

Master's Student Handbook

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION TO THE GRADUATE PROGRAM	1
▪ Your First Week at UB	1
▪ Working with the Director of the Master's Program	1
▪ Credit Transfers	1
REQUIREMENTS	2
▪ Description of Each Requirement	2
▪ Graduate Seminars: Intensive vs. Extensive	5
▪ ENG 600: Independent Studies & Reading Groups	5
▪ Incompletes	6
▪ Master's Thesis and Oral Exam/Project:	6
• Master's Thesis	6
• Oral Exam/Project	7
• Completing the Program: How Long Does It Take?	8
OTHER ASPECTS OF GRADUATE STUDY	10
▪ Graduate Groups	10
▪ Public Lectures	10
▪ The Director of the Master's Program	10
APPENDIX	11
▪ Selection of Recent MA Thesis Titles	11
▪ Sample Orientation Schedule	12

INTRODUCTION TO THE MASTER'S PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

The purpose of this handbook is to introduce students to the practices and requirements of the UB English Department's MA Program. You will find information and advice here about a wide range of subjects relating to all stages of your progress through the MA degree, including coursework, examinations, and thesis writing. Do not hesitate to contact the appropriate departmental officers, especially the Director of the Master's Program, if you have any questions or if you need further information.

The Director of the Master's Program

Andrew Stott
435 Clemens Hall
amstott@buffalo.edu
645-0692

Your First Week at UB

At the end of August, incoming MA students must attend a week-long orientation in which they will be given pointers about the library system at UB, computer technology, immigration (for international students), and insurance issues. In addition, they will have an opportunity to meet English faculty members, the Chair of the Department, and the Directors of Graduate and Master's Studies. See the sample orientation schedule at the end of the appendix.

Note that international students will only be able to register for courses after attending the International Students' Orientation Session. The extra fees that appear on their bill will disappear after they attend the orientation session.

Working with the Director of the Master's Program

The Director of the Master's Program also serves as the instructor for the course ENG 501: Introduction to Scholarly Methods, which MA students are required to take their first semester. This course incorporates time for individual advisement with the Director so that each student can ask questions and discuss his/her goals. Remember that the Director is available throughout the year to guide you and facilitate your transition into graduate school. Please do not hesitate to set up a meeting with him or her should you have concerns about any aspect of your MA program.

Credit Transfers:

If you have completed graduate coursework at another institution, it may be possible to transfer credits, but bear in mind that a) transfer credit (up to 6 credits) is decided on a case-by-case basis and b) the transfer of credits can only occur **after** the completion of 24 graduate-level credits at UB while enrolled in the UB English Department's MA Program.

REQUIREMENTS

The basic requirement for the MA degree is the completion of a minimum of 30 approved and graded graduate credits. To be considered full-time, students need to register for 12 credits every semester. The required 30 graduate credits are to be accumulated in the following manner:

1. 9 credits from required courses: 3 credits from ENG 501A: Introduction to Scholarly Methods; 3 credits from ENG 501B (this is not an actual class and has no coursework or meetings—it is just free time set aside for advisement and settling into graduate school in the first semester); and 3 credits from ENG 502: Introduction to Critical and Cultural Theory
2. 12 credits through 4 “intensive”/A-section, 3-credit graduate seminars (not including ENG 501/502)
3. at least 3 “extensive” graduate credits accumulated through either “extensive”/B-section, 3-credit graduate seminars. One credit can also be filled by an approved independent study or approved reading group.
4. as a final component, the successful completion of an MA thesis, or an approved project and one-field oral examination, for which you formally prepare through 6 credits of ENG 598: Project Guidance or ENG 700: Thesis Guidance, as appropriate.

1. Required courses:

ENG 501: Introduction to Scholarly Methods

This course aims to introduce students to the structure of information within the field of literary studies and transmit the necessary skills, knowledge and methodologies required for the successful study of literature at the graduate level. During this course you will be introduced to key literary research tools, develop an awareness of the material history of printed books, learn how to locate relevant information from an exhaustive range of sources, and evaluate the relative authority of some sources over others. We will also be working on the correct compilation and organization of research bibliographies; the theory and practice of editing texts; and the preparation and delivery of scholarly presentations. The final component of the course involves writing a critical paper from a plan and first draft, through to the finished product. Class meetings take the form of practical demonstrations in the libraries, classroom discussions based around prescribed readings, and writing workshops.

