



MA EXAM in American Literature, English Literature, and Literary Theory

Introduction

There are actually three separate “exams” that are given in the same session and follow an integrated procedure: exams in American Literature, English Literature, and Literary Theory. Students are strongly encouraged to consult with faculty at every part of the exam procedure except for the two days before the exam. Each student should talk with faculty about the proposal, the choice of themes, the choice of works, etc. In fact, it will be seen as a weakness if a student gets to the exam not having discussed the exam sufficiently with faculty. In addition to the more specific requirements listed here, the student has to officially sign up for the final exam in order to be able to take the exam.

The time line – Summer and Fall Term

At a meeting in the first week of the Summer Semester: The student submits a proposal (list of chosen themes) to the examiners and the list is approved or rejected. It is possible that parts of the proposal are accepted and others rejected, but all three parts need to be accepted to sign up for and take the exam. Problems will be discussed with the faculty.

48 hours before the exam: The student is notified of the one theme from the accepted proposal that will be the focus of each part of the exam (three themes in total). The student finalizes the presentation for each theme (three presentations in total). No consultations with the faculty concerning the contents of the presentations are allowed in the 48 hours before the exam. If the student does not receive the notification by 48 hours before the exam, s/he is responsible to contact one or more faculty and the department assistant to ask about the situation.

The exam

The student presents his or her complete reading list, gives the presentations and answers questions from the committee. Each student will give all three presentations within one session.

The proposal

The proposal should contain:

- The student’s name, student number, email address, telephone number, and other identifying information.
- The student’s choice of 5 themes from the American Literature list (see below for details about the themes).
- For each American Literature theme chosen, a list of at least 3 and not more than 6 primary literary works plus one article – length critical or theoretical study (journal article, book chapter, etc.) relevant to responding to that theme.
- The student’s choice of 5 themes from the English Literature list (see below for details about the themes).



- For each English Literature theme chosen, a list of at least 3 and not more than 6 primary literary works and one article – length critical or theoretical study (journal article, book chapter, etc.) relevant to responding to that theme.
- The student's choice of 3 themes from the Criticism and Theory list (see below for details about the themes).
- For each Criticism and Theory theme chosen, one book – length critical or theoretical work relevant to responding to that theme.

The themes

The themes include an objective topic as well as one or more example questions that might be addressed in a response to the theme. In special situations, students can propose additional themes to be added to the list and chosen for their exam. Students should come to faculty with their ideas about these well before the deadline to submit a proposal for the exam.

The reading list

For the exam the student should prepare reading lists of book – length, canonical literary works that s/he has read before or during MA study, one list each for American and English literature. There should be at least 50 works on each list, and the list can include works from the department BA exam reading list. While the student is advised to review the reading lists with appropriate faculty, it is not submitted officially until the day of the exam, and therefore can and should be updated and modified until that point. The works on the list can be the target of questions for the student at the exam. The student should bring 5 paper copies of the complete reading lists to the exam.

The exam

The focus of the exam is a presentation in response to a theme chosen from a list followed by the student responding to questions asked by the examining committee. There are three parts of the exam, and the student gives a separate presentation for each part.

By 48 hours before the exam, the student will be officially notified by e-mail of the one theme (from the accepted proposal) on which the student will be examined in each part. The exam will focus on this one theme. Before this time, students should and must prepare to answer all the themes listed in the proposal. The last 48 hours are to polish the presentation on the one theme assigned for each part. See below for details about the presentations themselves. After the student delivers the presentation at the exam, the faculty committee evaluating the exam will ask questions related to the student's presentation, and the answers that are given by the student are also evaluated as part of the exam. The committee can also ask questions based on the student's reading lists, but questions should still have a basis in the theme and presentation.



The presentation

- The structure of the presentation should be the following:
 - Define and/or explain the key terms/concepts that are in the topic.
 - State the thesis statement, which responds to the theme.
 - Present a well-organized argument to support the thesis statement.
 - Give a brief summarizing conclusion to emphasize the main points of the presentation.
- Presentations for each of the three parts of the exam should be 10 minutes maximum.
- The presentation should address only the one assigned theme and nothing else.
- The presentation should show original, creative, critical thinking about the theme. The purpose of the presentation is not to provide the “correct answer”.
- The presentation should not only answer the questions suggested in the list of the themes. The questions are examples of the kinds of questions one might answer in addressing the topic given.
- The presentation should display a strong knowledge of the relevant literary and critical/theoretical works approved in the student’s proposal.
- Each presentation should have a “thesis statement” that is the student’s original idea connected to the theme and works, and the presentation should seek to argue in support of that thesis statement.
- Presentations should not be purely descriptive.
- Presentations should not be read or memorized.
- Students cannot bring any notes or other materials into the exam session.
- Regulations regarding plagiarism and academic honesty apply equally to presentations and written papers. For example, a presentation that is copied (memorized) from another source is plagiarism and a clear reason to fail the exam.

N.B.: In creating the proposal itself, the student already must do a lot of work and make some key decisions. In the time between the approval of the proposal and 48 hours before the exam, the student must prepare many possible presentations (13 in total). In the 48 hours before the exam, the student has to perfect the three presentations to actually deliver. Moreover, during this whole time, the student should be continually building his or her overall reading list. The exam is designed to examine all of these activities, which are all appropriate for a student to engage in during a master’s program in literature.