Where To Find What You Need

Welcome to the Department of English at Virginia Commonwealth University. We hope your course of study here will be intellectually stimulating and academically enriching. This handbook is designed to give you the information you'll need as you progress through the program. It provides general program information as well as details about advising, registration procedures, requirements, and examinations.

The current Graduate Bulletin discusses the School of Graduate Studies' requirements for all students, including general academic regulations. Students should be familiar with all university rules and regulations as detailed in the Graduate Bulletin. The Bulletin and each semester's Schedule of Classes outline the academic calendar and give the dates for registration, the add/drop period, and graduation application deadlines.

The university's annual Resource Guide, published by the Division of Students Affairs, provides a directory of university services and policies. In the Resource Guide, you'll find a variety of information about topics ranging from grade review procedures to parking services. The Division of Student Affairs is located in Sitterding House, 901 Floyd Avenue, 828-1244.

If you have questions beyond the scope of these materials, please contact Katherine Bassard, Director of the MA (827-8314), or Thom Didato, the Coordinator of English Graduate Programs (828-1329). The main departmental phone number is 828-1331. See Faculty for the names, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses for all graduate faculty in the department.

Where We Contact You

Every enrolled graduate student must have an e-mail account. Students can obtain an e-mail account by going to the Customer Service Window (B-9) in the basement of Cabell Library or online at http://www.at.vcu.edu/faq/accts/computing.html. Electronic mail is the primary vehicle for conveying information to you. Course information, examination dates, fellowship announcements, and other professional opportunities are relayed only by e-mail, so failure to have an active e-mail account places you at a significant disadvantage. Additionally, all MA candidates have a place to receive mail and various printed materials in the English Department's main office in Hibbs 306. Please check these mailboxes frequently.

General Program Information

Advising

Initially, students meet with the Director of the MA to determine their classes for the first semester. After that semester, students are assigned a faculty member as their advisor. If you have a particularly faculty member you would like to have as your advisor, you may request that person. While many graduate students "self advise," you are encouraged to maintain communication with either your advisor or the Director to ensure your program of study is appropriate. Students, however, are expected to keep their own tally of credits and lists of classes that will fulfill the degree requirements.

If you need information about requirements, forms, deadlines, or other administrative aspects of your degree, please see the graduate director or English graduate programs coordinator.

Student Status

A graduate student at VCU is considered full time if he or she is enrolled for a minimum of nine and a maximum of sixteen credit hours per semester. More than sixteen hours is an overload and requires special permission. No more than twelve semester credits may be earned in a summer semester. All fully admitted and provisionally admitted students are classified as G1 and can enroll for all Writing and Rhetoric courses and all 500- and 600-level literature courses without special permission. However, permission forms, when needed, are available from the English graduate programs coordinator.
Students must maintain an overall grade-point average of 3.0 ("B") and will receive no credit for courses graded lower than "C." Students receiving two or more "C's" or any grade of "D" or "F" will be reviewed for possible academic termination. Students who do not register for courses for more than one calendar year and who do not apply for a leave of absence must reapply for admission to the university and MA in English.

Graduate Teaching Assistants must register for nine hours each semester. GTA's must take three hours of English 500 (Practicum in Teaching College English), which may count toward that total. Also, during each academic year (fall and spring semesters), GTA's must complete at least fifteen hours that do count toward graduation. This "reasonable progress" toward a degree is required to maintain financial aid. Please note that English 500 hours do not count toward required graduation credits.

**Time Limit for Completion of Requirements**
The time limit for completing a graduate degree cannot exceed seven years. At the master's level this period includes five years with two possible one-year extensions. Upon written petition through the MA program director, extensions may be granted by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies. All work applied toward the degree, including work transferred from other institutions, cannot be more than seven years old when all degree requirements are fulfilled and you apply for graduation. For additional details, please consult the [Graduate Bulletin](http://www.has.vcu.edu/eng/graduate/ma/ma_handbook_print_pre2010.htm).

