on with them into the dissertation stage. But some do not, and there is no assumption that the Two Area committee will become your dissertation committee.)
When you meet with faculty members to discuss their serving on your committee, explain to them the general project behind your research and give them your estimated time-table; as with the dissertation director, you should discuss expectations of working together. Some committee members will want to read early drafts of every chapter; others will read a chapter only after it’s been worked through and revised; still others will prefer to wait until the end to read the entire dissertation in one go. In general, you should bear in mind that your director is your main advisor, responsible for the overall quality of your work, while your committee members will tend to see themselves primarily as resources for your research.

And remember: one of the members must be a UMass professor from outside the English department. Your dissertation director should be able to help you find this committee member.

The Prospectus

The dissertation prospectus explains what your research project is and how it will contribute to a particular field or fields. Each dissertation director has his or her own conception of what the prospectus should be, but in general you should plan to write 12-15 pages with a bibliography attached. It is worth remembering that as you write your dissertation, emphases and even the overall shape may undergo change. It is best to regard the prospectus as a road map providing you with a good sense of direction, structure and focus for the journey.

The Graduate Studies Office has several examples of the prospectus on file, which you may look at. You will immediately notice how different in format, style and length each of these is. The most important thing to bear in mind is that the prospectus is a document that should work for you. It should be a springboard, not an impediment, and you should never spend more than one semester writing it. Remember that you will need to have your prospectus filed with the Graduate School (see below) in order to apply for most grants and fellowships.

Note: The prospectus is an official document that needs to be signed by all of your committee members and the Graduate Program Director, who sends the prospectus to the Graduate Office. University regulations require that the prospectus be submitted at least seven months prior to the dissertation defense.

The Dissertation Defense

The defense typically lasts one to two hours and often consists of the student’s own statement, a discussion of the dissertation arising from that statement, and finally, a discussion of what can be done with the dissertation in the future. On the whole, the defense is not so much the student “defending” what he/she has written as discussing the project and its future with the committee. All questions posed to the student are about the dissertation. Do not expect to be quizzed about an entire literary period, poet, etc., or to be interrogated about topics not covered in your chapters. Many students find the defense very affirming since they are treated as a colleague and an expert in their field.
Typically, only the student and his/her committee are present at the defense, but the defense is in fact “open” to all graduate faculty; with the agreement of the dissertation committee, students may invite anyone they wish to attend (parents, friends, etc.).

The student’s statement can be almost anything, and is usually discussed in advance with the dissertation director. Not all students or committees have found it necessary to begin this way. When they do, some students begin by explaining what they've learned from the process of writing a dissertation. Others explain how the project evolved from start to finish (e.g., “The chief difficulty I had while writing the dissertation was . . .”).

The discussion, too, can take almost any shape. Students and their committees in the past have talked about what kind of courses, graduate or undergraduate, the student might be capable of teaching. Others have had detailed discussions about how the dissertation might be turned into a book and/or how separate chapters might be reworked into articles and where those might be published.

**Scheduling and Formatting**

Consult the Graduate School website for detailed instructions and guidelines regarding manuscript preparation and submission. There are many small details that have to be observed, so take time to familiarize yourself with them. Some are very particular, such as having the dissertation signed off by all your committee members with, and only with, a black ink pen (and preferably the same black ink pen!). You must pay the various graduation fees and submit all paperwork by an established deadline.

Give copies of the final version of your dissertation to committee members at least two weeks before the defense.

Complete the necessary paperwork for the graduate school at least three to four weeks before the defense.

Make sure you have the dissertation’s signatory page (on acid-free paper matching the body of the text) with you at the defense because your committee will sign it right there.

**Common Difficulties (and How to Handle Them)**

Some students zoom through the program with nary a stumble or scratch. Most of us, however, encounter minor (and occasionally major) setbacks, quagmires, and other assorted monsters. And generally speaking, the dissertation is the most challenging part of the doctoral program.

It’s not unusual to experience some discouragement about the dissertation and the progress you’re not making. Many students experience bouts of self-doubt, frustration, and thinker’s/writer’s block. Take time to talk with people you trust, or seek out professional
help if you think that's what you need. Everyone usually benefits from joining or creating an ongoing dissertation group for support, useful critique, and deadline-setting.

– In some cases, students find that they have to stop reading and just start writing, allowing themselves to write what they already know. Occasionally students find that they’ve gone so far away from their primary texts that they need to stop reading secondary material and plunge back into the primary sources.

– If you’re having problems working with a committee member, talk with friends and decide if it’s a matter for the Graduate Program Director to mediate. The GPD is usually able to offer suggestions about resolving the issue.

– Many students fear that their dissertation will have already “been done.” Rest assured: you may find books that share your interests, but almost never will you find that someone has taken an identical approach to your topic.

