



MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH PROGRAM HANDBOOK (for Students starting Fall 2018 and after)

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Welcome Letter

Welcome to the Master of Arts in English at Sonoma State University. We offer options of completing your degree with an emphasis in literary criticism, creative writing, or in rhetoric and English education. As a whole, we seek to create a community of scholars and writers engaged in a dialogue that crosses and transcends imaginative and theoretical boundaries. We encourage all of our graduate students to widen the scope of their interests by exploring opportunities in our curriculum, by reaching out to their peers and finding mentors among the

English department's graduate faculty, and by participating fully in the life of the department.

This online handbook provides information on how to apply to the M.A. in English and helps newly admitted students gain a sense of what to expect as they navigate their way through the program.

Once you are admitted to the graduate program, you have to complete the following academic steps to ensure your:

- Pass all required coursework,
- Successfully take the department's Qualifying Exam; **or** achieve a 65th percentile score on the GRE Subject exam in Literature; **or** work as a survey course teaching assistant for two semesters.
- Complete your thesis/creative project.

You will also need to follow these administrative procedures necessary for graduation:

- File a "Master's Degree Graduation Application" form at the outset of the semester you wish to graduate with the Office of Admissions and Records.
- At the end of your first year, select your completion option (literary criticism, creative writing, rhetoric and English education), constitute your committee (two graduate faculty members), and file an "Advancement to Candidacy" form ([GS01](#)) with Graduate Studies. The deadline is April 30th.
- After completion of your thesis/creative project, file the "Completion of Requirements" form ([GS02](#)) with Graduate Studies.

These steps are explained in detail below, together with supplementary information you may find useful in obtaining your degree. Meeting requirements and published deadlines is your responsibility, and we hope this guide will assist you to do so. It is most important for you to maintain frequent contact with the graduate coordinator, and, as you advance through the program, your thesis or creative project supervisor.

Congratulations upon your decision to pursue a Master's in English. We look forward to working with you.

Dr. Chingling Wo
Graduate Coordinator
Professor of English
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Application Information

Candidates for admission must apply online via Cal State Apply (<https://www2.calstate.edu/apply>). Deadline for admission for fall 2020-spring 2021 academic year is early March, 2020. The minimum GPA required of applicants within the last 60 units of undergraduate coursework is 3.0. (Please note that the English Department does not offer deferred admission; admitted students who do not matriculate must reapply if they wish to be readmitted).

Documents you need to submit:

- Official copies of all transcripts
- A statement of purpose not longer than two pages or 500 words that identifies applicant's field of interest: Literary Criticism, Creative Writing, or English Education/Rhetoric.
- An expository prose sample/professional paper (10-20 pages).
- Three letters of recommendation. We prefer at least two of the three letters be from referees who are familiar with your academic work.
- Creative Writing students should send additional samples of poetry (10 pages maximum), or fiction or nonfiction prose (or a combination of genres—20 pages maximum).

M.A. Completion Options:

- Literary Criticism or English Education/Rhetoric students complete their degree by writing a thesis that involves literary criticism/theory or an English Education/rhetoric focus.
- Creative writing students will complete their degree by producing a manuscript project of fiction, poetry, non-fiction or hybrid/cross-genre creative work. Each manuscript will be preceded by a critical introduction.

If admitted as Conditionally Classified: Under special circumstances, students may be required to undertake additional coursework at the undergraduate level, if, for example, they have a Bachelor's degree in a discipline other than English. For example, if you are conditionally classified, you will be required to complete any pre-requisite coursework by the close of your first year in the M.A. program, unless you have made other arrangements with the Graduate Coordinator. If you are admitted as conditionally classified, it is your responsibility to:

- Contact the graduate coordinator early on to discuss your pre-requisite coursework.
- Complete this additional coursework by the close of your first year, unless you have been granted additional time by the graduate coordinator.
- Contact the graduate coordinator to file a "Change in Graduate Status" form with the Graduate Division to establish your status as a classified student.

