

GRADUATE STUDENT FAQs

This handbook/FAQ is intended to be a resource for MU graduate students in English. As of Spring 2020, the information contained here has been reviewed by the English Department Director of Graduate Studies, but students should check independently to confirm that no policies have been revised before making important decisions regarding their program and career. These FAQs were compiled and edited by AEGS representative Liam Drislane; the answers were vetted and/or provided by Angela Sorby (DGS at that time).

Department policies and practices

- What is the difference between the DGS and the department chair?
 - The Chair (currently Leah Flack) leads the Department, including all faculty (including TAs teaching). The Chair serves as a liaison to the wider university and answers to the Dean. The Director of Graduate Studies is appointed by the chair, manages the Graduate program and answers to the Chair. The DGS (currently Angela Sorby) administers the graduate program runs graduate admissions, advises graduate students who do not yet have a dissertation adviser; proposes changes to graduate education policies (so if something needs changing, tell her!); serves as a confidential liaison between students, faculty, and the Chair; and runs the process for teaching awards and fellowships. Most of the time, if graduate students have a question or problem, the DGS is their first stop.
- If I take an advanced undergraduate course as a graduate student, what should I expect, and what steps do I need to take in registering?
 - There are two numbers for dual courses: a 4000-level and a 5000-level. Register for the 5000-level. You should expect an enhanced curriculum with opportunities to complete graduate-level seminar papers or the equivalent; however, students are strongly encouraged to take the 6000-level courses, even if they are out of their field, since breadth is part of any graduate education and sometimes the connections made are surprisingly useful.
- What if CheckMarq says I need a permission number to register?
 - This is common. Email Wendy Walsh (the administrative assistant) and cc the DGS(Angela Sorby) Wendy has access to the software and can generate the number. Sometimes Angela has to approve it, but Wendy is the only one who can implement it. This is routine and never a problem if you're registering normally.
- How does auditing a class work for graduate students?
 - Students must first register for a course via CheckMarq, then request the audit option from the Graduate School. The [Audit Request Form](#) is located on the [Graduate School forms website](#).
- If I'm concerned about something that happened in one of my classes or in an encounter with a student or faculty member, who can I talk to?
 - The Director of Graduate Studies is the liaison between graduate students and faculty, and is the first stop if a student experiences or witnesses an altercation in need of resolution. In the event that a student needs to contact an official outside the department, reach out to James South, the Dean of Faculty in Arts and Sciences.
- Is healthcare available to graduate students?

- Graduate students are encouraged to access basic health care via the University health clinic for a flat fee of \$163/semester. The University does not offer automatic health insurance coverage for more advanced/emergency levels of care, but does participate in group buy-in plans as outlined here: <https://www.marquette.edu/grad/graduate-student-healthcare-options.php>
That said, many students have found that the ACA (Obamacare) gives them cheaper options, which is why the website above also links to those resources.
- Are there counseling resources available to graduate students?
 - Graduate students enrolled on a full-time basis are eligible for services at the Counseling Center, which can be reached at the following link: <https://www.marquette.edu/counseling/eligibility.shtml>
- What are the period/language requirements for graduate students in English?
 - There are no period requirements. There is a foreign language requirement on the books, but it is waived if the student does not need a language for their dissertation.
- Can students take foreign languages, and can those classes count toward graduation?
 - Students can sign up for foreign language classes, but they do not count toward the credits required to graduate.
- Can I take classes outside of the English department and have it count toward graduation?
 - Graduate students can take one class outside of the department with the permission of the DGS and the course instructor.
- Can I take classes at local colleges/universities and have them count toward graduation?
 - Credits earned at other other schools can be transferred in but will not be covered by a student's MU stipend.
- What classes are required to graduate for MA/PhD students?
 - Graduate students in English are required to take one critical theory course; there are no other mandatory courses. The theory course is typically offered once every two years, so sign up for it whenever it is offered.

PhD-specific questions

Coursework:

- What courses do I need to take in order to graduate?
 - The department's can be found at the following link: [PhD basic path](#). Basically, you'll take two 6000-level courses per semester; you can take a 5000-level course if it's imperative for your research, but these are less pedagogically optimal for students at the PhD stage.
 - There is an admittedly confusing system of registration numbers for students beyond coursework, meant to keep them at "full time." Check out the Bulletin for those numbers (at the 8000 and 9000 level) for descriptions.

Dissertation and the DQE:

- It's never too early to start thinking about your dissertation, and the MU English Department has created a brief introduction to such topics as your relationship with your advisor, the role of your committee members, the purpose and format of the DQU, and a basic "how to write a dissertation" overview. You can find this resource at the following link: [Dissertation 101](#).

