Guidelines For

The Ph.D. in English
at Boston College

Fall 2013 Edition
Welcome to the Fall 2013 edition of the guidelines for the Doctoral Program in English. By offering these guidelines, we mean to collect together materials - some of which have existed in the program for years - that will assist students in planning their degree programs. These are not literally the rules governing our work together; rather, we have tried to assemble descriptive materials that cover what students have customarily done, what past directors have expected, how to find resources here at BC and beyond, and, in a few places, descriptions of the community we try to build here. As you know, we pride ourselves on offering a program that allows individual students the flexibility to shape many dimensions of their intellectual and professional work; at the same time, we believe that the structures described here will assist you in crafting a program of study that will serve you well on the path toward your doctorate and beyond. Some of the resources here, as well as some of our web resources, are under construction, so bear with us as we continually update them to reflect current knowledge. I know that I speak for all members of the English Department faculty when I welcome you aboard, for the first time or for another productive and exciting year. We look forward to working with you!

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Web Resources

Just to get you acquainted with some of the resources we've created for PhD candidates in English, you might want to start by looking at the different online dimensions of what we do here. They are in different locations.

1. The program’s **Official Web Site**, linked to the English Department’s site. This is what most prospective students (and anyone else who’s surfing around) will see. It’s under occasional revision; please feel free to make suggestions.  
   [http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/english/graduate/doctoral.html](http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/english/graduate/doctoral.html)

2. The **Blackboard Vista** site for the doctoral program, which contains previous exam lists, teaching materials, online calendars and discussion sites, as well as application forms and shared readings by program members. It’s open to all students in the PhD program.  
   [https://cms.bc.edu/](https://cms.bc.edu/). There is a separate page with resources from EN934, Advanced Research Colloquium (offered in alternate years and required in the third or fourth year).

3. The **PhD Student Accomplishments Page**, at  
   [http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/english/graduate/doctoral/students.html](http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/english/graduate/doctoral/students.html)

4. Please send any updates (including publications, conferences, or other significant activity) to Tracy Downing in the English Department ([downingt@bc.edu](mailto:downingt@bc.edu)).

5. The **Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Web Site**  
   [http://gsas.bc.edu/](http://gsas.bc.edu/)  
   is a great place to find out the ‘official line’ on policies and procedures for graduate study, and to find out what resources (financial, instructional, and otherwise) are available to you.

6. To meet the English faculty, go to:  
   [http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/english/faculty.html](http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/english/faculty.html)

Course Work

PhD candidates in English are required to take a ‘PhD Seminar’ in each of their first four semesters; these seminars are on a different topic each semester. The PhD Seminar is a scheduled course like any other grad course; we do our best _not_ to have it conflict with other courses or student obligations, but no guarantee is possible.

Beyond that, students take electives in the graduate program; these may include independent study courses (called ‘Readings and Research’ or ‘R & R’s’), and courses at partner institutions (see ‘Some Options for Course Work Beyond BC’ below). Students participate in the Pedagogy Workshop in their second and third year; in their third or fourth year, they enroll in the Advanced
Research Colloquium, which is essentially a professionalization seminar covering the making of a CV, writing a job letter or a dissertation prospectus, and placing an article in a scholarly publication. To teach in our First-Year Writing Seminar, which is required of all students in the third year of their teaching, you must also take EN 825, Composition Theory and the Teaching of Writing, which is offered each spring (or show that you've had a comparable course in your background).

Because some students arrive with MAs and thus an extensive graduate course background already, the number of additional courses a student may take varies widely. But a common sequence among many of our current graduate students is to take four to six courses, overall, in their first year, and three or four in their second. Typically, in the second year you will be preparing to take your first minor field exam (required by the end of the second year), and working as a TA in a large lecture course, and that has tended to thin out second-year course plans a bit. But again, there's variety here. Students sometimes return to take courses (i.e., suitable doctoral seminars) in their third and fourth years, for example (and even audit one in their fifth).