Please note: having enrolled for ENG 501, you will automatically be enrolled for three credits in the corresponding “B” section (although it may not show up immediately on your schedule). The “B” section does not have a set meeting time but is instead time put

aside for advisement. Consider it a bonus – free time we give you to settle into graduate school and get up to speed with the work.

Part-time students should not enroll in the “B” section, so they should simply drop this section once it shows up on their schedule. If you run into any difficulties with this, please contact the Director of the Master’s Program or Joyce Troy in the Graduate Office at 645-2575 x1008 or jtroy@buffalo.edu.

ENG 502: Introduction to Critical and Cultural Theory

This course is intended to enhance your familiarity and facility with the kinds of questions literary scholars ask today and their strategies for answering them. You will tour some of the foundational texts and landmarks of contemporary theory, study various critical approaches, and gain practice doing research.

2. Four “intensive” graduate seminars

In the list of English Department graduate courses for any given semester, you will notice that each seminar is divided into “A” (intensive) and “B” (extensive) sections. This is a distinction observed only by the English Department and the Comparative Literature Department at UB.

An “intensive” seminar is a regular seminar in which you are expected to attend every session, read all the set texts, and complete all the assignments. Intensive seminars constitute the core of the program and are selected from the “A” sections of all graduate seminars officially listed or cross-listed in the English Department’s course catalogue. In addition, you may, with the permission of either the Director of the Master’s Program or the Director of Graduate Studies, take graduate seminars outside the English Department. In the past, MA students have taken courses offered by the departments of Comparative Literature, History, American Studies, Women’s Studies, Visual Studies, African-American Studies, Romance Languages, and Classics. The responsibility for finding courses outside English lies with the student him- or herself. Discuss your rationale for taking particular courses outside the English Department with the Director of the Master’s Program.

Note: if you take a graduate seminar outside of either the English or Comparative Literature departments, bear in mind that other departments do not observe this intensive/extensive seminar distinction; consequently, any seminar taken in such departments will automatically count as one of your intensive seminars and you will be required to fulfill all assignments.

3. At least three “extensive” graduate credits

An “extensive” course is a course where you attend all the sessions, do all of the reading, and, at the faculty member’s discretion, complete some assignments during the course of the semester; you do not complete a final research assignment. Extensive courses are good if you are interested in exploring a new area, or wish to familiarize yourself with something without committing research time to it.

In addition to the “B” section within each of our seminars, you may wish to consider independent individual and group work for “extensive” credit. Such work consists in independent studies with individual professors or reading groups organized by graduate students and sponsored by a faculty member.

4. The final component

The MA Program offers two options:

- i. The student may write a conventional MA thesis (c. 60-80 pages) directed by a faculty member of the student’s choice. Usually you prepare for such a thesis by up to six credits of ENG 700: Thesis Guidance with the supervising professor. This thesis must be formally submitted and conform to the UB Graduate School’s formal guidelines. These guidelines, along with a booklet on formatting and submitting your thesis can be found on the Graduate School website: <http://www.grad.buffalo.edu/policies/masters.php>.
- ii. The student may write a shorter paper (c. 25-35 pages) under the direction of one faculty member and take an oral examination covering one field represented by at least fifteen texts, supervised by another faculty member. Preparation involves six credits of ENG 598: Project Guidance with the relevant, supervising faculty member.

Grading and Matriculation

With the exception of ENG 501 and ENG 502, MA students take all their courses with PhD students. While our PhD students are graded either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory,” students in the MA Program are given traditional letter-grades for their courses. You should always remind your instructor of this fact and, in the case of extensive registrations, make sure that you complete enough oral and/or written work to make such a letter-grade evaluation possible.

When you have completed all your coursework short of your final component, you will need to fill out an official “Application to Candidacy” form. When you have completed your final component, you will fill out an official “M” (matriculation) form for the award of your degree. These forms are on file in the graduate office. Note that once your “Application to Candidacy” has been approved, you are eligible for full-time status by paying for as little as one academic credit while you work on your final component. (See Joyce Troy for the Certification of Full-Time Status Form. Eligibility is limited to two semesters.)