- You will have lots of formal prep: a pre-dissertation summer seminar (really more like an independent study) taught by the DGS after your second year of coursework; and an 8830 DQE prep course during your third year, taught by your prospective dissertation director.

Committees:

- How do I find a DQE Committee Chair/dissertation director?
 - Talk to more than one faculty member in your field or a related field. The person in your exact field may or may not be the best fit, and not all potential directors have room to add more advisees, since they can only direct a limited number of dissertations at one time. Also, this is (unavoidably) an interpersonal relationship and you want to make sure it's a good fit on that level as well. If your "perfect" director can't direct, they can often still serve on the Committee as a second or third reader, and you'll still benefit from their expertise. Seemingly less-relevant Directors might sometimes actually be great for you; for instance, their periodized area may be different from yours but their theoretical approach may be closely aligned and very useful.
- When do I need to have confirmed my committee chair?
 - Your ENG 8830 advisor should become your chair. Generally, aim to have your chair confirmed by August prior to the third year of your program at the latest, so you can register for 8830.
- How does a PhD student choose a dissertation committee?
 - Your dissertation advisor will advise you regarding the other two committee members.
- When do I need to have the entire committee confirmed?
 - During your 8830/DQE semester, you can talk to your chair about who will be on your committee. Ideally, you should have the committee confirmed early on during the semester you're taking 8830..
- Can I change committee members?
 - Once you've completed 8830, your Chair can change only under very unusual circumstances. You can modify your topic, but the broad area covered in your DQE should be the broad area of your dissertation. In other words, your 8830 research should inform, but not rigidly determine, your dissertation topic. You cannot, for instance, switch from writing a dissertation on Milton to writing a dissertation on Hollywood musicals (unless there is an undiscovered trove of Hollywood musical adaptations of *Paradise Lost* ...). You can, however, switch from writing a dissertation on Milton's *Paradise Lost* to writing a dissertation on, say, poetic responses to the Glorious Revolution (which took place during Milton's lifetime) or Blake's reception of Milton.
 - If you change Committee members, do so very early and communicate with all concerned. A rule of thumb is: the more work a faculty member has put into working with you individually, the more committed you should be to staying with that Committee member. .
- Can dissertation committee members come from outside the Department or outside MU?
 - Yes, one can. An external member can join a student's committee only when that scholar has some mutual research interest that cannot be met within the

department. This is especially appropriate when students are drawing on MU's interdisciplinary programs.

Assistantships:

- What kind of assistantships are available?
 - PhD students may have a teaching assistantship, a research assistantship (currently being run out of the Center for Advancement of the Humanities), or a writing center assistantship. Public humanities internships through the CFAH are also funded as assistantships.
- Will I have the opportunity to teach literature classes during the program?
 - There is a process by which PhD student (generally one close to graduating) may have the opportunity to teach a literature course. The lit classes are restricted not by the department but by the number of lit courses that projected enrollments allow the Department to run. There is no application process for these assignments because the Department makes decisions based on what is needed (in terms of courses) and who is available (in terms of advanced graduate students and their expertise).

Fellowships:

- What is a fellowship, which are available within the department, and how do I get one?
 - The MU English Department offers one fellowship, the Goeden, to students nearing completion of the dissertation. Advanced PhD students can apply for the fellowship, and one student is selected each year. The fellowship allows the selected student to receive the standard TA stipend without teaching for one academic year.
 - The University offers some diversity fellowships to students from nontraditional backgrounds upon acceptance into the program; more information is here: <https://www.marquette.edu/grad/finaid-diversity-fellowship.php>
 - The Graduate School offers two “distinguished” (competitive)fellowships, the Schmitt and the Raynor. The Department will help students prepare these applications upon request, and we've been fairly successful in getting them in past years. Information on these fellowships can be found at the following link: <https://www.marquette.edu/grad/financial-aid-distinguished-fellowships.php>

MA-specific questions

- Can MA students obtain an assistantship with a stipend, tuition waiver, of other funding?
 - The MA program is self-funded, but the tuition is automatically reduced (\$500 per credit/hour). Rarely, the Department has been able to further fund MA students through surplus funds and offer them teaching/service opportunities (and we love it when we can!), but this can never be predicted. Trinity Fellows and Diversity Fellows are fully funded at the MA level through separately-administered programs; students apply to these concurrently with admissions.
- Do MA students need to take summer classes in order to graduate on time?
 - If an MA student takes three classes per semester for two years, summer classes are not required for graduation. The three class schedule assumes no teaching.
- Do MA students need to complete a thesis, exam, or capstone project to graduate?

