Bowling Green State University

MA in English with a Specialization in Literary and Textual Studies

MA PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Spring 2023; revised and updated April 21, 2023

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**Degree Requirements, Advising, and Coursework**

**Degree Requirements**
31-33 hours of graduate credit, including 6 hours of required courses, a minimum of 24 hours in English/elective courses, and capstone hours. Students completing the MA Portfolio option for their capstone (MA Plan II) will complete a 1 credit-hour capstone course while students completing a thesis as their capstone (MA Plan I) will complete 3 credit hours of thesis work. The required hours do not include ENG 6020 Composition Instructors Workshop, which is required for students teaching in the University Writing Program (UWP) for the first time. Use the check sheets in this handbook to keep track of your progress in your coursework and to ensure you make timely progress on your capstone project.

In addition to the MA degree, the English Department offers graduate certificate programs that can be taken concurrently with the MA in English. Certificate programs in English can be found on the website; others exist across the university. If you are interested in pursuing a graduate certificate, speak with the program director for more information.

**Advising and Information**
There are three main sources for information in English:
- **Literature Program Director**: For general questions, degree program, academic advising, course selection, faculty questions, mentoring: Literature Program Director.
- **English Department Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate Secretary**: Graduate Assistantship assignments, funding, questions related to university administration. The Grad Secretary is an excellent and often the fastest-response resource for all kinds of questions.

**Coursework**
The MA in English with a specialization in Literary and Textual Studies coursework is designed to both ground students in contemporary English studies (broadly conceived) and to allow a great deal of flexibility in an individual student’s path of study.

Once courses are announced for the following semester, but prior to registering for courses, you must meet with the Literature Program Director to pick your courses for the upcoming term. The Literature Program Director serves as your committee chair regarding coursework. For most courses, you will be able to self-enroll through the online portal once enrollment opens following your meeting with the program director.

The **Check Sheet for Coursework and Degree Completion** will help you keep track of courses and your progress toward graduation. In addition, be sure to regularly check your online **Degree Audit Report** (MyBGSU > Student Degree Audit), which will track your progress toward your degree. If you have any questions, consult the Literature Program Director.
Capstone Project: Portfolio or Thesis

Students must complete a capstone assignment during year 2 to successfully complete the MA degree. This project can take the form of one of two options: the portfolio (also referred to as Plan II in BGSU documentation) or the thesis (also referred to as Plan I). Both options are designed to serve as a culmination of a student’s scholarly work in the MA program. Despite the numbering (Plan I and Plan II) most students will complete the portfolio. Students considering a thesis should review the information below and have a concrete plan towards completion by (preferably before) the end of their first year.

Master’s Portfolio (Plan II)
A student completing the portfolio track will need 31 credit hours to graduate (30 hours of coursework plus 1 hour for ENG 6910 Master’s Portfolio). A student pursuing the portfolio option compiles a portfolio, typically consisting of four substantial course projects that best exemplify the strengths of the student’s writing, researching, and critical thinking abilities, as well as representing either the range of their work or some specific area(s) of interest to the student. In consultation with an advisor, the portfolio student revises and expands their projects and writes a critical introduction (sometimes called the “analytical narrative”) describing the scope of the portfolio, the revision process, and what the portfolio represents about their intellectual and/or professional development during the MA program. The complete portfolio with introduction is typically 40-70 double-spaced pages.

Portfolio Timeline
Students pursuing the portfolio option will work to secure a portfolio advisor from the available faculty, generally during the fall semester of year 2. Students choosing this option will enroll in a 1 credit-hour capstone course (ENG 6910 Master’s Portfolio) with their chosen advisor in the spring of year 2.

Sample Portfolios
MA Portfolios are submitted to and remain public on BGSU’s ScholarWorks site, operated by BGSU’s University Libraries: https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ms_english/. ScholarWorks hosts MA Portfolios for students in the MA in Literary and Textual Studies as well as students in BGSU’s online MA in English programs. Some portfolios are titled, others are not. Some recent Literary and Textual Studies portfolios include:

**Master’s Thesis (Plan I)**

A student completing the thesis track will need 33 credit hours to graduate (30 hours of coursework plus 3 hours of ENG 6990 Thesis Research). The master’s thesis is written under the direction of a thesis committee chair (first reader) and a second reader. Please give careful attention to the entire “Thesis & Dissertations” section of the Graduate College website, including the online Thesis/Dissertation Handbook and the dates and deadlines. You can find requirements, that handbook, and other essential information here: [http://www.bgsu.edu/graduate/thesis-and-dissertations.html](http://www.bgsu.edu/graduate/thesis-and-dissertations.html). You are responsible for carefully reviewing that information and using it during the thesis-writing process.