– Allow yourself the time to assimilate the information you’re consuming. Trying to rush your best ideas can be an unfruitful use of sweat and anxiety.

– Write as you go. Don’t wait until you’ve completed all of your reading (because you’ll never complete all the reading) to jot down ideas and create some working drafts. It’s often more efficient to work on more than one chapter of the dissertation at once.
Advising and Professional Development

Thinking about Your Future

The Graduate Program is fully aware that most graduate students pursue an advanced degree because they intend to get a job. We believe that students should be given every opportunity to prepare themselves for their careers, and we have devoted considerable resources to this end. Both the Director and the Associate Director of the Graduate program are available for informal conversation about your future and for more focused help with such matters as fellowship and job applications, internships, interviews, and alternative career paths. We strongly urge you to see them in your first year here and to make a point of meeting with them occasionally as you move through the program.

Experience has shown us that success on the job market follows not so much from shaping yourself into an abstractly “ideal” job candidate as from knowing your interests and strengths and demonstrating to others the particular qualities you could bring to a job. Therefore, the more consistently reflective you are about yourself—your aims, abilities, interests—the better prepared you will be for the moment you go on the job market and present yourself as a candidate for a specific position. It is our hope that conversations with the Director and the Associate Director, and participation in our workshops (see below), will help you develop the self-awareness that is so helpful when you actually go on the job market.

Workshops and Advising

The Associate Director, often in conjunction with EGO, also organizes and coordinates a series of “professionalization workshops” for all graduate students in the program. Collectively, their aim is to make clear that there are exciting new opportunities for graduate students who understand the ways higher education itself is changing and who develop the skills and interests being demanded of the new professoriate. Consequently, while some workshops focus on traditional aspects of professionalization (e.g., writing a job letter, putting together a CV), most deal with topics that promote a broader understanding of what “professionalization” means today. Again, we strongly urge you to enroll in some of these workshops early in your studies here. As well as supplementing what you learn through your coursework, they might open doors to new ways of imagining yourself as a teacher, scholar, and intellectual. Regular offerings include:

- pedagogy workshops and effective mentoring for teachers
- dissertation workshop and support groups
- professionalization workshops that deal with topics such as “the job letter,” “the job talk,” “the campus interview,” “publishing conference papers,” “teaching portfolios and syllabi”
- individualized job search counseling
- grant-writing workshops held by the graduate school
- mock interviews before the annual MLA
Professional Organizations

On entering the graduate program in English, students are strongly encouraged to join one or more of the literary and professional organizations that guide and assist us in our academic work. For example, all entering graduate students should join the MLA (Modern Language Association) as early as possible. Special member rates are offered to graduate students and include subscriptions to the PMLA and other journals of the MLA.

We also urge you to familiarize yourself with several journals in your areas of interest. A few times each year you should browse through them, read the book reviews, read an occasional article, look at the book titles being advertised, and so on. After three or four years, you will find that this process has oriented you toward your field(s) much more effectively than any course, curriculum, or program advising can do.

Other important professional organizations include the ASA (American Studies Association), CCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication), AWP (Associated Writing Programs), NCTE (National Council for the Teachers of English), MELUS (Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States), and AJS (Association for Jewish Studies). Membership in these organizations is a crucial way to keep up with all the news, conferences, and the latest scholarship in any of these areas.

Conferences

Entering the profession means taking in and presenting up-to-date scholarship. In addition to the annual conferences held around the country by various professional organizations like the MLA and ASA, any number of smaller, more regional conferences on particular themes issue calls for papers by graduate students and faculty alike. For a complete list, see each new issue of the PMLA; or check out the bulletin board outside the graduate studies office of announcements. We also strongly urge you to join a listserv that regularly disseminates information about conferences, papers, etc. (One of the best is http://www.english.upenn.edu/CFP. To subscribe to the list, address a message to listserv@english.upenn.edu. The subject line can be anything, but the body of the message should read subscribe cfp. There should be nothing else: no name, no email address. You should receive a confirmation message after a few minutes.)

The Graduate Office is usually able to provide modest funding for graduate student travel to conferences in which they are presenting papers connected to their research or scholarship. Students should not count on departmental funding to cover the entire cost of conference travel; in recent years, the amount available has been around $300 per student per year. If that amount is spent on one conference, students should not expect additional departmental funding for travel until the following year. Funds are awarded on a first come, first served basis; all students need to apply is a notice of acceptance to the conference. Be aware that funds often run out by the end of January. Due to limited funds, students are eligible for travel funds only through the year after their original program length (that is, for six years from year of enrollment for those entering PhD, eight years for those entering MA/PhD).
The Writing Program occasionally has funding available to support travel by its current tutors, lecturers, and graduate Teaching Associates when they are presenting papers directly related to Writing Program courses or programs—that is, Basic Writing, College Writing, Junior Year Writing, the Writing Center, or the Writing Program as a whole. Graduate students may not receive travel funding from both the English Department and the Writing Program for the same conference. They may, however, request an exception to this policy if their travel costs are unusually high (e.g., for a conference outside the U.S.) and both the English GPD and Writing Program director agree to this exception. If students are presenting at more than one conference during the year, they may receive funding from English for one conference and the Writing Program for another, if the funding is appropriate to each conference, and agreed to by the relevant director.