- MA students may choose to complete a 6-credit “official” thesis or a 3-credit independent study to do a longer scholarly paper. These options are recommended for students planning to apply to a PhD program. The Department encourages MA students who are not pursuing a PhD to consider a professional project or internship that will help them bridge into a public humanities career. The Graduate School offers paid internships at off-campus sites on a competitive basis and these can be a great option for MA students. Plan early for this, since they’re often full-year (part-time) plus all-summer (full time) opportunities with significant responsibilities.
- Do MA students teach?
 - MU does not permit students without an MA degree to teach stand-alone courses; however, the Department can sometimes find them other projects or opportunities. This is very fluid, in terms of available resources.

Prospective graduate students

- How does the hybrid undergrad/MA program work?
 - Students take 3-4 graduate credit courses (full grad or hybrid) in senior year, then have one additional year at 3/3 level to finish the MA. In the junior year, students apply to graduate school and are admitted at the beginning of senior year.

Academic conferences

- How do I find conferences that relate to my research?
 - The University of Pennsylvania’s “Call for Papers” site compiles CFPs from a wide range of disciplines and is a valuable starting place to search for relevant conferences. You can reach the Upenn CFP page at the following link: <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/>.
- Which conferences should I prioritize?
 - This answer varies widely depending on the academic field. Consult with experienced scholars in your research area(s) to determine which conferences are most valuable for your academic interests and goals. That said, conferences are mainly useful as a way of “professionally acculturating” and any conference is likely to serve this role. It’s a good idea to look for regional conferences that are less expensive.
- How do I submit a proposal?
 - The CFP will include submission guidelines.
- How do I write an abstract?
 - In lieu of reproducing advice available elsewhere, this guide offers links to several relevant resource; the DGS is also happy to help:
 - Guide to writing abstracts: <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/>
 - Principles and examples: <https://hsp.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/HOW%20TO%20WRITE%20AN%20ABSTRACT.pdf>
 - Sample abstracts: <https://english.as.uky.edu/dissertation-abstracts>
- How do I get funding to attend a conference?

- The Graduate Student Organization (GSO) and the Association of English Graduate Students (AEGS) offer travel grants, but they seldom cover the whole expense.

Miscellaneous

- How do I write and format my CV?
 - A thorough (and opinionated) guide to the academic CV can be found at the following link: [Dr. Karen's Rules of the Academic CV](#). It's also a good idea to look at the CV of scholars in your field and use them to reverse-engineer your own CV. Your dissertation director will be willing to share theirs; you can also ask advanced MU students.
- When should I start trying to publish articles?
 - If you are going on the academic job market, start as soon as possible without compromising your coursework or dissertation progress. A revised dissertation chapter or even a course paper can sometimes be publishable, but talk to a faculty member about how to prepare it.
- Which kinds of publications should I prioritize?
 - This depends on what kind of job you hope to get. If you apply to professor jobs at research university, you'll be most competitive if you have 1-2 peer-reviewed articles placed in competitive journals or peer-reviewed essay collections. plus a conference presentation or two. However, fewer and fewer college jobs fit this model. You should consult with your advisor about your strengths and how to highlight them; these may include pedagogical research, public-facing essays, digital projects or blogs, or even creative work.
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 - Ask professors by email or in person. Give them enough time (3-4 weeks is ideal) and include as much supplementary material as possible (your cv, an old paper, a link to the job/fellowship description if available). When you're on the "traditional" job market, they'll usually write one generic letter and then tailor it to specific jobs if necessary; remember to ask them to change the date/details if you go on the market more than once. Don't feel apologetic about asking! Your professors want to do this for you. If there's a delay, remind the person and stay in touch.
- How do I obtain letters of recommendation?
 - Ask professors in person or by email, giving them *at least* three weeks and ideally more. Send them your cv, a writing sample, and a link to the fellowship or position. It's appropriate to ask them to emphasize something that the job requires. The more specifics you provide, the better their letter is likely to be. Don't be apologetic or shy about asking for letters; professors want you to

succeed and want to write them. Because of the long lead-up, though, they sometimes forget; it's polite to remind them if you don't hear back.

- What can I be doing to prepare for career options outside of academia?
 - The current DGS (Angela Sorby) is involved with and strongly committed to the Humanities Without Walls program, meant to give graduate students access to, and preparation for, diverse careers. Talk to her about the many options, which include internships on and off campus. Career Services is also happy to work with graduate students and discuss your resume/CV. It can be useful to meet a few times per semester to discuss how you can translate your academic work into other professional contexts as well as what you can be doing to add to your resume to make yourself viable in non-academic career paths.
- Are graduate classes offered in the evening or on weekends?
 - In response to graduate student requests, it has been established that one graduate seminar (out of two taught each semester) will be held either online or in the evening.