The thesis topic should arise out of the student’s personal exploration in a field of study. The thesis may represent a specifically limited piece of research, a critical understanding of a sector of knowledge of literature of considerable dimensions, or a thorough critical analysis of a substantial piece of literature. You and the thesis committee chair will choose a length that satisfies the requirements of the topic. Theses in English normally range from 60-80 pages, although the specific length and scope would be decided between the thesis committee chair and student. Students should expect to write a minimum of 50 pages and a maximum of 100 pages. Each chapter should be approximately the length of an academic article. Students should expect to work through multiple drafts of each chapter, as well as more than one revision of the entire thesis.

Alternative formats for the MA Thesis, such as digital humanities projects (digital curation of archival material with a significant critical component), curricular or pedagogical projects, etc., are possible. If you are interested in alternative formats, meet with the Literature Program Director about possible formats, committee chairs, etc. Regardless of format, any alternative project must illustrate an equivalent level of research, analytical rigor, and argumentative writing as would a traditional thesis.

All theses are accessible in the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation database through BGSU’s University Library website. See “Examples” below for a list of recent sample theses.

**Thesis Deadlines**

The deadlines for various steps for completion of a thesis are available on the check sheet on the following pages and at the Graduate College Office located in McFall Center. The Graduate College has a deadline listing for each academic year that provides due dates for approving thesis topics, completing preliminary drafts, conducting oral exams, and depositing library copies. Please familiarize yourself with the Graduate College website: [http://www.bgsu.edu/graduate.html](http://www.bgsu.edu/graduate.html), especially the “Documents and Forms” and “Important Dates & Deadlines” sections. Much of what you will need as a graduate student can be found there.

One especially important deadline that students must remember is the deadline for Application for Graduation. These are usually in January for spring semester graduation, in June for summer graduation, and September for fall graduation. But check with the Graduate College website above for specifics.
Selecting a Thesis Committee

In your first year in the program, make the time to meet with graduate faculty who share your areas of interest; whenever possible, take courses with faculty members whose areas of interest overlap with your own.

However, before asking a faculty member to serve on your committee, consult about possible committee members with the Literature Program Director. The Director helps suggest faculty who have overlapping interests, are potentially available, and might work well with the student. In the spring semester of the first year, consult with the Literature Program Director to discuss appropriate faculty for your thesis topic. If you have not taken a course with a faculty member who shares areas of interest, visit the faculty member during office hours to discuss your interests and see if the faculty member is willing and able to serve on your committee. There are some faculty members who may not feel comfortable serving as your thesis committee chair if they have not had you in a class before. By the second half of the spring semester of your first year, you should be narrowing down your potential thesis topic in consultation with the Literature Program Director.

You will select a two-person committee of professors who know your work and who express an interest in it: a thesis committee chair (first reader) and a second reader. Your committee chair might be an expert in your area, but does not necessarily have to be an expert; they should be someone with some working knowledge of the area and who you can work well with. If you have not had the opportunity to take a class with the faculty member who best fits your topic, it is your responsibility to meet with the faculty member, discuss your potential thesis topic, and ascertain their availability and interest in serving as chair of your thesis committee. Remember that asking someone to serve on your committee as chair or second reader is a request that should be undertaken professionally and formally. A student has the freedom to choose which faculty member to approach, but a faculty member might decline based on availability, timeline of the project, areas of expertise, etc.

The thesis committee chair must be a literature faculty member with graduate faculty status. The Literature Program Director can help identify possible readers.

In consultation with your thesis committee chair you should identify a second graduate literature faculty member to serve as the second reader for your thesis committee. If your topic requires specific expertise, your second reader can be a graduate faculty member from a different English program or a different department. A third reader is also possible but is not required. Should a third reader be included, they may be a graduate faculty member from a different English program or a different department.

Preparing the Thesis

For details on the following steps, see the “Check Sheet for Completion of MA Thesis,” below. Here are the general guidelines for completion of a thesis:

1. Meeting with the Literature Program Director

   To begin the process, meet with the Literature Program Director to discuss the thesis topic, potential thesis committee chair, and second reader. As you are doing so, please fill out the form found at the end of the Check Sheet for MA Degree Completion with Thesis. This form must be signed by the Literature Program Director, the thesis committee chair, and the second reader. The form guarantees that all parties are aware of the guidelines/instructions in the MA Handbook and also that all parties have been consulted regarding the thesis topic and their role.
in the thesis process. (Again, keep in mind that your thesis committee chair ideally should have expertise in the field and/or historical/literary period under which your topic falls. Your second reader should ideally have expertise in a theoretical and/or methodological approach that you are using.)