Program Information

Maintaining Graduate Status:

- To graduate, you must maintain continuous enrollment at SSU while you take coursework, after advancement to candidacy, and during the semester in which you expect to receive your degree.
- You can take a one-semester leave from the university without endangering your status. If you choose to take two or more semesters leave, you will need to submit a full application to reinstate yourself as a student in good standing.
- In extraordinary circumstances and with the support of the graduate coordinator, students may petition the Graduate Studies Office for a leave of absence not to exceed two years.
- Students advanced to candidacy who are working on their completion projects and who have completed all units for their degree may enroll through the Office of Extended Education in project continuation (578) for 1 unit. This low- cost option enables students to remain in good standing and entitles them to library privileges. The unit does not count toward financial aid.
- Finally, it is important to remember that no courses taken more than seven years prior to completion of your degree may count toward the MA.

Working with the Graduate Coordinator:

- Newly admitted students will meet with the graduate coordinator at the outset of the term. If you can't make the scheduled group meeting, please set up an individual appointment.
- Continuing students should consult with the graduate coordinator as they plan their research or coursework each semester. In general, it is best to make arrangements to meet with the graduate coordinator in person.

Working with Faculty Mentors:

- Relationships with faculty mentors are perhaps the most important associations you will develop during your career here. There are two kinds of mentors: 1) the formal affiliations you establish with the faculty members you select to serve on your thesis committee and 2) informal relationships with other faculty with whom you share research interests or with whom you have taken classes.
- Selecting your thesis committee, which consists of a supervisor (first reader), and a second reader, is your responsibility, although you may find consulting with informal mentors as well as other students helpful. It is also your responsibility to set up regular meetings with your committee to keep them informed of your progress, and to ensure that you provide your readers with adequate time in which to read drafts of your work (a good rule of thumb is to allow a two-week turn-around-time, though it is best to clarify expectations with each member of your committee).
- Once your committee members agree to serve, they bear responsibilities toward you in turn. You can expect to work most closely with your supervisor, who will read

and critique drafts of your work as it develops, and who will guide you as you undertake the revision process. The responsibilities of the second reader are less extensive, although in individual cases, second readers too, may expect to read multiple drafts of your work. Typically, however, your second reader will critique your work after you have finished a complete draft. (In the end, however, it is up to you and your mentors jointly to determine how often each expects to meet with you and to review your work. Make sure to get from each a clear sense of their expectations at the outset.)

- Literature or English Education students writing theses will meet formally with both members of their committee during the oral defense, which follows approximately a week after the thesis itself is turned in, as will those who select the comprehensive exam option as their completion project.
- Creative Writing students will participate in an oral reading of their creative work upon completion of their project. Your thesis advisor will assist in arranging public readings with your peers.

Please remember that you must constitute your committee by April 30th of your first year of study. Even if you do not yet have a clear idea of what you will be working on, you need to be in touch with your committee members and inform the graduate coordinator of your decision.

Staying in touch, joining our community:

- All graduate students are asked to inform the department Administrative Coordinator, Rheannon Torres, of any changes to their mailing address or to their current email address.
- Note that all students are provided with an e-mail account by the university, and this SSU account is the default address to which the university will send information about registering and other campus information. The department maintains an M.A. listserv, through which departmental and program information is disseminated. The "English-grads" listserv circulates job and course announcements, deadline notices, reminders of ESA events, Writers at Sonoma readings, and other information deemed useful to the graduate community.

Sonoma State University and the English Department are strongly committed to creating a productive learning and living environment that promotes the rights, safety, dignity, and value of every individual. It is fundamental to our mission to promote a civil, respectful, and inclusive community, and to oppose acts of racism, religious intolerance, sexism, ageism, homophobia, harassment, discrimination against those with disabling conditions, or other forms of intolerance. It is the responsibility of all members of the SSU community to create a productive campus climate characterized by considerate and principled conduct. We expect that all members of the SSU community will:

- Communicate with each other in a civil manner

- Recognize and be accountable for how their actions and language impact the community
- Treat community members with consideration, dignity, and respect
- Create a community in which actions of bigotry, oppression, bullying, and hatred will not be tolerated

Program Requirements:

The MA in English requires 34 units. Whether you have selected the literary criticism/rhetoric and English education thesis or the creative writing project as a culminating option, 28 of these units will be completed through your coursework and the remaining 6 will be taken either as thesis units (599) or as directed writing units (535).