✚ **Seminars: Intensive vs. extensive**

How to decide which classes to take intensively or extensively:

It is important to strike a balance between taking classes in a wide range of areas with a wide variety of faculty members and taking seminars in areas that will directly relate to your area of interest and possible thesis. There is no simple rule of thumb when it comes to deciding which seminars to take intensively or extensively, but generally speaking, students take intensive seminars with the faculty members they will want to work with down the road on their thesis or exam/project committee.

Learning your Field: Course Work

When enrolling in seminars, be broad in your sense of what is useful to your field. Shape a concentration for yourself amid your varied interests without limiting yourself to seminars in a narrowly defined field that would fail to provide the context you need to complete your thesis or exam/project. For instance, although the UB MA in English has no language requirement, Early Modern students may benefit from Latin; Lacanians may benefit from a history class. Take courses in your field and in contiguous and related fields. A specialist in twentieth-century English or American literature will want to know something about Victorian literature. An African Americanist would benefit from coursework in African and Caribbean writing. If you write on twentieth-century fiction, it would be useful for your understanding of that field to study relatively marginalized as well as mainstream fields: canonical writers but also, for example, African American and/or Asian American traditions, postcolonial or feminist/queer writing and approaches to reading, and/or popular literature. Make sure to read journals in the field(s) in which you are working. Some recent issues of journals may be found on the bookshelves of CI 306.

✚ **ENG 600: Independent Studies and Reading Groups**

Independent Studies: what is the difference between independent studies and supervised readings?

Supervised readings (ENG 601) are reserved specifically for preparation for the PhD oral examinations. **Independent Studies** (ENG 600), by contrast, allow you to work closely with faculty members in a field where no coursework is offered. You need to approach individual faculty about the possibility of doing an independent study with them considerably before the time you wish to engage in such study. Independent Studies must be approved by the DGS before the end of the preceding semester. Only one Independent Study or Reading Group may count as an intensive seminar; only two may count toward seminar credits. We expect students to read independently and broadly without receiving credit.

Reading Groups constitute another way of satisfying some portion of your requirements. If you are interested in studying a subject (for example, science fiction) that is either absent from or under-represented in existing course offerings, you can find other students who want to study the same subject and form a reading group. You will need to find a faculty sponsor (you register for independent study credit with this faculty member) and you and the other students then draw up a reading list in consultation with this sponsor. You will hold regular meetings (usually eight or so) over the course of the semester in which the reading group meets and the faculty sponsor will meet with the group on 2-3 occasions over that period of time. Only one Independent Study or Reading Group may count as an intensive seminar; only two may count toward seminar credits. We encourage students to meet in independent reading groups without receiving credit.

You will need to submit your proposal for a Reading Group to the Director of Graduate Studies for approval. Sample proposals are available for perusal in the Graduate Studies Office.

Incompletes:

Although it is possible to take incompletes in graduate seminars at UB, faculty in English strongly discourage you from doing so. The grade for an I/U needs to be turned in within a year of your taking the incomplete, so it is important to remain in communication with faculty and give them enough time to read the submitted work before your grade is due. Two Incompletes unfinished after two semesters will lead to loss of good standing in the program. You must also have finished all Incompletes before taking your oral exam, if you choose this option for completing your degree.

The Master's Thesis and Oral Exam/Project:

The Master's Thesis

The Master's thesis is defined as a piece of extended scholarly writing between 60-80 pages in length, and generally split into three or more chapters plus an introduction. As befits a research-led assignment, full scholarly apparatus are required – footnotes or endnotes, meticulous citation, and a bibliography – consistent with the guidelines of either the *MLA Style Manual* or *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The UB Graduate School has a set of formal guidelines for theses; a booklet outlining these guidelines is available in the English Graduate Office.

Picking a Topic

The commonest mistake when planning a thesis is biting off more than one can chew; the best topics for MA theses are focused and well-defined. For the sake of argument, a thesis title “Word and Image in Latin America, 1400-1900” (fascinating though it may sound) would be considered too large and unruly a topic for such a relatively small study. By contrast, something succinct like “Shame and Social Ritual in Three Novels by Saul Bellow” would be ideal, both in terms of structuring the thesis and scope. The appendix

to this handbook contains a list of recent MA thesis titles to get a flavor of workable topics.

