Graduate Student Manual
FIU Department of English

MA Degree in English
(Literature, Writing and Rhetoric Tracks)
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 delve into the nitty gritty details of the thesis process. We wrote the manual in consultation with fellow graduate faculty members, including Heather Blatt, Director of the Literature Program.

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

As always, we are available to answer your questions throughout your thesis process, and we look forward to working with you!

Martha Schoolman, Director of the Graduate Program, mschoolm@fiu.edu

Vanessa Sohan, Associate Director of the Graduate Program, vsohan@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 program 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 graduate study such as a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition.
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
ENC 5703  Rhetorical Traditions  3

Thesis
LIT 6970  Master's Thesis  6

The 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 a Thesis Committee. An oral defense is required before the Thesis Committee.

Students in the program 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)
Taken by both Literature and Writing and Rhetoric Track students.
ENC 5703  Rhetorical Traditions  3
ENG 5048  Literary Theory  3

Thesis/Capstone (6 credits)
LIT 6930  Master's Thesis  6

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)
Taken by both Literature and Writing and Rhetoric Track students.
ENC 5703  Rhetorical Traditions  3
ENG 5048  Literary Theory  3

Thesis/Capstone (6 credits)
LIT 6930  Master's Thesis  6

Core Required Course (3 credits)
ENC 6702  Composition Theory and Practice  3

Or
ENG 6937  Teaching College Composition  3

**Writing Program Electives (9-15 credits)**
ENC 5235  Grant Writing  3
ENC 6261  Theories of Professional and Technical Writing  3
ENC 5432  Document and Visual Design for Professional Writers  3
ENC 5752  Women's Rhetorics  3
ENC 6734  Theories of Multilingual Writing  3
ENC 5494  Writing Center Theory & Practice  3
ENC 6736  Writing Across Conventions  3
ENG 6942  College Composition Practicum  1

**English Department Electives (6 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 (6 credits)**
Students have the option to take courses from the following departments, with advisor approval: Communication, Leadership and Professional Studies. The following courses have been pre-approved; if other courses are of interest, check with Dr. Sohan before registration.

**Teaching and Learning:**
ADE 5383  Instructional Analysis and Design
ADE 5386  Individual Learning and Adult Education
ADE 6360  Adult Teaching Methods
LAE 5355  Literacy Instruction in the Intermediate Grades
LAE 6339  Teaching English in the Secondary School
LAE 6935  Seminar in English Education
TSL 5245  Developing ESOL Language and Literacy
TSL 6376C  Reading & Writing Strategies for ESOL Students

**CARTA, M.S. in Mass Communication: Global Strategic Communications:**
MMC 6402  Theories of Mass Communication
MMC 6108  Theories of Mass Communication & Writing
PUR 5406  Multicultural Communications
DIG 5438  Digital Storytelling

**Graduate standing is required for admission into all graduate courses.**
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.

For all MA students there are two 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 the student to learn about the current scholarly conversation on their chosen topic, 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.

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 semester (3 credits each semester) or taken in one semester.

Thesis Timeline

The thesis timeline is set by FIU’s University Graduate School (UGS), details are described here: https://gradschool.fiu.edu/calendar-deadlines/. 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 expecting to graduate in the Spring of 2023 must form a thesis committee by the last day of classes in the Spring semester of 2022. The M-2 (thesis proposal) is due near the middle of the semester before the student expects to graduate (typically their 3rd 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 dates timeline 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.
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 committee chair.

Primary Research Involving Human Subjects: Students who are undertaking primary research (interviews, surveys, questionnaires, observations) should speak to their thesis chair 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 committee chair to serve as Principle Investigator or PI and the student to work with their chair to complete an IRB protocol form describing their research project and methods via the Topaz system online (for more on Topaz, including how to gain access, see this website: https://research.fiu.edu/irb/topaz/). (Certiﬁcation is 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 protocol must have final IRB approval prior to submitting the M2 and the IRB approval form must be attached to the M2.

M1: Thesis Title and Committee Membership

Identifying 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, historical area(s) of focus, and the working relationship the student has with faculty members.

Students must obtain the consent of a member of the graduate faculty willing to direct the thesis. 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.

Graduate committee members must be a member of the graduate faculty (a CASE grad faculty list can be found here). Thesis committee chairs must be Tenure-Track (TT) graduate faculty; Non-Tenure Track faculty can be members of thesis committees as readers as long as they have Graduate Faculty Status.

Soliciting Faculty Participation: Much of this is accomplished through one-on-one meetings with faculty. As the student meets with faculty to discuss their thesis concept, they may find their thesis ideas develop with feedback from faculty.
Thesis Committee Chair: The student's conversation with faculty should guide the student to select an appropriate thesis committee chair, with whom the student will work most closely. 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 Committee Chair to determine the schedule for developing the thesis proposal and subsequent drafts based on CASE and UGS deadlines.

More details will be discussed and developed through the student’s (optional) participation in ENG 5971: Thesis and Dissertation Workshop.

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 for the spring semester; this means the form must be submitted to and approved by CASE prior to the final exam week. However, if the student is enrolled in summer courses, they can submit the M1 form over the summer.

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).

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.

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.

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.

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 you should develop your M2 in consultation with your chair.
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. The expectation of all thesis and dissertation research is that publishable new knowledge will result.

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 will be answering 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 of the proposal will provide the appropriate detail at a level such that a specialist will be informed of current developments in the field that are important to the understanding and conducting research on the problem. 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 will answer 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 take to gathering and analyzing 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, conduct, 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.

**Goal**: to give the student feedback on the proposed thesis before writing begins; to enable the student to solicit guidance and feedback; to 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 committee chair well in advance of the meeting to share their completed draft of the thesis proposal. Well in advance = about a month before any deadlines. At that point or through further discussion, the committee chair 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: Do you feel ready to begin work on the thesis itself? If no, what do you think you’ll do next? If yes, where will you start writing? How do you anticipate
structuring the thesis itself (for example, an author/text per section, or sections determined by stages of your argument)?

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. The student should also bring a copy of the M2 form for the committee to sign (and a blue or black pen in case no-one else arrives with a pen appropriate for signing the form).

Citi Certification: All students must complete Citi certification training prior to submitting their M2 (Humanities Responsible Conduct of Research Course).

M3: Graduate student submission of formatted complete draft to UGS.

As mentioned above, once the student has gained approval of the M2 they should work closely with their chair 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 director and then from the other readers. Most directors 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 chair 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 chair 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 re: 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 Regulations for 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 here (https://gradschool.fiu.edu/thesis-dissertation).

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

Graduate Program Director
Prof. Martha Schoolman
mschoolm@fiu.edu

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

Associate Graduate Program Director
Prof. Vanessa Sohan
vsohan@fiu.edu

(Advises students on the writing and rhetoric track.)

Graduate Office Associate
Christian Gomez
chrgomez@fiu.edu

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

Center for Excellence in Writing
https://case.fiu.edu/writingcenter/
fiucew@gmail.com

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

Disability Resource Center
https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/get-support/disability-resource-center/
drc@fiu.edu

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

Counseling and Psychological Services
https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/health-and-fitness/counseling-and-psychological-services/305-348-2277 (CAPS)

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