

**Graduate Student Handbook**  
**Stephen F. Austin State University Department of English\***

**Mission Statement**

The SFASU graduate program in English seeks to furnish its MA students with a body of learning in British, American, and world literature and to foster critical thinking and its clear and creative expression. Through close engagement with texts, professors, and fellow students, graduate students in English develop an understanding of the contexts, methods, and theories that inform literary study and production. The program prepares students for further study in literature or creative writing as well as careers in teaching, writing, and other fields demanding textual expertise.

**Application to the Program**

Ordinarily, an English major with an undergraduate degree from an accredited college is eligible to pursue graduate study in English; however, any student with fewer than 24 semester hours of undergraduate credit in English should complete additional work to establish a background for English graduate study before applying. For clear admission to the graduate program (i.e., as a degree-seeking student in English), a student must have a GPA of 3.0 on a 4-point scale during the last sixty credit hours of undergraduate work and in upper-level undergraduate English courses, as well as acceptable scores on the Graduate Record Exam (General Test). (Currently, there is no specified minimum GRE score.)

**Courses of Study within the Graduate Program**

The MA in English includes three required classes:

- ENG 524 (Great Texts to 1650)
- ENG 525 (Great Texts after 1650)
- ENG 582 (Bibliography and Research Methods)

Ideally, 524 and 582 are taken in the first semester (fall) and 525 in the second (spring). 524 and 525 comprise a year-long survey of exemplary literary works and ensure an introduction to graduate-level consideration of these texts for each incoming class. 582 is a key course in that it covers research, MLA style, disciplinary standards, and contemporary critical issues. Otherwise, the program encourages students to balance courses in American, British, and World Literature; creative writing; and linguistics.

36 graduate hours are required to complete the MA, whether one chooses the thesis option or the non-thesis option. Six of the 36 hours will be thesis hours (ENG 589 and 590, each for 3 hours) in the thesis option. No minor or electives outside of English can count toward an MA with thesis; in a non-thesis program, a student may, with the consent of the Graduate Coordinator, count 3-6 graduate hours outside the Department of English toward the MA in English.

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\* **NB:** The active version of this document is always to be found on the English Department's website; this version will supersede any others. Likewise, where this handbook refers to electronic materials, those materials are subject to change and should be checked frequently. Also, in the case of websites outside SFA, no responsibility is taken for accuracy. Finally, this document is subordinate to the university Graduate Bulletin and the webpages of the Graduate School and College of Liberal and Applied Arts except in cases where the department sets its own policies.

Students may choose to emphasize creative writing and write a creative thesis. The 30 non-thesis hours will then include a mixture of literature and creative writing classes. (It is recommended that the student take at least 18 hours of literature classes.) Students interested in the creative emphasis should consult with the creative writing faculty early in their graduate careers.

### **Registration**

Students should contact the graduate coordinator upon being accepted to the graduate program to receive advice on what courses to take during their first semester. Advisement will also be required for registering for subsequent semesters, and early registration is necessary to ensure that courses make. It is important for this and other reasons that students register for the courses into which they have been advised. An advising schedule will be set up by the graduate coordinator in advance of registration, typically in early April or November. Note that graduate courses can close, so you will want to register soon after registration opens.

### **Timelines**

The English MA typically takes two years to complete (nine credit hours per semester for four terms). Prior to beginning the final semester, if not earlier, students should complete a degree plan with the graduate coordinator.

One or two graduate courses are normally offered each summer session; however, summer courses depend on the desire of a particular professor to teach during the summer, when he or she gets slightly less “credit” for teaching. Of course, independent study courses can be completed during summer sessions; they are arranged individually between a student and a member of the graduate faculty. A student is allowed to count a maximum of two independent study courses (ENG 595s) toward the MA.

### **An Overview of the MA**

Your four semesters might go something like this:

**Semester 1 (Fall):** Nine hours of coursework, getting to know the faculty, developing some areas of particular interest, maybe GAing (20 hrs/week).

**Semester 2 (Spring):** More of the same, plus assistantship apps (for those interested in GAing and not currently doing so) due March 31 for the next fall. ENG 580 must be taken by GAs planning to teach in the coming fall but can/should be taken by anyone planning to teach in the future. Might look for upcoming conferences.

[Summer: Think about thesis topic/reading/mentor if you intend to write a thesis. Think about comps if not writing a thesis. Get ready to apply (recommenders lined up, CV updated, drafts of statements of purpose) if applying for PhD programs with fall application deadlines. Perhaps take a course or two. Look for conferences.]