Most topics come out of seminar work – a paper that begs to be revised and extended, for instance, or an area of study that you would like to explore further. A simple question to ask yourself when looking for a thesis topic is simply “what did I enjoy most?” It is often advisable to follow these initial instincts as having a genuine interest in your topic will be of invaluable assistance when seeing it through to the end.

Choosing a Supervisor

Once you have chosen your topic – or at least got a few ideas together – you should approach a professor who works in an appropriate field (the Director of the Master’s Program can help you if you are unsure of whom you should ask). If you have not taken a seminar with the professor before, introduce yourself and your topic in an email and ask if they would meet with you. As supervision workloads are not distributed evenly amongst the faculty and some professors may be oversubscribed, it may not always be possible to work with your first choice, especially if you have not taken an intensive seminar with that person. What is most important, however, is that you get regular opportunities to meet with someone who will discuss ideas, read your work and give you feedback on early drafts. Usually students take up to six credits of English 700: Thesis Guidance, when planning and preparing the thesis.

Research and Planning

Research is a fairly lonely business, but you can make it much easier with some rudimentary planning. Consult with your supervisor and ask for reading suggestions; do a thorough survey of all the relevant library databases (MLA, ABELL, WorldCat, etc.), and start to compile a list of books and articles you intend to consult; scour the footnotes and bibliographies of books and articles you have already found looking for further leads. Most importantly, KEEP METICULOUS RECORDS FROM THE START. Always make sure you note the author, title, place of publication, publisher, date and page number of any quotes you take, and update your records regularly. If you are keeping these records electronically, make sure you back up your files regularly to avoid disasters. Keeping good records will alleviate the pain of searching for that elusive quotation that makes the whole thesis make sense... something you read right at the beginning and cannot quite remember now.

Once you are ready to start writing, it helps to break the workload into smaller sections. If you intend your thesis to have three chapters and an introduction, think of each chapter as a separate essay of roughly the same length as a seminar paper. You can write them in whatever order you choose, as once you have written drafts of all the chapters you can go back and make the revisions necessary to link the pieces together, by referring back to previous arguments or anticipating coming chapters. The final draft should convey the sense of a unified and coherent study. Generally speaking, introductions are written last.

Writing the Thesis

Although you can start writing whenever you like, the vast majority of MA theses have been written over the summer months. The writing experience is different for everyone, but you should aim to set yourself clear and realistic deadlines and stick to them. Try to write a little every day. The more you write the less daunting writing becomes and consistent daily efforts soon add up. This phase of the project is generally done alone as your supervisor will not be able to give you meaningful feedback until there is a substantial amount drafted for him or her to comment on.

Oral Exam/Project

As an alternative to writing a thesis, MA students have the option of taking an oral exam based on a semester-long reading list, along with a modest written project of between 25-35 pages. This option tends to be preferred by students who have not yet decided to specialize in a particular field.

The aim of an oral exam list is to study a literary period, genre, theme, or author(s) in depth without the need to produce a thesis on the topic. The list is compiled in consultation with the professor you have chosen to direct your study. Lists vary in length depending on the material to be covered – lists of poetry will necessarily be longer than lists of Victorian novels, for example – but you should aim to challenge yourself while also limiting the list to what can be covered realistically in the course of a semester. Your professor will help you be the judge of this. A list should have a well-defined theme and a focus – which can be as broad as “experimental fiction” or as specific as “postcolonial readings of *Jane Eyre*” – and should include some critical and historical (or theoretical) works.

Once the texts on the exam list have been approved by the supervising professor, the onus is then on the student to keep up with the reading schedule and make appointments with the supervising professor to discuss the material. Patterns of supervision differ from professor to professor; typically, you will set up a schedule of four or five meetings to discuss blocks of reading during the semester.

At the end of the semester, you will be examined orally on your list. The exam takes about one hour. Questions are asked by the supervising professor with a second professor sitting in as an observer. The examination seeks to determine not just how well you have absorbed the material, but the degree to which you can create links among texts and synthesize your thoughts about the list as a whole. [The structure of this exam (and of the PhD oral exam) is under review by the Graduate Review Committee and may change during the coming academic year.]