**Course Information**

**Registration**
After the initial registration, subsequent registration for most courses can occur by telephone as specified in each semester's advanced registration booklet. You are strongly encouraged to register during advance registration. Please remember that even though the University generates a bill when you register, tuition is not due until the semester begins so do not let that prevent you from registering in advance. Advance registration enables students to enroll in the courses of their choice and provides the department with the information necessary to make accurate determinations about enrollment figures and future course offerings. Students would do well to consult with an advisor prior to each registration.

**Credit for Courses**
Graduate courses are listed in the Graduate Bulletin. Each semester the department provides an electronic list of English graduate classes and course descriptions on the Department of English web site at [http://www.has.vcu.edu/eng/courses/](http://www.has.vcu.edu/eng/courses/). The meeting times and registration information for these classes can be found in the university's Schedule of Classes published each semester.

All classes must be at the 500-, 600-, or 700-level.

At least half of the required courses for the degree must be numbered 600 or above. As detailed above, students must achieve an overall grade-point average of 3.0 ("B") and will receive no credit for courses graded lower than "C."

Students may take graduate-level classes offered in other departments that complement their interests within their concentration. You must get approval from the program director or your advisor prior to enrolling. Questions regarding courses offered in other departments should be directed to the directors of graduate studies in those departments.

The Graduate Bulletin contains further information about the School of Graduate Studies' regulations including attendance requirements, the grades of "W" (withdrawn) and "I" (incomplete), time limits for completing courses graded "I" and other academic policies.

**Course Availability**
Not all courses listed in the Graduate Bulletin will be offered every semester. For course availability on a semester-to-semester basis, you should consult the Schedule of Classes for that semester, as well as the department's course descriptions. Generally, the department tries to offer two 500-level surveys of literature each semester, rotating through the seven surveys within two years. At least once a year at the 500-level, the department typically offers linguistics, criticism, and teaching English as a second language. Generally, we offer English 530, Introduction to Literary Scholarship, and English 531, Literary Criticism, once a year. English 501, Introduction to Graduate Studies, is offered every fall. These regularly offered courses are complemented by a variety of courses in writing and rhetoric and a range of seminars in literature.
Other Curricular Opportunities

Independent Study
Independent studies are designed for the student who wishes to pursue a subject beyond the scope a course typically allows; thus, they are intended for students who have developed a specific research interest, theoretical problem, or sustained topic to explore. Prerequisite for all independent study courses are six credits of appropriate graduate course work. Independent study is not available for a course that duplicates courses already being offered. Neither can it be used as thesis hours or for a creative writing project. A student may take a maximum of six credits in graduate-level independent study courses.

Students must have a member of the graduate faculty direct their independent study. Students must submit a description of the course of study, a bibliography, and the anticipated final product (e.g., a long paper). Students should be sure the description and bibliography are carefully prepared to give a clear sense of the aim and goals of the project. Independent studies must be approved by the faculty member who will direct the study, by the Department Chair and by the Director of the MA. A copy of the form required to process an independent study is included in this handbook. Once the study is approved, you will be given a special card with which to register.

Creative Writing Workshops
Students in the MFA have first priority for classroom space in creative writing workshops. However, the Director of Creative Writing or the instructor of the course may permit some MA candidates who have an existing portfolio of work to take a creative writing workshop. Decisions will be made on the basis of the student's portfolio of drama, poetry or fiction, which must be sufficiently advanced to be eligible for enrollment in these courses. The student who has not previously written poetry, drama, or fiction may consider taking an undergraduate course in creative writing at the 400 level in order to prepare a sufficient portfolio. Undergraduate courses in creative writing at the 400 level do not count toward the graduate degree.

Thesis
The requirements for the thesis are outlined below. In order to sign up for thesis credits, students need a thesis director and a prospectus for the thesis. The MA Committee, in consultation with your advisor and thesis director, approves all thesis proposals. This process is discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this handbook.

Internships in Writing, Teaching, and Editing
The possibilities for internships exist and change each year. Please consult with the graduate director or the graduate programs coordinator.

