

Graduate Student Manual



MA Degree in English (Literature, Writing and Rhetoric Tracks)

FIU Department of English

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How to Use This Manual

We have designed this manual to provide an overview of the MA in English program.

In terms of organization, the manual begins broadly (with our program's mission) and then gets progressively more detailed as we describe the thesis process. We wrote the manual in consultation with fellow graduate faculty members, including Heather Blatt, Director of the Literature Program, and Vanessa Sohan, the previous Associate Director of the Graduate Program for the Writing and Rhetoric Track.

We encourage you to read the manual in its entirety at the start of your MA and then use it as a reference throughout your time in the program.

As always, we are available to answer your questions throughout your time in the graduate program, and we look forward to working with you!

Martha Schoolman, Director of the Graduate Program, mschoolm@fiu.edu
Luke Thominet, Associate Director of the Graduate Program, lthomine@fiu.edu

Our Mission

We, the Graduate Faculty in the Master of Arts in English at Florida International University, seek to create a rich and supportive environment of critical inquiry, imagination, creativity, and social responsibility, for students, faculty, and staff. Our research is fundamental to our teaching, and our work as critics and scholars allows us to help students engage with the latest developments in our fields. Our shared point of departure is a belief in the immense power and reach of language and the corresponding conviction that we, as human beings, cannot detach ourselves from its forces.

As scholars and teachers of literature, we examine and seek to understand the stories that constitute us and our world. Appreciating the power of language necessarily means recognizing its reach into every facet of human life. It also means recognizing the role of language and interpretation in establishing and contesting unjust power structures that perpetuate colonial institutions and knowledge formations. We seek to foster a community of inquiry, inclusion, and social responsibility poised to addressing these many aspects of our human existence and its material and symbolic contexts.

As scholars and teachers of writing and rhetoric, we are dedicated to understanding how communication, literacy, technology, and culture interact in creating an informed, engaged public. We view rhetoric as both a practice and a subject of study: rhetoricians hone their own communication skills and study the choices made by other rhetoricians, choices that are shaped by and shape specific contexts. Understanding writing as a rhetorical practice also means understanding writing as a mode of learning and a nonlinear process that reflects our identity positions. Our approach thus works within and across the borders of language, media, and mode. We seek to engage students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as resources and to build upon students' 21st-century literacy practices. We support students as they learn how to compose socially situated texts in university, community, K-12, and professional contexts.

We consider ourselves fortunate to be in a place shaped by its proximity to Latin American and the Caribbean; we take the International in our institutional name very seriously. We therefore understand that diversity of experience must be represented in our curriculum, even as we pursue diversity beyond the goal of mere pluralism. Rather, we recognize the productive potential of non-normative experiences, understandings, and values as central to critical humanistic inquiry, regardless of field.

Tracks

Literature

This track emphasizes advanced research in literary and cultural studies. Students in the track develop their knowledge of multiple "English Literatures" (particularly North American, British, and Caribbean) across media, employing diverse theoretical and critical approaches. Graduates of the program have gone on to careers in high school and college teaching as well as other fields that draw on their well-honed research and communication skills, such as journalism, social advocacy, and government. The program also has a successful track record in placing interested students in PhD programs in English and Comparative Literature.

Writing and Rhetoric

In this track, we engage with students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, build on their 21st-century literacies, and support them as they learn to communicate more effectively in university, community, K-12, and professional contexts. Graduates of the Writing and Rhetoric track can work as professional writers in private industry, governmental, and nonprofit organizations, and as writing instructors at the secondary and postsecondary level. The track also provides excellent preparation for PhD programs in Rhetoric and Composition or Communication Studies.

Admissions Process

Deadlines

- **For Fall Admission:** Apply by March 1, 5 p.m. EST
- **For Spring Admission:** Apply by October 1, 5 p.m. EST

Admissions Requirements

- **GPA:** 3.0 undergraduate
- **GRE:** Not required
- **Applicant Statement / Letter of Intent:** In no more than 1000 words, describe the relevant academic, personal and/or professional experiences compelling you to pursue advanced study in English. If you were not an English major in college, please take care to describe your qualifications for advanced study in English.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Two letters required from undergraduate or graduate literature, and/or writing and rhetoric professors.
- **Additional Requirements:** Minimum 10-page writing sample demonstrating your advanced skills in literary or writing and rhetoric research and analysis.
- **Optional Requirements:** Statement of purpose indicating a desire to be considered for a teaching assistantship.