The project is an extended essay on a topic of your own choosing that complements your orals list. Though the project must be entirely new work and may not replicate work you have handed in for other seminars, it might be something that has grown out of seminar reading, or a response paper. Again, the onus is on the student to approach a professor to supervise this piece of work.

Completing the Program: How Long Does it Take?

Our program has been designed so that it is possible to be paid for as two semesters of full-time study and completed in one calendar year (two semesters and a summer). Some students take this option every year; most students take three or four semesters to finish. The amount of time you take to finish is entirely up to you. Once you start, you are neither locked into a timetable, nor under any pressure to finish **as long as you finish within four years**.

For those who would like to complete the program in a year, here is how it is done:

For MA students, full-time status is defined as 12 credit-hours. When paying for full-time status you can enroll for up to 18 credits at the same rate. Registration for full-time status extends, for degree conferral purposes, up to the late-August deadline for September degree conferral. Therefore you can schedule (and pay for) all of your required 30 credit-hours toward the degree by registering for either 12 hours in the fall semester and 18 in the spring, or for 15 in each semester, even though the work on your final component will most likely be finished during the summer. Following are two models for full-time study, together with their credit-hour calculations:

Model A:

Fall semester	Spring semester	Summer
1. ENG 501 A (3)	1. Intensive seminar 2 (3)	Complete work on thesis, orals, or project
2. ENG 501 B (3)	2. Intensive seminar 3 (3)	
3. ENG 502 (3)	3. Intensive seminar 4 (3)	
4. Intensive seminar 1 (3)	4. Extensive seminar, independent study, or reading group (3)	
	5. ENG 598 or 700 (3)	
	6. ENG 598 or 700 (3)	

Model B:

Fall semester	Spring semester	Summer
1. ENG 501A (3)	1. Intensive seminar 2 (3)	Complete work on thesis, orals, or project
2. ENG 501 B (3)	2. Intensive seminar 3 (3)	
3. ENG 502 (3)	3. Intensive seminar 4 (3)	
4. Intensive seminar 1 (3)	4. ENG 598 or 700 (3)	
5. Extensive seminar (3)	5. ENG 598 or 700 (3)	

The advantage of Model A is that it gives you time to adjust to graduate school and, for most of you, a new home. However, Model A does make for a very loaded spring semester. If you follow Model B and enroll for 15 credits in the fall, we recommend that you enroll for three of those credits in the “extensive” format.

N.B.: Because you would not be enrolling for any new coursework during the summer, you would probably not be eligible for new financial aid during that period. However, because your spring semester work toward your final component would still be ongoing, you would be construed (for the duration of the summer) as continuously and actively engaged in completing your program, and therefore not yet subject to repayment of student loans. Likewise, international students should not have any difficulty remaining in the U.S. for the duration of that summer period to complete their academic work. For additional, more authoritative advice on these matters, consult the Offices of Financial Aid (<http://src.buffalo.edu/financialaid/index.shtml>).

OTHER ASPECTS OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Graduate Groups

Graduate study at UB offer multiple opportunities for non-credit learning and intellectual stimulation. The Department strongly encourages you to become involved with the Graduate Groups in the fields closest to your interests. Current Graduate Field Groups include the Americanist Group, the British and Irish Studies Group, the Early Modern Studies Group, the Graduate Poetics Group, and the Transnational Studies Group. Typically, these groups hold colloquia, organize work-in-progress sessions, and invite outside speakers. Many of these groups are interdepartmental and interdisciplinary. Participating in these groups will enable you to become acquainted with graduate students and faculty from UB and elsewhere who have similar intellectual interests. Many students also participate in the English Graduate Students Association (EGSA).

Public Lectures

All MA students should make an effort to attend the many and diverse public lectures sponsored by the Department of English or other departments, programs, and research groups of interest to you on campus. These events can be a wonderful way to explore your own area of interest further and to introduce yourself to new research areas and the faculty and graduate students working in them. They also provide valuable models of professional styles of presentation and research.

