

M.A. English: Literature Exam Option

- To prepare for and complete this exam, the student will take 3 credits of English 596 (Individual Study) with the chair of the exam committee. The Graduate Coordinator must be advised of the student's intent to take the examination and of the name of the chair of the committee. The Coordinator has sample 596 forms which s/he will forward to the chair of the committee, along with copies of the guidelines, sample questions, etc. In the case that the faculty member is unaware, the student should remind him/her of this requirement. It is recommended that the student and the committee chair should review together the "Exam Option" document in the early phases of Eng. 596.
- Each student will create an individualized reading list of material covered in his/her course work. The list of texts from the student's courses may be supplemented with additional texts that help fill in gaps or focus the reading list to meet the educational goals of the student. The reading list should be comprised of at least 45-55 separate primary literary and theoretical texts. Secondary texts in literary criticism and literary history should be consulted by the student to help contextualize the primary works.
- The student may submit to the chair the original syllabus for all the courses s/he has taken, along with specific titles to works that were listed in a generic manner on the syllabus. In case of loss, the chair should remind the student that the department keeps copies of all syllabi. Chair must make sure that the student's list includes works from a variety of courses s/he has taken during the Masters program.
- The student will form a three-member committee comprised of faculty to develop and evaluate his/her exam. The chair of the committee must hold graduate faculty status. This committee will develop an examination of 3 essay topics, from which the student will choose 2 on which to write. Each of the two essays must be 8-9 pages long, not counting a separate Works Cited page, for a maximum of a 20-page examination. Students will pick up the exam at 9 o'clock in the morning on a Friday, and return it by 5 o'clock in the afternoon the following Thursday. Exams must be typed, double-spaced in 12-point font, and printed out.
- Each of the 2 essays must incorporate meaningful analysis and synthesis of at least **5 texts; these texts must derive from at least two separate, graduate courses taken by the student, and preferably more.**
- The committee can aid the student by ensuring that the essay topics **prompt the student to synthesize the material in a variety of ways, but especially across the courses the student has taken.** The essay topics should be constructed in a manner that helps the student to make connections or discuss similar or disparate elements among texts that come from different time periods, cultures, genres, and/or traditions etc. The essay topics can suggest cross-course discussion of theme, genre, literary style, historical or cultural context, literary period, theoretical approach etc. There should be no questions that emerge from the readings of only one course, or that focus on only one text or one author.

- Students may not discuss any one text at length in both essays. Students may not present direct material from their own previous essays (i.e. “cut and paste”), although they may choose to re-visit issues and topics on which they have previously written.
- Students are not required to go beyond the original reading list in order to successfully complete the exam; however, during the exam period, they may visit the library, do additional research, and supplement their exam analyses with secondary texts not on the original reading list, if they wish.
- Students are highly recommended not to organize their essays by text, but rather by aspect or idea that can be discussed across the minimum 5 texts. This exam tests students’ abilities to synthesize and integrate thoughts across texts, courses, time periods, themes, theoretical approaches, critical positions, etc.
- In granting a grade, the committee will take into consideration first and foremost the content, noting especially the student’s own ideas and insights. It will also assess the student’s facility in providing meaningful analysis and synthesis of the various texts, approaches, etc.; his/her awareness of the context (e.g. genre-conventions, history, critical tradition, etc.) from which the texts or the analyses proceed; his/her implementation of effective argument development and proper grammar and conventions; and his/her ambition in the number of courses from which s/he has drawn the texts on which to write.
- An exam may pass, pass with honors, or fail depending on how well the student has performed the elements listed in the previous bullet. A passing exam will demonstrate a competent performance, while an honors distinction will demonstrate a truly outstanding performance. Honors designation may not be granted if the student is required to re-write any part of the exam.
- The faculty committee will evaluate the exam, with each member writing a short response to the exam, providing the reader's overall assessment of the exam and specific comments about each section.
- The chair of the committee will provide the readers' comments to the student, and students have the right to review the readers' comments and their graded exams.
- The chair of the committee will forward the committee's recommendation, the exam, and comments to the Graduate Coordinator to keep with the student's file.
- The committee may ask the student to re-write one or both exam essays only once during the quarter of examination. If the student does not pass the re-write, s/he must take a new exam in the following quarter. Students should note that this may result in their having to stay enrolled in the program for an additional quarter.
- A student has the right to contest the exam committee's evaluation of the first or second exam by petitioning the department chair. If a student does not pass the second exam, even after retaking it, s/he must meet with the Graduate Coordinator to explore alternative options for completing the graduate program.
- A copy of the exam questions should be given to the Graduate Committee to create an archive of exams, which both faculty and students may review and which the committee will use for assessment.
- The exam should be scheduled no later than the 7th week of either of the two final quarters of the student’s program.