Funding

The Department of English offers a limited number of teaching assistantships, which include a tuition waiver and a stipend.

The majority of those assistantships involve an apprenticeship with the First-Year Writing program (teaching ENC 1101-1102). Upon completing 18 hours of graduate work, including Teaching College Composition (ENG 6937), students are assigned to teach a course of freshman composition. Students may hold a teaching assistantship for a maximum of two years, and teaching assistants must be registered for 9 credit hours while they hold their assistantship.

All inquiries about financial aid should be addressed to the Financial Aid Office, which also awards loans, work-study, and all other financial packages.

Program Structure

Common Degree Requirements

The master's degree program consists of 30 semester hours of course work at graduate level (course numbers 5000 or above) and a thesis (6 credits). A maximum of six graduate semester hours may be transferred into the program subject to the approval of the graduate committee.

Required Courses

- ENG 5048: Literary Theory (3 credits)
- ENC 5703: Rhetorical Traditions (3 Credits)

Thesis

- LIT 6970: Master's Thesis (6 Credits)

Each student must complete a research thesis. The topic must be approved by the faculty member who will supervise the research, and then approved by the Thesis Committee. The thesis will be accepted only after being read and approved by the Thesis Committee. An oral defense meeting with the Thesis Committee is also required.

Tracks

Students may choose between two tracks, Literature or Writing and Rhetoric. The track-specific requirements are as follows:

Literature Track

Common Core of Required Courses (6 credits)

- ENG 5048: Literary Theory (3 credits)
- ENC 5703: Rhetorical Traditions (3 Credits)

Thesis

- LIT 6970: Master's Thesis (6 Credits)

Electives (24 credits)

Students may take a maximum of 24 semester hours (5000 or 6000) as appropriate to their graduate track (Writing and Rhetoric or Literature). Students should consult with a faculty advisor in their track, or with the Graduate Program Director.

Writing and Rhetoric Track

Common Core of Required Courses (6 credits)

- ENG 5048: Literary Theory (3 credits)
- ENC 5703: Rhetorical Traditions (3 Credits)

Thesis

- LIT 6970: Master's Thesis (6 Credits)

Writing Program Electives (minimum 12 credits)

- ENC 5235: Grant Writing (3 credits)
- ENC 5432: Document and Visual Design for Professional Writers (3 credits)
- ENC 5494: Writing Center Theory & Practice (3 credits)
- ENC 5752: Women's Rhetorics (3 credits)
- ENC 5935: Special Topics in Composition (3 credits)
- ENC 6261: Theories of Professional and Technical Writing (3 credits)
- ENC 6702: Composition Theory and Practice (3 credits)
- ENC 6734: Theories of Multilingual Writing (3 credits)
- ENC 6736: Writing Across Conventions (3 credits)
- ENG 6935: Special Topics in College Pedagogy (3 credits)
- ENG 6937: Teaching College Composition (3 credits)
- ENG 6942: College Composition Practicum (1 credit)

English Department Electives (9-12 credits)

Students in the Writing track may take up to 6 elective credits within the English Department: AML - American Literature; CRW-Creative Writing; ENG-English-General; ENL-English Literature; LIN - Linguistics; LIT-Literature

Electives Outside the English Department (0-3 credits)

Students have the option to take up to 3 elective credits outside of the department with approval from the Associate Director of the English MA.

Thesis Process

After completing the required courses and a total of 30 hours of course work, students must write a master's thesis, which is a work of original scholarship that makes a significant contribution to the understanding and appreciation of some aspect of the discipline.

There are two primary options for the thesis: an article-length thesis (about 7,500-10,000 words or 25-30 double-spaced pages); or a more "traditional" thesis (about 15,000 - 18,000 words or 60-80 double-spaced pages).

The process of researching and writing the thesis enables students to learn about the current scholarly conversation on their chosen topics, including relevant background and contextual information; seek out and understand the dissonances and gaps in the scholarly conversation; and enter into and contribute to the conversation by developing and sustaining an effective scholarly argument. More details will be discussed and developed through the student's (optional) participation in ENG 5971: Thesis and Dissertation Workshop.