Some Options for Course Work Beyond BC

Boston College is a member of the Boston-Area Consortium and the Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies (and of the Boston Theological Institute, though this is rarely relevant for our PhD candidates). These consortium relationships allow you to take graduate courses at other universities in the Boston area.

Boston-Area Consortium
Students are eligible to cross-register for one course per semester at Boston University, Brandeis University or Tufts University. Here are the links to the English departments at those schools:
Boston University  http://www.bu.edu/english/grad-courses.html
Tufts University  http://ase.tufts.edu/english/admin/courses.html
Brandeis University  http://www.brandeis.edu/registrar/reg-sched/curgrad.php

Graduate Consortium in Women’s Studies (GCWS) at MIT
The GCWS describes itself as ‘a pioneering effort by faculty at nine degree-granting institutions in the Boston area and MIT to advance women’s studies scholarship.’ Faculty and students are drawn from the following nine member schools: Boston College, Boston University, Brandeis University, Harvard University, MIT, Northeastern University, Simmons College, Tufts University, and UMass Boston. Several of our faculty members (notably Profs Lydenberg, Restuccia, Seshadri, and Kowaleski-Wallace) have taught in this consortium, and I try to make a point of forwarding the GCWS course list each semester. There is an application process for enrolling, so keep your eye on the Web if you’re interested (http://mit.edu/gcws/).
The Graduate Colloquium, Pedagogy Seminar, and Research Collaboratives

Several events and activities in the program aim to build community among graduate students at all levels, and the faculty.

The Graduate Colloquium is a joint MA-PhD program that sponsors lectures and gatherings throughout the academic year. In alternate years, the colloquium consists of two evening events at BC featuring a roundtable discussion, papers by BC and area graduate students, and a keynote speaker drawn from BC’s faculty. In the other years, we host a full-blown one-day graduate conference featuring graduate papers from across the country, and a keynote speaker from outside BC. The inaugural conference in 2007, entitled “Another Way In: The Unseen Influences That Change our Worlds” (with a keynote by Bill Brown from University of Chicago), provided a fantastic model for future programs; the 2013 conference, “Health, Mental Health and Literature,” featured a keynote address by Joshua Wolf Shenk and was a huge success. Normally, we like to have at least one first year and two second year Ph.D. students involved in the planning of these events, and in general, the more volunteers participate, the easier it is for everyone. This is a great way to get experience with administration, event planning, and the academic milieu generally. The 2013/14 PhD student Director for Graduate Colloquia is Yin Yuan.

Secondly, all PhD students are required to participate in a student-run Pedagogy Seminar. PhD students entering in Fall 2012 or after will be required to participate in the Pedagogy Seminar in their second and third years. Naturally, students in all years are always welcome and are encouraged to attend. The group meets two or three times a semester. Topics for each workshop are generated by the whole group (past topics have included “Creating Syllabi & Designing Courses,” “Dealing with Troubled and Troubling Students,” and “Teaching Outside BC”). The workshops usually last two hours or so. Traditionally, the first hour is student only, in which students share their experiences, challenges, and questions. In the second hour, the seminar customarily invites a faculty member or two to join the discussion and share their experiences. Workshop coordinators set the date/time of meetings, select the topic, invite faculty, reserve a room (with the help of the department secretary), and purchase snacks (they should save receipts and turn them in to Linda Michel for reimbursement). Contact persons for 2013/14 are Deanna Malvesti and Trista Doyle.

Finally, every year, students and faculty have an opportunity to participate in a series of Research Collaboratives organized and run by students and faculty together. This is funded by GSAS under the rubric of ‘Preparing Future Faculty’, and they have been a great success for the past three years; midway through the fall semester you will get a call for proposals. These collaboratives are simply get-togethers that combine socializing and coordinated discussion, sharing of common research interests and resources, and/or common reading in specific research areas. Last year, groups met to work on drafts of essays together; attended a film in their professional field; had dinner together following a series of common readings. We can certainly imagine other formats as well: for instance, as in our recent PhD workshops, students and faculty might form a panel to try
out forthcoming paper presentations at an upcoming conference.