Literary Criticism:

- 1 core course (500): 4 units;
- 6 seminars: 24 units;
- thesis (599): 6 units

Creative writing track:

- 1 core course (500): 4 units;
- at least 2 seminars (500-level coursework) for 8 units;
- at least 2 writing workshops (530) for 8 units;
- one directed writing course (535) for 4 units,
- one additional seminar or workshop for 4 units;
- Creative project completion units (535): 6
- No more than 4 units of directed writing units (535) may be counted toward the degree prior to the culminating option.

Rhetoric and English Education:

- 1 core course (500): 4 units;
- 6 seminars: 24 units;
- thesis (599): 6 units

All graduate level seminars are 4 units, so you can expect to take a minimum of seven courses toward completion of your degree.

All MA students:

- All options require candidates to take English 500 and two 500-level seminars.
- All students may take two classes at the 400 level (senior undergraduate) for degree credit.
- Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant units (460 and 462, respectively) do not count toward the 34-unit total; nor, except at the discretion of the graduate coordinator, do independent study units (595).

- Up to 9 units of graduate coursework may be transferred from another institution or transferred from Open University or Extended Education units taken on campus.
- Additionally, two courses (8 units) of work outside the discipline of English may be counted toward your MA. All of these require approval from the graduate coordinator.
- To count toward the M.A., coursework must be completed at the level of B-or higher.

The Qualifying Exam

This three-hour written exam is best taken at the close of the second or fourth semester. The exam is Pass/No Pass, and is scheduled through the graduate coordinator **once a year** in the spring. Please note that the Qualifying Exam consists of readings in both British and American literature (to be read by all students. You can study for this exam independently, but it is strongly recommended that you attend informational meetings held by the graduate coordinator.

Advancement to Candidacy

Students are advanced to candidacy when they have

- completed their coursework (save for completion units),
- Successfully take the department's Qualifying Exam; **or** achieve a 65th percentile score on the GRE Subject exam in Literature; **or** work as a survey course teaching assistant for two semesters.

Your advancement to candidacy is formalized by the filing of a [GS01](#) form with Graduate Studies. The "Advancement to Candidacy" form ([GS01](#)) is available in the department office or can be downloaded online at <http://web.sonoma.edu/aa/gs/forms.html>, and is filed with the university office of Graduate Studies.

Master's Degree Graduation Application

-- File your "Master's Degree Graduation Application" form by SSU deadlines (start of the semester you intend to graduate), so that you will receive your MA degree at the end of the year you expect to finish.

Completion of Requirements

To complete the degree, you must have a thesis defense (thesis option), or a public reading (creative option). File the [GS02](#) "Completion of Requirements" form) with the Graduate Studies office when you have finished both the written and oral components of your project.

As of Fall 2018, The MA in English program no longer has a Foreign Language requirement. However, students who wish to enter MFA or Ph.D. programs upon degree completion are strongly encouraged to study a second language to fulfill future requirements.

Completion Options

With the help of your mentor(s) and the graduate coordinator, students select one of two completion options for the MA degree.

Thesis

The thesis is the written product of your systematic exploration of a significant question. Your work, which when completed should run anywhere from 50 to 100 pages, should demonstrate both a breadth and depth of response. In it you should identify your own critical position by entering into a dialogue with other critics in the field. This understanding and articulation of the critical landscape should be matched by a complementary exploration of your own thinking. Although your argument should reflect your awareness of significant critics who have written on the topic in advance of your thesis, it should concentrate upon developing your own ideas in depth and detail. Approximately one week after completing your thesis you will sit a one-hour defense with your faculty committee. The defense is not interrogative; rather, it should allow you to assess the state of your thinking at the completion of your project and to evaluate the nature of the thesis itself. Your committee may use this opportunity to suggest areas of further revision, should you intend to submit a portion of your work for possible publication.

Creative project

Your creative work should constitute a coherent body of writing within a genre (fiction, poetry, or nonfiction); or, should it blur genres, offer awareness as to the nature of its literary hybridity. It should be prefaced by an introduction that explains the project's aim, influences, scope, and design. (It is a good idea to consult the finished work of other students to gain an understanding of the variety of approaches possible in the introduction, as well as to consult with your mentor). Your work should aim for originality as well as facility with language, and should implicitly offer illustration of significant independent thinking. Toward the close of the semester you will take part in a public reading of a portion of your work.