Other Departmental Resources

Graduate Teaching Assistantships
The Department of English offers a limited number of Graduate Teaching Assistantships each year. Assistantship duties usually involve working as a tutor in the writing center, working in the department's computer center, or teaching sections of English 101/200. Some students assist faculty members with teaching, assisting in large lecture courses, research, or administrative duties, and other assignments are made to meet departmental needs. Assignments are made by the Associate Chair in consultation with faculty program directors. Assistantships are available to full-time students only, and the students take certain required courses (636, 500) as part of their responsibilities. GTAs receive a stipend and have their full-time tuition paid for the academic year. Assistantships are awarded each year from among all applicants on the basis of each applicant's academic records (undergraduate and graduate), GRE scores, letters of recommendation, and professional qualities. Assistantship application forms are available from the English graduate programs coordinator and must be submitted to the program director by March 1.

Work-Study Opportunities
The department also has a limited number of work-study opportunities available for graduate students. The applications for these positions are handled through the Office of Financial Aid. Contact that office for further information and the appropriate forms.

Computer Center
The Department of English maintains a computer center on the third floor (rooms 331 and 341) of the Hibbs Building. It is staffed by Graduate Teaching Assistants and is available for use by all English graduate students.

Graduate Writers Association

http://www.has.vcu.edu/eng/graduate/ma/ma_handbook_print_pre2010.htm
The Graduate Writers Association is a student organization, registered with the Office of Student Activities, open to any English graduate student. The organization promotes the literary arts at VCU, primarily through the Friday Readings Series, which provides an opportunity for students to share their work in front of an audience. The GWA also helps sponsor and plan the Visiting Writers Series.

**Professional and Academic Writing Association**

The Profession and Academic Writing Association is a student organization, registered with the Office of Student Activities, open to any English graduate student. PAWA sponsors regular readings, speakers, and discussions in the area of academic and non-fiction writing.

**General Requirements for the Degree**

Regardless of concentration, all students must complete 30 credit hours for the degree, with at least 15 of those hours at the 600-level. University regulations permit us to accept (with approval of the MA Committee) up to six hours of transfer credit and up to six hours taken as a "special student," before a student is fully admitted to the program. With approval from the MA director, students may take a limited number of courses in other departments that complement their interests within their concentration. As discussed further below, in each concentration, a student may choose to write a thesis as part of the degree.

**Requirements Specific to Concentrations**

**Literature**

The literature concentration emphasizes reading, textual analysis, and critical thinking. Students are encouraged to develop their own area of interests rather than exhaustively cover all literary periods and genres.

1) Either English 530, Introduction to Literary Scholarship, or English 531, Literary Criticism (3 cr.)
2) English 501, Introduction to Graduate Studies (1 cr.)
3) One course in Writing and Rhetoric (3 cr.)
4) Five courses in literature, linguistics, or criticism (15 cr.)
5) Three additional courses in literature, linguistics, or writing and rhetoric; or coursework from outside the department with approval of the MA Committee. Six hours (the equivalent of two courses) may be thesis credits. (9 cr.)
6) An examination based on a reading list and coursework.

**Writing and Rhetoric**

The writing and rhetoric concentration focuses on theory, pedagogy, and practice as it prepares students to write, teach, and approach discourse critically.

1) English 636, Teaching Writing (3 cr.)
2) English 501, Introduction to Graduate Studies (1 cr.)
3) English 672, Writing Nonfiction (3 cr.)
4) One course in linguistics, to be chosen from the following (3 cr.):
   - English 532, Applied English Linguistics
   - English 552, Teaching English as a Second Language
   - English 553, Studies in Linguistics
5) One graduate-level course in literature (3 cr.)
6) Two additional courses in Writing and Rhetoric (6 cr.) to be chosen from the following:
   - English 637, Theories of Writing and Rhetoric
   - English 651, Topics in Teaching Composition
   - English 652, Topics in Writing and Rhetoric
   - English 670, Literary Editing and Publishing
   - English 671, Film and Television Scripts
   - English 692, Independent Study
   - English 694, Internship in Writing
7) Four additional courses in literature, linguistics, or writing and rhetoric; or coursework from outside the department
with approval of the MA Committee. Two of these courses may be thesis credits. (12 cr.)