Students must enroll for a total of 6 hours of thesis credits (LIT 6970) while working on the master's thesis. These hours can be split over two semesters (3 credits each semester) or taken in one semester.

Possible Considerations in Designing a Thesis

Multimodal or Multimedia Projects

Students who are interested in incorporating multiple modes (linguistic, textual, aural, visual, and/or gestural) and/or media in their project will need to consult with their thesis major professor.

Primary Research Involving Human Subjects

Students who are undertaking primary research (interviews, surveys, questionnaires, observations) should speak to their thesis major professor about whether they will need to have their project approved by the Institutional Review Board prior to submitting their M2.

Note that IRB approval requires the thesis major professor to serve as Principle Investigator or PI and the student to work with their major professor to complete an IRB protocol form describing their research project and methods via the [Topaz system online](#). Citi certification is also required of all MA students and must be attached to IRB protocols as well.

Once submitted, IRB protocols can take anywhere from 4-6 or more weeks to gain final approval from reviewers (protocols often go through one or more rounds of revision during this process). The project must have final IRB approval prior to submitting the M2, and the IRB approval form must be attached to the M2.

Thesis Timeline

The thesis timeline is set by FIU's University Graduate School (UGS). Details are described on the [UGS calendar](#). Form deadlines vary slightly each year and will depend on the student's status as a full-time or part-time student and their successful progression through the program requirements.

The general structure is that students are required to submit the M-1 form (formation of thesis committee) one full academic year before they expect to graduate (typically their second semester). Thus, a student who expected to graduate in the Spring of 2023 would have needed to form a thesis committee by the last day of classes in the Spring 2022 semester. The M-2 (thesis proposal) is due near the middle of the semester before the student expects to graduate (typically their third semester). The M-3 and ETD forms are due at set intervals during the graduation semester.

Note that the last date to defend the thesis (and submit the M3 form) is typically one month before classes end, which means the thesis should be submitted to all committee members early/mid-semester (beginning of March for spring graduation; beginning of June for summer graduation; beginning of October for fall graduation).

Students are advised to familiarize themselves with the specific deadlines as soon as they enter the program and heed reminders issued by the graduate program director's office. **All forms are due to the CASE graduate school one full week before they are due to UGS.** The deadlines are firm and the department does not have the power to make exceptions.

M1: Thesis Title and Committee Membership

Soliciting Faculty Participation in the Thesis Committee

The graduate student is in charge of identifying possible faculty with whom to work in the development of the thesis. Students may wish to consider faculty areas of specialization, their historical area(s) of focus, and their working relationship with the student. Much of this work is accomplished through one-on-one meetings with faculty.

Students must obtain the consent of a member of the graduate faculty willing to direct the thesis. This faculty member is the "Major Professor" in the student's thesis committee. In addition, at least two other members of the graduate faculty must agree to serve as readers for the project. Each reader must have access to at least one draft of the thesis, submitted well before any official filing deadlines. Students should agree to establish with each reader an appropriate schedule for reading and responding to the drafts.

Thesis committee members must be a member of the [graduate faculty](#). Major professors must be Tenure-Track (TT) graduate faculty (e.g., Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, Professors). Non-Tenure Track faculty (e.g., Assistant Teaching Professors, Associate Teaching Professors, Teaching Professors) can be members of thesis committees as readers if they have Graduate Faculty Status.

Thesis Major Professor

The student's conversation with faculty should guide the student to select an appropriate thesis

major professor. This will be the Tenure-Track faculty member with whom the student most closely works to develop the thesis topic and scope.

The student should work with their major professor to determine the schedule for developing the thesis proposal and subsequent drafts based on CASE and UGS deadlines. The major professor will also be the primary reader of the student's thesis. They often review multiple drafts of the thesis before it is sent to the rest of the committee for review.

Submission & Deadlines

The M1 form asks for a title and very brief summary of the project (1-2 sentences). The M1 form must be submitted while the student is still enrolled in courses; **this means the form must be submitted to and approved by CASE prior to the final exam week.** The final deadline is typically one full academic year before the student's planned graduation and is listed on the [UGS calendar](#).