**Semester 3 (Fall):** Nine hours of coursework (including ENG 589 if writing a thesis), teaching and/or GA work, a conference (attend or present), maybe apply for PhD programs, start hard prep for comprehensive exams (if not writing thesis). Degree plan with coordinator.

[Christmas Break: Thesis or comps preparations, PhD applications.]

**Semester 4 (Spring):** Final coursework, teaching and/or GA work, maybe a conference (attend or present), maybe applications to PhD, finishing/defending thesis (ENG 590) or prepping/taking comps, apply to graduate, look for jobs, graduate.

### **Expectations for Students and Grading**

The step from the Bachelor's degree to the MA program is intense, as students move towards becoming more specialized in their area(s) of interest. As a professional program, the MA course of study provides students with a fair amount of liberty in terms of balancing coursework and conducting independent research; therefore, extreme dedication and good time management skills are essential to success. Graduate students typically take fewer courses per semester than undergraduates, as the workload per course increases greatly. The reading schedule for each course is intense, and the discipline requires a higher level of writing—one that is stylistically clean and structurally sound and significant. For instance, a student accustomed to earning As as an undergraduate may suddenly earn Bs or Cs for the same style of writing. Therefore, the student must work closely with professors and style guides to determine what is acceptable for the graduate level.

Grading for the MA program is conducted on a four-point scale (4.0). Students are encouraged to maintain an A average. Unlike the undergraduate level, where Bs are considered rather good, in graduate school they are undesirable in that they indicate a student has performed below exemplary. Some have said that a graduate B translates as “BE careful” (although there is of course a difference between the B that's almost an A and the B that's almost a C.) Cs and below obviously indicate unacceptable work, and multiple Cs or below can easily result in probation or suspension (it takes an A to counterbalance every C—that is, to stay at a B average). To remain in good standing with the Graduate School and to graduate, a student must maintain a 3.0 on a 4.0 scale (B average) both overall and in the major (English) courses (if courses other than English courses are being included in the degree plan). During any semester or summer session that the grade point average falls below 3.0, the student with clear admission to graduate study will be placed on academic probation; the student with probationary admission will be placed on academic suspension. A student placed on academic probation and failing to restore an overall 3.0 average the following semester or summer sessions will be placed on academic suspension. A student placed on academic suspension is denied the continuation of an academic program as well as the privilege of registering for course work. This suspension period is for one semester or one summer session, whichever follows the period after which the suspension occurred. Thereafter, the student will revert to post-baccalaureate admission status and will only be permitted to take course work not applicable toward a degree program. To be reinstated to a degree program, the student must be recommended by the appropriate academic department and approved by the academic dean, the Graduate Council, and the Dean of the Graduate School.

Graduate essays in English are expected to be very well-written, of course, but also to be substantial, which typically means that they will contain much of the following (depending of course on the particular assignment): claims or arguments, contextualization of claims/arguments, self-awareness of any critical assumptions, definition of key terms, review of existing literature on the subject, engagement with the critical discussion of relevant issues or texts, application of critical theory. “Close reading” is essential and expected, but, depending on the assignment, may not be sufficient (as it likely was for your undergraduate papers).

### **Professionalism**

As budding professionals, graduate students should strive to emulate professors when beginning their scholarly endeavors. Students should begin to distinguish themselves from undergraduates,

as they have chosen to become professionals and scholars of English. Punctuality, regular class attendance, respect for deadlines, and professional behavior send out messages about one's dedication to the field.

Unlike the undergraduate experience, students will begin to develop professional connections with their professors which may lead to shared academic experiences such as attending conferences together or assisting with research; however, students (and professors) are expected to keep these contacts primarily professional. Referring to a professor on a first-name basis (especially in a classroom or other formal setting) is discouraged in the absence of indications otherwise. E-mail, likewise, seems to be a medium in which students adopt overly informal standards (e.g., misspellings, lack of capitalization, first-name basis). That having been said, it is important to cultivate a good working relationship with your professors, as you will need recommendation letters from them when applying to other programs or applying for jobs and they will need to know you and your work well in order to write strong letters. (Also, naturally, inasmuch as you are able you should only request letters from professors that you expect to recommend you with minimal reservations.) Be sure to allow professors ample time to write these letters (six weeks or so).

Most PhD programs admit students once a year during the fall semester; however, many begin processing applications as early as the fall prior to the desired fall of enrollment. Therefore, students should investigate potential schools no later than the beginning of their second year and begin the application process by the July before they graduate (if in May), as schools often require recommendation letters, writing samples, GRE general and/or subject test scores in addition to a purpose statement.