Employment/other Opportunities at the University

■ Research Assistants

- The relatively small size of our English department encourages a great deal of informal exchange between faculty and graduate students. New students often find mentors in their classroom teachers. One way to get to know faculty who share your scholarly or creative interests is to work as a Research Assistant. Research assistants are unpaid, but receive between one and four units of English 460 as credit for their time. (You and the faculty person you are working for should meet before the course begins to clarify the type of work expected and how many units it will receive.
- **IMPORTANT:** the units do not count toward the degree; they do count toward unit totals for the semester, however, so can be useful for students on financial aid.) The department is relaxed and collegial, so you should also feel free to take advantage of faculty office hours, as well as to introduce yourselves when you find an open door.

A number of positions are available to help with your expenses as a student. First-year students often find employment as tutors in the campus Writing Center. Occasionally faculty may offer modest compensation in return for grading help (These arrangements are not funded by the university but are negotiated instead with individual faculty).

Returning students may continue tutoring, but they may also work as Teaching Associates or in several different administrative capacities described below. Both entering and continuing students may apply for these positions. While most students do not work as Teaching Associates until their second year, these positions are open to qualified new students. All employment positions described below are contingent upon the student maintaining satisfactory progress toward the MA degree prior to and during employment.

■ Writing Center Positions:

- A. Staff:** Graduate students in English are eagerly invited to apply to work as staff members in the SSU Writing Center. Staff members primarily tutor students who are working on writing projects, working with students of all class levels and across the curriculum. Extensive training is offered. As of the fall term 2010, the pay rate is \$10 per hour.
- B. Assistant Director, Master Tutor:** Graduate students with tutoring or writing-center experience are urged also to apply for the Writing Center's graduate assistant positions: Assistant Director of the Writing Center, a half-time (20 hours per week) staff position; and Master Tutor, a 5 to 10 hours-per-week position. Both positions primarily involve extensive supervisory, training, and mentorship duties but also include some administrative tasks. The Writing center accepts applications year-round, but most hiring occurs in the latter part of the spring term for the following fall

semester. Interested students should contact the Writing Center Faculty Director: Emily Hostutler at hostutle@sonoma.edu or 707- 664-4401

■ **WEPT (Written English Proficiency Test) Coordinator**

One position is available each year as Graduate Assistant to the faculty coordinator of the WEPT. In conjunction with the faculty coordinator, the graduate assistant helps administer the required graduation writing exam program for fifteen hours a week at a salary of approximately \$3300 per semester. While the position is primarily administrative, advising of students is also a key component. The position thus offers valuable experience for those interested in composition and rhetoric studies. This position is announced each spring for the following academic year; applicants who can commit to work both semesters are given preference.

■ **Creative Writing Positions**

Graduate students may also apply for two positions available in literary editing and publishing: *Zaum* Senior Editor and *Volt* Production Editor. The position of *Zaum* Senior entails overseeing all production, editing, and marketing of the magazine, as well as managing and guiding the *Zaum* editorial staff. Pay ranges from \$1200 to \$1500 a year, depending on budget allotment. *Volt* Managing Editor entails organizing and reading submissions, fulfilling orders, and developing readership of *Volt* magazine. Workload is 2-3 hours a week; pay averages around \$1,000 a year. To apply for these positions, contact Professor Gillian Conoley: extension 664-3919; gconoley@pacbell.net

■ **Teaching Associates**

Graduate students are eligible to apply for positions as Teaching Associates in the Lower Division Composition program. The program provides students with an excellent opportunity to gain teaching experience in a structured setting. At the same time, graduate student instructors provide valuable service to the department. Teaching Associates serve as instructors in English 100, a year-long composition course for incoming freshman who do not pass the composition/reading placement test. English 100 courses meet for 4 hours per week, with class size limited to 16 students. Teaching Associates should plan on spending an additional 10-12 hours per week outside of classroom time upon preparation, grading and office hours. This considerable workload should be balanced with the demands of the graduate program itself as well as personal commitments. In addition to teaching, Associates are required to enroll in English 303, a professional development seminar that meets for one hour per week and provides support and mentoring. This professional development seminar is a required condition of your employment. It does not, however, count as a course toward your degree. Pay is approximately \$955 per teaching unit, or \$2, 865 per semester. Teaching Associates also receive a fee waiver on the state fee portion of their tuition (set currently at \$1368/ semester). Teaching Associates are members of the UAW union and the terms of their employment are governed by that contract. Preference in hiring Teaching Associates is given to students with the following:

- coursework in rhetoric or composition theory (English 491 or English 587 are SSU's recommended courses but equivalent courses from other institutions will be considered)
- experience teaching composition at the college level
- experience in tutoring writing

Students are hired annually. Teaching associates are sometimes asked to teach a second year, although priority is given to students who have not yet had the opportunity to teach.

■ Writing and Editing Opportunities

Graduate students may work as interns and editors for SSU's two highly regarded literary magazines through a course called Small Press Editing. *Volt*, a nationally distributed, award-winning (three Pushcart Prizes, two Best American Poetry Selections, Fund for Poetry Award) magazine edited by poet and professor Gillian Conoley, routinely publishes some of the best known writers in the country. *Zaum*, entirely student edited and produced, publishes student work and has won several Associated Writing Programs awards for editorial vision and graphic design. Students who have acted as interns have gone on to pursue careers in editing and publishing.

- for *Volt's* website click on <http://www.voltpoetry.com>
- for *Zaum's* website click on <http://www.zaumpress.net>

Writers at Sonoma Reading Series and Sonoma Writers' Festival

The creative writing faculty sponsor and host the **Writers at Sonoma** reading series, which draws writers from the rich cultural milieu of the Bay Area as well as writers from all over the country and abroad. Writers who have read in the program include many award winning writers (Pulitzer-prize, McArthur Genius Award, National Book Critics Circle Award, National Book Award) as well as upcoming new voices. Recent writers have included Yusef Komunyakaa, Michael Palmer, Lyn Hejinean, Lynn Freed, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Rae Armantrout, Robert Hass, Brenda Hillman, James Alan McPherson, Lawrence Weschler, and Yiyun Li.

Each year, the department also organizes the **Sonoma Writers' Festival**, presenting readings, panels, and workshops with distinguished writers, editors, agents, and publishers to give students of all concentrations guidance in getting their work out into the world. The SWF also provides internship opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students.

Suggested Two-Year Timeline for the MA

Fall semester, year one, suggested courses:

500, two 500-level seminars, or one graduate writing workshop and one seminar.

The required core course in theory and methods (500), one seminar (or a graduate writing workshop). Students are advised to start reading for the **Qualifying exam**, a written exam administered during the spring semester. Full-time students can take the exam either toward the end of their first or second year.

Important: English 500 also serves as proof of your having met SSU's WEPT requirement. Proof of competency will not be automatically recorded. Instead, submit a WEPT waiver form (available at the WEPT office), with unofficial transcripts to show completion of the course.

Spring semester, year one, suggested courses:

Three elective 500-level seminars or, for creative writers especially, one 500-level seminar, 4 units of directed writing (535), and one writing workshop (530).

In addition to your coursework, you should begin to think about your culminating project. When you have arrived at a focus for this project at the close of the term, you should constitute your committee. You should have passed the Qualifying Exam (or the Literature GRE) and be working to fulfill the language requirement.

Over the summer:

Refine the scope and focus of your project by drafting an abstract of your project (thesis option).

Fall semester, year two, suggested courses:

For those writing a thesis, two 500-level seminars. For those pursuing a creative project completion, one 500-level seminar, 4 units of directed writing (535) and/or one writing workshop. You may also wish to divide your thesis or creative project work into two semesters; in this case, you may register for three units of either 599 (thesis) or 535 (creative project directed writing).

Spring semester, year two:

Register for six units of 599 (thesis) or 535 (directed writing completion). If you've already completed three units in the previous term, then register for only three during this term. This semester, your last if you intend to graduate at the close of two years, should be spent writing and revising your thesis or creative project or reading for your exam. You should stay in very close touch with your thesis advisor, with whom you should set out a writing schedule at the outset of the term. Make sure to allow time for your committee to read drafts of your work, and ensure that you schedule your thesis defense before the end of the semester. To complete the degree, you must have a thesis defense (thesis option), a public reading (creative option).