ENGLISH DEPARTMENT MISSION

The mission of the English Department is to offer a rigorous and engaging learning experience in the study of English; to facilitate reflective reading informed by a variety of cultural contexts, genre conventions, scholarly inquiry, critical analysis, and creative thinking; to produce innovative scholarly and creative work in a variety of genres that advances our understanding of language, literature, writing, and media; to support a collaborative and student-centered learning community that welcomes diverse backgrounds and perspectives, fosters social responsibility, and celebrates life-long learning; and to provide service to the university, state, and global community.

The goals for the MA in English Studies endorse this mission and expand upon it to include the mission to develop critical reading and writing skills for advanced professional scholarly inquiry.

Objectives

1. Literary History: students will develop a working knowledge of literary history, with a specialty by the conclusion of the program in two historical fields.

2. Literary Theory: Students will be able to recognize and understand the dominant theoretical paradigms in the field of English studies. They should be able to engage these theoretical paradigms in their scholarly writing.

3. Writing Skills: The Critical Essay: Students will be able to craft original and sophisticated theses for scholarly essays. Essays should reflect an awareness of the current critical conversations in their field and engage other scholarly points of view.

Assessment

Objective 2: Literary Theory: Assessment Methods

I. English 501: Literary Theories and Practices.
   An introductory graduate-level course in literary theory
   In their first quarter, all graduate students are required to take English 501, a foundational course that offers students an overview of literary theory and criticism. Specifically, students will gain a working knowledge of such fields as Marxist theory, feminist theory, queer theory, psychoanalytic theory, critical race theory, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and posthumanism. In addition, students will develop a sophisticated understanding, specific to the discipline of English studies, of such terms as aesthetics, difference, ideology, essentialism, agency, and mediation. In this course students should also gain:
   • Acquisition of literary research skills
• Increased sophistication as a writer of literary criticism
• Increased agility as a participant in an ongoing theoretical conversation

Student learning will be assessed by shorter writing assignments throughout the quarter and a culminating theoretical essay, 15-25 pages, demonstrating an ability to understand, and engage with sophistication, literary theory.

II. MA Qualifying exam: Assessing student learning in literary theory, midway through the program.

The MA Qualifying exam will, among other things, allow us to assess student progress by demonstrating the student’s ability to work more independently with critical theory.

Overview of Exam
The MA Qualifying Exam is a take-home essay exam that students write over the course of a weekend during fall quarter in their second year. This exam offers the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to think theoretically across authors, genres, and historical periods. The entire exam process allows students to demonstrate intellectual independence and self-motivation in their reading and writing.

This exam process has three important steps:
1. In the spring of their first year, with the help of their exam committee, MA students develop three personalized reading lists, two derived from Departmental Reading Lists, which are organized into historical periods. The third list is a Critical Theory Reading List, in which students choose three to five theorists.
2. Over the summer students read deeply and craft four exam questions that respond to criteria given to them by their committee.
3. In the fall of their second year, during the scheduled time (over the course of a weekend) students will be given two of their exam questions and produce two essays, 5-7 pages each.

Assessment: Direct Evidence
Every student is assigned an MA Qualifying exam committee of two faculty members. These faculty members will assess student learning in the area of literary theory in two ways:

• They will assess student exam questions, which should, among other things, demonstrate a sophisticated engagement with the theorists from their Critical Theory Reading list. The chair of the committee will offer a brief report of student progress to the DGS after the “First Fall Meeting” with the student.
• They will assess the exam. Success on the exam requires that students successfully demonstrate their learning in the area of literary theory by:
  1) Situating their claims within a critical context, demonstrating an understanding of what current scholars in the field have already suggested about the topic at hand.
  2) Presenting a coherent, attentive sense of methodology, one that is appropriate to the question, the text, and/or the period, and deploying the appropriate critical terms that will alert their reader to their theoretical approach.
Assessment: Indirect Evidence

The MA Qualifying exam committee meets with the student informally in the spring of their first year to help them craft their reading lists. In the fall of their second year, students attend two formal meetings. In the “First Fall Meeting,” the faculty committee members assess student exam questions and offer the student feedback for revision. In the “Second Fall Meeting,” the faculty members offer the student feedback on their exam. In both of these meetings the committee will also seek feedback from the student about their learning success. The chair of the committee will offer a brief report of student feedback to the DGS.