The Director of the Master's Program

The Director of the Master's Program is a resource meant to help you make the best of your experience at UB. Use him/her!!

APPENDIX

A Selection of Recent MA Thesis Titles:

Aaron Lelito, "Narratives of Consumption: Postmodern American Fiction's Engagement with Consumer Culture" (2007).

Hugo Garcia Manriquez, "The Promised Future: The (Un)Interrupted Dialogue in William Carlos Williams' *Yes, Mrs. Williams*" (2007).

Bradford Reid, "Body Language: The Material Bodily Lower Stratum in the Poetry of Walt Whitman, Frank O'Hara, and Charles Bukowski" (2007).

Jeanne Skotnicki, "Role Reversal: Female Self-Interest and Male Sacrifice in the Novels of Louisa May Alcott" (2007).

Michael Idland, "'Racing the Screen: Race and Hegemony in African-American Television" (2006).

Jeffrey Iovannone, "Transperformance: Transgendered Reading Strategies, Contemporary American Literature" (2005).

Susan Lavalley, "Reconsidering the Home Front: American Women Writer's Responses to Maternal, Domestic, and Nationalistic Expectations During the First World War" (2005).

Jessica Beard, "Susan Howe, Charles Olson and the Poetics of Enactment" (2004).

Jason Malikow, "The Economics of Violence in the Fiction of Dennis Cooper and Bret Easton Ellis" (2004).

Michael Albert, "Redefining Nature: Wordsworth and Clare From Romanticism to Ecology" (2003).

Adrin Fisher, "Grace and Family Dysfunction in Selected Works of Flannery O'Connor" (2002).

David Pavelich, "'My Life by Water': Reading Lorine Niedecker's Reflective Poetics" (2002).

SAMPLE ORIENTATION SCHEDULE

The English Department orientation for incoming graduate students takes place during the two weeks before classes begin.

FOR COMPUTER-MEDIATED ENG 101 INSTRUCTORS ONLY (HELD IN 128 CLEMENS):

M, Aug. 13	9:30-12:00	Computer lab: facilities & communications.....R. Feero
	13:30-16:00	Use of MS Word/ the Page-Design Syllabus...Dir. Comp., Feero
Tue, Aug. 14	9:30-12:00	The Page-Design syllabus..... Dir. Comp, R. Feero
	13:30-16:00	Course Info.....R. Feero
Wed, Aug. 15	9:30-12:00	Internet library resources.....L. Taddeo
	13:30-15:00	Web assignments for students..... Dir. Comp, R. Feero
	15:00-16:00	Hands-on practice
Th, Aug. 16	13:30-16:00	Putting your syllabus on the Web..... Dir. Comp, R. Feero

FOR REGULAR CLASSROOM ENG 101 INSTRUCTORS ONLY: Arab Lyon in Clemens 538

Tue, Aug. 21	9:00-12:00	Intro. to the Composition Program and ENG 101.....A. Lyon
	13:30-16:30	The ENG 101 Syllabus
Th, Aug. 23	9:00-12:00	On-line resources; revising the syllabus....Dir. Comp, R. Feero
	13:30-16:30	Pedagogy.....A. Lyon

FOR ALL IN-COMING GRADUATE STUDENTS:

Wed, Aug. 22	9:30-11:50	Academic Orientation.....Chair, Administrators
	12:00	Lunch in 306 Clemens, Provided by the Department
	13:30	Literary and Electronic Library Resources..... L. Taddeo
F, Aug. 24	14:00	Graduate School Orientation, Mainstage Theater, CFA

FOR IN-COMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ONLY:

M, Aug. 20	16:00-18:00	Immigration & Public Safety Sessions*
------------	-------------	---------------------------------------

*You must first register with the Office of International Education

FOR ALL IN-COMING PHD AND MA STUDENTS (HELD IN 306 AND 436 CLEMENS):

F, Aug. 24	9:00-11:50	Intro. to the PhD Program..... Dir. of Grad Studies
		Intro to the MA Program..... Dir. of MA Studies

FOR EVERYBODY—GRAD STUDENTS, SPOUSES, SIGNIFICANT OTHERS, CHILDREN

Early in the semester 18:00-21:00 Garden Party (Bring a dish)Place TBA