### **Transfer of Credit**

Under certain circumstances, a graduate student may transfer 6-12 semester hours of graduate course work taken at other accredited institutions. The student pursuing a master's degree with thesis may transfer a maximum of six semester hours; a student pursuing a master's degree without thesis may transfer a maximum of 12 semester hours. To transfer any credit from other institutions, however, the student must submit an official transcript of the courses to be considered and have the approval of the appropriate academic department and academic dean. The work must have been taken not earlier than six years prior to the student's first graduate enrollment at SFA. Moreover, if the student fails to complete work on the graduate degree at SFA before the expiration of the six years, the transfer credit will not be applicable toward a degree here. Any course accepted by transfer will carry credit but not grade point value. Moreover, to transfer credit, the student must have earned a grade of B or higher on the course.

### **Assessment and Portfolios**

It has recently become an imperative across the college, on both the undergraduate and the graduate levels, that "student learning outcomes" (a technical term) be measured on a regular basis by measures other than grades. What this essentially means is that your work will be read and assessed by faculty committees from time to time. Furthermore, it means that we will frequently need access to copies of your work from the present and earlier semesters. Thus, you should keep copies of all of your graduate work for your own purposes, for recommendation letters, and for possible additional assessment.

### **GA/TA Positions**

Graduate Assistants (GAs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs) gain valuable experience and receive a stipend (circa \$10K/year). These positions also qualify students for in-state tuition rates and make them eligible for benefits (at a 50% rate for insurance).

Graduate Assistants are assigned to one or more faculty members during the first year of study to work for approximately 20 hours a week in the department, and are required to carry a course load of six hours per long semester (though nine hours are recommended). Dropping below six hours renders one ineligible for an assistantship for the following semester. The assistantship is awarded for up to two years (i.e. four semesters). Customarily, Graduate Assistants take a course in pedagogy during their first year that prepares them, subject to final departmental approval, to become TAs and teach sections of Freshman Composition during their second year (after they have acquired 18 graduate hours).

Human Resources and/or the graduate coordinator will notify all new GAs about required orientation sessions. Within one week of the start of the semester, GAs should arrange to meet with the graduate coordinator to receive their assignment(s).

### **Financial Aid and Scholarships** (according to the university graduate handbook)

SFA provides graduate students traditional financial assistance through scholarships, state grants, work study programs, graduate assistantships, and student loans. Some assistance is based on merit and some on financial need.

To determine your financial eligibility and need for those funds which require it, you must complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid and additional forms provided by the Financial Aid Office. Applications for assistance should be submitted to the Financial Aid Office by April 1 for priority consideration (See the Financial Aid Calendar). You will be notified by e-mail of award within two to four weeks after receipt of all the required documentation.

If you have received an award from other resources (e.g. external scholarships), you should contact the Financial Aid Office to ensure these awards are processed properly.

### **Conferences**

One of the MA program's goals is to have students produce seminar papers at the end of their courses that can be developed into journal articles and/or conference papers. Conferences are a great way to gain professional experience, hear scholars in one's area of interest, and make vital contacts. Conference experience, if not publication, has indeed become essential for students competing for spots in PhD and law programs.

The University of Pennsylvania's call for papers website is a great resource for finding upcoming conferences:

<http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/>

Financial assistance for conferences (up to \$400) is available to graduate students through the Student Academic Travel Fund. See <http://www.sfasu.edu/studentaffairs/105.asp>

### **Curriculum Vitae (CV)**

Incoming students should create and keep a curriculum vitae (CV) throughout their graduate school career, as this document is the single first glimpse a perspective employer or school gets into your academic history (it's essentially an academic résumé, detailing your education and

scholarly achievements). Sample guidelines for establishing a CV are located at the following website:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gradstdy/careers/services/vita.html>

Faculty CVs are posted on the department's website and will give a good idea of what sorts of information are to be included and how.

### **Library Resources**

MA students will find a wealth of information accessible through the library's webpages. You will certainly want to generate an ILL (Interlibrary Loan) account to obtain materials not present on campus. Students can access Worldcat or the MLA database, among others, to search for articles and such. Sometimes you then have to check the library's catalog; sometimes direct links to ILL are offered. The ILL form generally generates the necessary information; however, at times it has to be entered and/or corrected manually (this is especially true of page numbers for articles, and sometimes it cannot tell the difference between a book and an article).

The amount of time it takes to receive materials ranges from as soon as 24 hours for e-mailed articles to approximately 2-4 weeks for hard copies of articles and books. It is imperative to return these materials on time, as students will be charged \$1 per day that they are overdue.