Every year, graduate students in the English department also organize their own English Graduate Student Conference, where students read papers and share their works in progress. It is a great way to gain experience in presenting one’s work and to find out what our colleagues are doing.

We strongly advise you to have presented at least two or three conference papers by the time you begin your job search.

The Job Search

The academic job market can be a daunting prospect: the number and kinds of available positions shift unpredictably from year to year, and a good year generally might still mean a more challenging one for positions in a given field (and vice versa). But remember: people do get jobs. Almost 70% of UMass PhD’s from 1999-2012 currently hold tenure-track teaching or academic administrative positions, and many of the remainder hold other kinds of permanent academic positions.

Furthermore, the Graduate Office is deeply committed to helping you in this stage of the program. When you and your thesis advisor feel that you are ready to begin thinking about the job market, you should arrange to meet with the Associate Graduate Program Director, who co-ordinates our placement program. The Associate Director can tell you about the many resources we offer to help our students as they prepare for the job market, including workshops, individualized scrutiny of all application materials, and practice interviews.

As noted above, students should begin preparing their job search well before they actually finish their PhD. Your job application letter, teaching portfolio, writing sample, and CV all play a crucial role in your job search. You will want to discuss them with your dissertation director and the Associate Graduate Program Director, allowing enough time for several drafts and substantial revisions.
The final stages of your job search are a full-time occupation for many weeks. It is a long and often demanding process, which is why candidates are encouraged to begin preparing well in advance and to draw on the resources of the department.

Teaching

Students accepted into the MA/PhD or PhD programs can expect to receive seven or five years (respectively) of teaching support once they have applied to, interviewed successfully with, and been hired by the Writing Program. Continued support is also contingent upon satisfactory performance of all duties required by the position and upon maintaining good academic standing within the program. Semesters of guaranteed support are continuous from the semester of enrollment, excluding formal leaves of absence from the program. That is, teaching support is contiguous with program duration. In addition, semesters spent working outside the department (e.g., in teaching, research, or editorial assistantships that are equivalent in hours to a departmental assistantship) are included in the semesters of guaranteed support. Teaching on program extension in the Writing Program is possible, but only if available in a given year. In some cases, it might be possible to extend the clock on departmental support through teaching: but permission must be granted well ahead of time by the graduate program.

The Writing Program’s interview and selection process is competitive; not every student accepted by the Graduate Program wins a Writing Program position, and for this reason a number of admitted students choose not to come to UMass. In rare cases, an admitted student who has not been offered a position in the Writing Program enters the program anyway: once here, these students should continue to apply to the Writing Program.

The Graduate Program aims to enable students to do three kinds of teaching during the course of their studies: in the Writing Program, as a teaching assistant for a lecture course, and as the teacher of a 35-student General Education (Gen Ed) course. Unfortunately, the complexities of scheduling, along with the uncertain size of each entering class of freshmen, wreak havoc with the ideal of orderly progression from one kind of teaching to another. For this reason, students who have been hired by the Writing Program can count on five years of support (if they are admitted into the PhD program) or seven years of support (if they are admitted into the MA/PhD program); but we cannot guarantee that they’ll be able to do all three kinds of teaching, much less that they will teach in any predictable sequence. That said, the Graduate Program Director (GPD) and the Director of the Writing Program do everything possible to ensure that every student’s teaching preferences are met.

Each spring, students have a chance to express their teaching preferences for the following year by filling out a form (known as the “dream sheet”) and returning it to the GPD. In assigning teaching, the GPD is guided by these preferences, along with the following considerations: is the student making satisfactory progress through the program? What kinds of teaching has the student already done? To what extent is a student qualified to teach one of the English Department courses scheduled for the following year? Any student who feels that there is something unfair about his or her
teaching assignment is strongly encouraged to take those concerns to the GPD, who can then either explain or even alter the assignment.

It is very important to understand that “the clock is ticking”: after five years, a PhD student will run out of teaching support; after seven years, an MA/PhD student will do likewise. For this reason, it’s crucial to adhere to the appropriate schedule provided in the opening pages of this handbook.

**Other Teaching Opportunities**

Students have a chance to apply for a limited number of Winter, Spring, and Summer Session courses offered through the Division of Continuing and Professional Education. These positions will be announced by the Graduate Office, which also distributes the appropriate application forms.

There are also teaching positions in other departments that are available to English Department students. These are listed in “Assistantship Opportunities” under “Students” on the Graduate School web site.
Notes