M2: Thesis Proposal

Before proceeding to write the thesis, students must secure approval of an M2 thesis proposal. The proposal can range from about four to five (4-5) double-spaced pages plus a working bibliography (of about 15 to 25 references). The goal of the M2 is to develop a detailed and specific proposal that will identify and articulate the context, rationale, foundational research, guiding questions, and methodology of the thesis project. The thesis often represents the largest and most independent project a student develops during the MA. Developing the M2 proposal lends structure, specificity, and direction to the thesis project.

Typically, the M2 provides a brief summary/introduction of the project, a brief overview of the current conversation around the topic (in the form of a short literature review), an identification of a gap in the current conversation that the writer seeks to research, and a discussion of the possible interventions the writer hopes to make in that conversation. It should also include a statement of the methodology and/or theories the student will employ and a brief description of what each chapter or section might include. The proposal should conclude with a selected bibliography of relevant or related references.

Below, we have included the suggested [UGS guidelines for M2 proposals](#) with some additional explanation of how these guidelines relate to Humanities research, since the labels for the components of the proposal largely draw on the language of STEM and social science inquiry. These guidelines, components, and organization are *suggested not set in stone*, and students should develop their M2 proposals in consultation with their major professors.

Components of the Proposal:

Overall, the proposal should demonstrate that the student understands the work to be conducted, its significance and has consulted and read the appropriate literature in formulating the proposal.

Conventional components of the thesis proposal, typically provided in this order, include the following sections:

Introduction and Statement of Problem/Issue

A current, concise, and scholarly presentation of the research problem/issue that gives clear evidence that the student has reviewed the current literature relevant to the planned research and has an understanding of the significance and nature of the problem (though the actual literature review usually comes in the next section, after the introduction). The introduction should contain a statement of the problem/issue that is outlined in a manner such that a non-specialist will understand the problem and reason it was chosen. This introduction section typically answers the following questions: What is the problem/issue to be studied? Why is this problem/issue worthy of study?

Background and Theory (including short literature review)

This section should provide specialists sufficient information about the state-of-art or knowledge in this field that they will be able to critically evaluate the proposal that follows. This Background section answers the following question: What work has been done by others and is relevant to the proposed problem?

Research questions, objectives, and/or hypotheses

In this section, the student should develop research questions that will guide the development of the thesis. The student can also state their goals/objectives in conducting this research and offer hypotheses, conjectural answers to each question in the form of a brief summary of what answer a student expects to discover, or an explanation of why this question is significant in the context of the thesis argument.

Methods and/or Theoretical Perspectives

This section is where the student identifies the methodology and/or theoretical approach(es) they are using to frame their thesis. For example, is the student applying a theoretical methodology like Actor-Network Theory, or Queer Theory, or a combination of multiple theories and methodologies? If they are conducting field research, what qualitative and/or quantitative approaches will they use to gather and analyze data?

Significance/Conclusion

Finally, the student should make sure their M2 has clearly explained why they believe their thesis topic and argument matter (answering the "So what?" question). Has the M2 shown how their thesis research participates in current critical conversations? What gaps in the field have they identified and how is their work seeking to fill those gaps? In other words, to whom will this project matter? With what other critics is the student in conversation? To what discussions will this thesis contribute?

References/Working Bibliography

A working list of primary and secondary sources that the student plans to read and reference as part of the thesis project. These might include, where appropriate, primary literary texts, secondary criticism, primary research (such as interviews or surveys), archival documents, literary or rhetorical theory, and other relevant material. Please make sure your bibliography draws on the citation guidelines you plan to use throughout your project (MLA, APA, or Chicago).

M2 Proposal Meeting

Ideally taking place no later than one week before the M2 form submission due date (determined by the University Graduate School), students should meet with all of their committee members together to discuss and get feedback on their proposal.

Goals

- Provide students with feedback on the proposed thesis before writing begins
- Enable the student to solicit guidance and feedback
- Determine if revisions to the proposal are necessary, or if the student is ready to submit the M2 and begin work on the thesis itself.

Purpose

Meeting with all committee members *together* ensures that students are not asked to reconcile conflicting advice, gives the student an opportunity to raise questions about how to move forward, and confirms that all committee members and the student reach consensus on the proposed topic and the student's next steps.