8) If the student does not write a six-hour thesis, he or she must take a written comprehensive examination based on a reading list and on coursework.

Examinations

Examinations at the end of the Masters program are designed to ensure that graduating candidates have acquired expertise in their respective fields. All candidates in the Literature track will take an exam; candidates in the Writing and Rhetoric track will elect either to take an examination or to write a thesis. The examination is based in part upon reading lists included in the Appendices of this handbook. The lists do not constitute a "canon," but rather represent significant works in the respective fields of English studies.

Examinations are administered in Fall, Spring, and Summer and contain both a morning and afternoon session. Two weeks before the exam, the students who plan to take the exam must submit an exam proposal that details the primary interpretative approaches or modes of inquiry they use to read the short list of set texts. These proposals, which must be approved by the MA committee, should contain the kinds of questions the MA candidate uses to make sense of the list. At least two faculty members evaluate an exam with the score of pass or fail. If necessary, a student may retake one or both sessions of the exam. Students may sit the examination twice.

Literature Track

The examination for the Literature track asks candidates to discuss texts in sophisticated ways in the context of English studies. Through their knowledge of an announced short list of texts, candidates should demonstrate an ability to analyze texts, to develop a sustained argument, and to interrogate theoretical issues. The examination presupposes that candidates will be able to write convincingly, to apply their knowledge and competence to particular questions, and to make critical evaluations and judgments.

From the longer reading list for the Literature track, the MA Committee selects a short "set text" list of five to ten particular works for the following spring, summer, and fall examinations. The Committee will select primary and theoretical texts that represent a chronological, generic, and thematic range and that afford opportunities to explore intertextual connections.

Writing and Rhetoric Track

The examination for the Writing and Rhetoric track asks candidates to demonstrate a familiarity with a broad range of issues and practices in writing and rhetoric and a mastery of a body of knowledge acquired in graduate school. The examination presupposes that candidates will be able to write convincingly, to apply their knowledge and competence to particular questions, and to make critical evaluations and judgments.

One section of the examination for candidates is based upon an announced selection from the reading list for Writing and Rhetoric. Texts selected represent a number of fields within writing and rhetoric: 1) Rhetorical Theory: texts both from the historical tradition and from modern rhetoric; 2) Writing Theory: texts focused upon writing and reading theory; 3) Pedagogical Theory: texts representing pedagogical theory in writing and rhetoric; 4) Interdisciplinary Connections: texts representing other disciplines that have influenced writing and rhetoric.

Graduation

To graduate, students must complete the requirements for their track and submit a completed graduation application. Graduation applications, available in Founders' Hall, Room 104, must be submitted to the student's advisor during the first two weeks of the semester in which the student plans to graduate. Students must be enrolled the semester they plan to graduate.

Departmental Organization

The MA Committee, with the Director of the MA and the Director of Composition and Rhetoric as ex officio members and with two elected members from the graduate faculty, monitors the program. The Committee serves as an admission committee, reviews student requests for special action (including waivers of requirements), and evaluates thesis proposals. The Committee also meets to consider curricular change and serves as an advisory committee to the Director.
The Director of the MA also serves on the Graduate Studies Committee. This Committee facilitates interaction between the MA and MFA programs and plans scheduling of graduate courses. Chaired by the departmental chairperson, the committee includes the Director of the MFA, the Director of Writing and Rhetoric, the Associate Chair, and elected members of the faculty. Any changes to the curricular requirements within either concentration are discussed and approved by the graduate faculty.

Fred Hawkridge, Interim Dean, College of Humanities and Sciences.
F. Douglas Boudinot, Dean, School of Graduate Studies.
L T Oggel, Chairman, Department of English.
David Latane, Associate Chairman, Department of English.
Sachi Shimomura, Director of Undergraduate Studies.
Katherine Bassard, Director of MA in English.
Clint McCown, Director of MFA in Creative Writing.
Thom Didato, Graduate Programs Advisor.