2. Formal Petition for approval of Thesis Topic / Proposal / Prospectus

The formal petition for approval of the thesis topic (known as the thesis proposal or prospectus) is a 5-10 page document explaining the purpose and scope of the thesis. The proposal should include an annotated bibliography and should be completed in the summer between a student’s first and second year in the program. The specific length/scope of the proposal can be decided by the thesis committee chair and student. It must clearly set forth the intellectual problem, the intended organization, and the methods of development of the thesis. When the proposal is approved by the student’s committee, the committee signs the Topic Approval – Thesis/Dissertation form (available on the BGSU Graduate College website) and submits it. Follow the steps listed on the Check Sheet for MA Degree Completion with Thesis. If the makeup of your committee changes at all after you have submitted this form, you will need to submit a new form. Check with the Graduate Coordinator, the Literature Program Director, and the Graduate Secretary via email. You must then provide them with an updated list of your committee members and their roles.

*Please contact the Literature Program Director for sample thesis proposals from past years.*

3. Research and Writing

You should expect to spend the summer between year one and two conducting research and reading about your thesis topic and beginning writing, and to spend the fall of year two drafting parts of the thesis. You will undertake this work in consultation with your thesis committee chair and second reader.

The committee members will decide, in consultation with each other and the student, the schedule for completion and how they will organize the process of discussing ideas, addressing questions, and reading drafts of chapters. Different committees will operate on different schedules and plans, but keep in mind the deadlines set by the Graduate College for graduation. It often helps to work backwards and set deadlines that will lead to your planned date of graduation.

In your plan, you should expect to submit a significant portion of your thesis (which addresses the problem stated in the proposal) to the thesis committee in the fall semester of your second year. This is to allow time to get feedback and revise as you complete the thesis work, so that you can do so in time to defend the thesis to meet the Graduate College deadlines, which generally require a completed, defended thesis by just after Spring Break.

4. The MA Thesis Defense

The thesis defense is intended to serve as the capstone experience for the Literary and Textual Studies program. Each student will arrange for a defense (also called the “oral examination”) with the thesis committee. The defense should not be thought of as a quiz; rather, it offers you the
opportunity to discuss with the committee your thesis and the intellectual challenges, new ideas, and conclusions posed by it.

Once the committee agrees that the thesis is nearing completion, schedule a date for the MA Thesis Defense. (Please note, the Graduate College requires a formal defense.) Before the defense, the committee should be given adequate time (a minimum of three weeks) to read and examine a completed final draft of the thesis. Ahead of the exams, ask the committee if they have questions or guidelines for what they hope to discuss. When scheduling the defense, be sure to allow adequate time after the defense for final revisions, formatting, and uploading to the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) database before any deadlines for graduation set by BGSU’s Graduate College. Deadlines can be found on the Graduate College website under “Important Dates & Deadlines.” Follow the steps listed on the check sheet below.

The committee has the job of approving two separate components at the defense: whether the student has successfully explained and defended the project and its ideas (the oral defense), and whether the manuscript itself is ready for final approval (manuscript approval). A successful defense must meet both qualifications. While a student might successfully pass the oral portion of the defense, faculty may still require final revisions and corrections before they give final approval to the manuscript (often called “signing off” on the manuscript). The committee “signs off” on the project using the Thesis/Dissertation Defense and Manuscript Approval Form. It is your responsibility fill out and submit that form.

5. Approval of Your Thesis and Electronic Submission to OhioLink’s Electronic Thesis and Dissertation database (ETD)
   Once your committee has signed off on both the oral defense and the manuscript and you have made all final revisions, done all final proofreading, and made all final corrections, you will upload your thesis to the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation database (ETD). For full details about how to prepare and submit your thesis, see the Thesis/Dissertation Handbook available on the “Thesis & Dissertations” page of the Graduate College website: [http://www.bgsu.edu/graduate.html](http://www.bgsu.edu/graduate.html).

Please note that the Graduate College has strict deadlines for when a thesis must be completed, approved, and uploaded to the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation database in order that a student graduate during a certain time (Spring, Summer, or Winter graduation). It is the student’s responsibility to meet all such deadlines.

**MA Thesis Examples**
Recent successful MA Theses from the program can be found on the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) database through OhioLink and BGSU’s Library website at [https://etd.ohiolink.edu](https://etd.ohiolink.edu). Download and read some sample theses to get a sense of the scope of a completed thesis project. Some examples (listed by date) include:

- Emma Vallandingham, “‘Have I Found My Place?’: Queerness and Alternative Communities in the Muppet Franchise” (2022).
• Adam Wagner, “‘Still Happier Landscapes Beyond:’ Queer Spirituality and Utopia in Bayard Taylor’s Joseph and His Friend” (2019).