Scheduling

The student should reach out to their major professor at least one month before the desired M2 meeting date to share their completed draft of the thesis proposal. At that point or through further discussion, the major professor will give the student the go-ahead to schedule the meeting. The student is responsible for:

- Scheduling the meeting at a time that works for all faculty to attend (often managed via Doodle polls)
- Identifying and reserving a meeting space for the discussion (this is typically the English Department Conference Room; the scheduling book is in the department office)
- Distributing their final draft of the thesis proposal to their committee members, ideally no less than one week in advance of the meeting date
- Informing faculty of the scheduled meeting date and time

Preparing for the M2 proposal discussion

Students should prepare by identifying any questions to ask of faculty, and any feedback they might wish to request. Useful questions to consider:

- What work is necessary before writing on the thesis project can begin?
- What is the first section of the thesis that should be written?
- What structure or organization is likely for the thesis?

- What issues or challenges are likely to occur in developing the thesis?

At the meeting

Students should arrive with their copy of their proposal, with any questions they might have, and with a means for taking notes. Typically, these meetings involve a discussion of the student's proposed project, questions for the student from the faculty, and questions for the faculty from the student. At the end of the meeting, faculty may request revisions to the proposal prior to signing the M2.

Citi Certification

All students must complete [CITI certification](#) training prior to submitting their M2 (Humanities Responsible Conduct of Research Course).

M3: Preliminary approval of thesis and request for oral defense

As mentioned above, once the student has gained approval of the M2 they should work closely with their major professor to establish a schedule for submitting drafts of their thesis well before the UGS deadlines.

Typically, students secure approval of their work first from their major professor and then from the other readers. Most major professors prefer to read and critique each chapter or section as it is completed rather than receive the entire, completed thesis all at once; however, the review process is something that the student and readers need to establish among themselves. Once all readers have given preliminary approval (sometimes pending recommended revisions) of a complete draft of the thesis, the student must request and schedule an oral defense and have them sign the M3 form.

At the same time that the student is gathering signatures on the M3 form, the student should schedule a defense time when all committee members can meet for an oral defense of the M3 draft of the thesis. Currently, the major professor and student are required to appear in person, but readers can attend virtually.

During the defense, committee members will ask questions and provide feedback on the student's research and suggest avenues for future directions and research. The committee members will provide their determination of whether the thesis has met the standards of the committee. They may approve pending particular revisions that the entire committee must all approve, they may approve with the understanding that the student will work directly with their major professor to make any necessary revisions to the thesis, they may approve with no revisions necessary, or they may reject the thesis. Note that theses typically do not undergo significant revisions post M3 and oral defense; usually, committees will ask for small changes to introduction, conclusion, clarifications in the methodology or framing, or editing and sentence-level changes.

Thesis Format, Standards and Guidelines and ETD Submission

After the defense and once the student has made the committee's suggested revisions, the student finalizes the thesis so that it conforms to the format, standards and guidelines set forth in the [Graduate School's Thesis/Dissertation Preparation Manual](#).

The final form, called the "ETD" form, is once again signed by all committee members post-defense. Information on what to include with the ETD form can be found on the [UGS forms page](#).

The committee members should individually submit CASE rubrics to Christian Gomez to file for department purposes.

Advising and Support

Graduate Program Director

Handles general admissions inquiries, questions about program requirements and assistantship assignments, advises the students on the literature track.

- Prof. Martha Schoolman, mschoolm@fiu.edu

Associate Graduate Program Director

Advises students on the writing and rhetoric track.

- Prof. Luke Thominet, lthomine@fiu.edu

Graduate Office Associate

Manages admissions, enrollment and registration processes, handles communication among the department, the CASE graduate school, and the University Graduate School.

- Christian Gomez, chrgomez@fiu.edu

Center for Excellence in Writing

Provides support to students working on all kinds of writing projects, including support tailored to graduate students managing long-term projects.

- Website: <https://case.fiu.edu/writingcenter/>
- Email: fiucew@fiu.edu

Disability Resource Center

Provides support to students with disabilities, including communicating with faculty, developing accommodations.)

- Website: <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/get-support/disability-resource-center/>
- Email: drc@fiu.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services

Provides short-term counseling to students and referrals for those seeking more in- depth treatment.

- Website: <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/health-and-fitness/counseling-and-psychological-services/>
- Phone: 305-348-2277 (CAPS)