Students who wish to do research at other colleges and libraries in Texas can apply for a free Texshare card at the circulation desk in the SFA library, which will enable them to check out resources at participating institutions. These cards are temporary, so students should check the expiration date before visiting other libraries.

The fourth floor of the library is the designated quiet floor. It is ideal for research, while group conferences and discussions tend to occur on the first and third floors.

### **Graduation**

Students applying for graduation should review the following checklist no later than the beginning of the semester of their desired graduation date:

<http://www2.sfasu.edu/graduate/CurrentStudents/gradchecklist.html>

Students must also remember that applying for graduation is required. The deadline for applying for graduation in a given semester can be found on the Graduate School's webpage.

Students writing theses must work closely with their advisors to construct a schedule that will allow ample time for draft reviews and the thesis defense before the last possible defense date that semester (available on the Graduate School's webpage). Likewise, students taking comprehensive exams must plan on the extra reading they will require and be prepared to take them per the schedule that the graduate coordinator sets up each semester. (See more information on theses and comprehensive exams below.)

### **Culminating Requirement**

Each degree program has a culminating requirement for a student's final semester or summer session of work. In English, the culminating requirement may be met in one of three ways:

- (1) successfully defending a thesis
- (2) passing comprehensive examinations, or
- (3) scoring 550 or higher on the GRE Subject Test in English Literature.

For information related to the GRE subject test, see the GRE pages online. A detailed description of the comprehensive exam procedures is available on the department website. Thesis procedures are covered below and on the Graduate School's webpages. Note that a student must be registered during the semester or summer session in which he or she fulfills the requirement.

### **Thesis Procedures**

By the end of the second semester, students should decide whether or not to write a thesis. Typically, those seeking entrance into PhD programs or research-related fields would benefit more from the thesis option, while students pursuing the MA as a terminal degree tend to opt to take comprehensive exams (or the GRE Subject Test in English Literature). For those planning to write a thesis, it is recommended that you determine a topic during your first year and begin your organization at the start of or prior to your second year. For official thesis procedures see <http://www2.sfasu.edu/graduate/CurrentStudents/thesisguide.html>

A thesis is a scholarly project in which students explore original ideas in their area of interest and formulate an argument in a 60-90 page document typically divided into 3-5 chapters (sub-topics). Upon doing preliminary research and determining a topic, a student should select a director for his/her committee with expertise in the chosen subject matter, as the director's job is to guide the student through the thesis research and writing process. During this initial meeting, the student and director will discuss possible committee members. Following this conference, the student will submit a tentative schedule for the project from research to the defense, a 1-2 page topical overview, and an annotated bibliography of any preliminary research done. Students will need to register for thesis hours the semesters they intend to write and defend. (ENG 590 must be taken during the defense semester.)

All thesis forms should be obtained from the graduate handbook. These documents include sample templates for introductory pages of the thesis as well as for the general format: [http://www2.sfasu.edu/graduate/CurrentStudents/forms\\_alpha.html](http://www2.sfasu.edu/graduate/CurrentStudents/forms_alpha.html)

Students conducting thesis research are entitled to extended borrowing privileges at Steen Library. In order to prove eligibility to the circulation desk, the student must present a printout of his or her course schedule verifying enrollment in thesis writing courses or a letter from the thesis director explaining that the student is conducting research but has not formally registered for courses.

### **After the MA**

An MA in English most directly prepares a student for teaching English courses at the two-year (community) college level and/or for continuing on to the PhD. However, it can serve as preparation for other endeavors, such as

- Law school (the critical thinking skills and aptitude for professional writing developed in this program help applicants to stand out above those with only a Bachelor's degree; the average age for law students is 24 [according to the LSU law school's website])
- Technical writing, publishing, editing, freelance writing, and grant writing

We have placed our MA graduates in PhD programs such as those at Texas A&M, Purdue University, the University of Washington, Oklahoma State University, the University of Rhode Island, and the University of Tennessee. We have also had many graduates go on to teach with the MA at various two-year colleges (and teach as adjuncts at four-year colleges).

## **Bookstore**

Students are not obligated to purchase books at the Barnes and Noble bookstore on campus; however, before making purchases from an online vendor, they should contact the professor to determine whether or not a particular edition is necessary for a course. While there are two independent bookstores in Nacogdoches, they usually do not carry graduate textbooks unless a professor contacts them and requests them to do so. [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) and [Half.com](http://Half.com) are two reputable vendors that enable students to compare prices and the quality of books. It is recommended that you order books at least three weeks before classes begin if you select standard shipping, although most orders arrive within one week of the purchase.

## **Accommodations**

Dorms and the University Woods apartments are available to graduate students; however, students who reside in dorms are obligated to purchase a meal plan each semester. There are a variety of apartment complexes available ranging from economy to luxury within a five-minute commute of the campus and others that are slightly farther. [Apartmentratings.com](http://Apartmentratings.com) is a useful resource that provides information on the location and amenities of each complex in addition to tenant reviews.

## **Health Services**

Graduate students can take advantage of the services rendered at SFA's health clinic. Preventative care, such as physicals and female health, as well as treatment for illnesses that do not require immediate care or hospitalization are often provided for free. Vaccinations and tests, however, are charged to the student at the lowest possible rate. See <http://www.sfasu.edu/healthservices/>

## **Parking**

Parking zones are designated by permit status and are enforced from 6 am to 4 pm, with the exception of lots 8 and 15, which do not open to all permits until after 9 pm. Students who live off-campus have commuter status and are only permitted to park in "all-permit" areas. GAs and TAs do not have access to staff parking privileges. Parking spots near the school and in the parking garage nearest the Liberal Arts building tend to be occupied during the early morning to afternoon. Additional parking is located in the football stadium parking lot and parallel to East College street; there is a shuttle service that runs between this lot and the lot behind the library.

Permits can be purchased at the University Police Department or drive-through stations set up during the fall semester. The price is \$32 for a one-year commuter pass if purchased in the fall, \$24 after January 1<sup>st</sup> and \$16 for summer. Parking in illicit spots or without a permit will likely result in a ticket and/or vehicle impoundment.

## **Campus Map**

[http://www.sfasu.edu/documents/sfasu\\_campus\\_map.pdf](http://www.sfasu.edu/documents/sfasu_campus_map.pdf)

## **Student IDs**

Student IDs are necessary for the library, recreation center and health clinic privileges and can be obtained at the Student Center at a cost of \$5, which will be charged to the student account.

## **The Recreation Center**

The on-campus recreation center is nothing short of amazing. With flexible hours and a variety of equipment—cardio machines, free weights, weight machines, pool, hot tub, lazy river, sports courts, rock wall, walking/ jogging track—there is always something to entertain you and keep you fit. Group exercise classes, an exciting alternative to independent workouts, are also offered but are limited to the first 30 participants, while aquatic classes can have 20 and spinning classes nine. Use of the facility is included with tuition, and much equipment rental is free. The Recreation Center also offers massage and nutritional services at a low fee for students.

### **College of Fine Arts Productions**

SFA's College of Fine Arts periodically performs play productions at the W.M. Turner Auditorium on campus. For a schedule of this season's shows and ticket information, visit:

[http://finearts.sfasu.edu/mainstage\\_series.php](http://finearts.sfasu.edu/mainstage_series.php)

### **On-Campus Movie Nights**

The Student Activities Association sponsors weekend movie nights at the Student Center. For movie showtimes, call 936-468-6554.

### **Getting around in Nacogdoches:**

There are a few key streets to know: North, University, Starr, College, and Austin. North and University run N-S; Starr, College, and Austin connect them E-W.

Need a new place to study? Check out these coffee shops: Einstein Brothers (next door to the library), Starbucks (in the student center), Starbucks (near North and College), and Java Jacks (across from Kroger on North Street). For office supplies: Staples near Wal-Mart on North St. The Main Post Office: corner of University and Austin. Frisbee Golf course: Pecan Park off Starr.

### **Career Services**

SFA has a career services department that is a great resource for helping students start their professional careers. Their website contains links offering advice ranging from how to build a catchy resume to networking and conducting a job search and lists dates for upcoming job fairs:

<http://www.sfasu.edu/ccs/careerservices/>

### **Campus Safety**

The university police department provides an after-hours escort service as well as vehicle assistance for students who lock their keys inside or cannot get their vehicle started:

<http://www.sfasu.edu/upd/services.asp>

### **Counseling Services**

While graduate school is a stimulating environment that most students find enriching and exciting, it is also a mentally taxing experience that tests students' fortitude and emotional stability. Therefore, learning stress management is vital to one's mental and physical wellbeing as well as one's academic performance. For ways to cope with stress and anxiety, check out the tips at [http://www.medicinenet.com/stress\\_management\\_techniques/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/stress_management_techniques/article.htm)

Also, SFA provides free and confidential counseling services to students:

<http://www.sfasu.edu/ccs/counseling/index.asp>

## **Appendix**

Sample Literary Analysis: "World Building in the Fiction of Chaucer"