GSAS's primary concern is that these events combine socializing and mentoring functions, and that these events prepare students to become the fully-balanced faculty members we know they will be. In other words, these meetings are intended to approach the question of professional training for the field.

**A General Overview of Goals in Your Program**

It isn't possible, of course, to describe a single ‘template’ for every student's experience; we pride ourselves on our flexibility. But it might help to have a brief overview, in graphic form, of a typical (or at least not atypical!) calendar of how your program might proceed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Course Work</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Exam Plans</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>2 PhD Seminars <em>(required)</em>, 3-4 electives</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Prepare for minor field exam, first language exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>2 PhD Seminars <em>(required)</em>, 1-2 electives (including EN 825, Composition Theory and the Teaching of Writing, if needed)</td>
<td>TA for lecture course (1 semester)</td>
<td>Minor field prelim and exam <em>(required)</em></td>
<td>Pedagogy Seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Maybe 1 seminar in area of interest</td>
<td>1 semester of FWS, 1 semester LitCore</td>
<td>Major field prelim and exam</td>
<td>Advanced Research Colloquium (3rd or 4th year), Pedagogy Seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Maybe 1 seminar in area of interest</td>
<td>1 semester self-designed English elective, 1 semester Studies in Poetry or Studies in Narrative</td>
<td>Dissertation prelim and exam, second language exam</td>
<td>Advanced Research Colloquium (3rd or 4th year), Diss. Prospectus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dissertation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dissertation</td>
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Your Teaching Experience

Doctoral candidates divide their teaching opportunities over three years in the program. In your second year, normally you serve as a Teaching Assistant for one semester in a large undergraduate course taught by one of the faculty. Recently, most TAs have taught sections of our two semester Introduction to British Literature and Culture sequence or another large elective class (Shakespeare, American Literature and Film, etc.); in that semester, you run a small discussion section and have the opportunity to deliver a lecture to the large class. TAs meet regularly with the faculty member running the course to discuss the readings, background materials, and pedagogical strategies. We generally work these arrangements out in the winter of the previous academic year, when the Director will ask you about your preferences.

In your third year, you normally teach one semester of our First Year Writing Seminar, and participate in the FWS workshops, peer groups, and evaluations. Then, in the other semester, you commonly teach either in the Literature Core or an introductory course for English majors: Studies in Poetry or Narrative and Interpretation. For the non-FWS course, you will be assigned a faculty teaching mentor (see below).

In your fourth year, normally you teach an undergrad elective of your own design (in consultation with the Chair and the PhD Director) in one semester, and either Literature Core, FWS, Studies in Poetry, or Narrative and Interpretation in the other. During this year, you will also have a teaching mentor. In addition, you may want to encourage your field and/or thesis advisor to visit your classes.

Obviously, there are small variations on these patterns, and there are teaching opportunities, of course, beyond the fourth year. We also think it is very worthwhile to expand your teaching experience to include tutoring (e.g. at BC's Connors Family Learning Center), teaching in the summer (e.g., in the Opportunities Through Education program), and teaching at other local institutions in the fifth year and beyond.

Advisors and Teaching Mentors

Every student in the program, at every stage, should have a designated advisor. If you don’t know who your advisor is, let the Director know immediately. If you would like to change your advisor, the same rule applies. In some instances, of course, your work may be jointly overseen by two faculty advisors rather than just one. But the roles and functions of these advisors naturally evolve during the course of your years at BC.

In your first year, you will be assigned an advisor—normally, someone in your field(s) of expressed interest, but in any event someone who may serve as a ‘sounding board’ and consultant for your first steps in our program. The number of times you meet with your advisor can vary widely. At a minimum, you should check in with your advisor twice each semester. That
advisor can review your course choices, discuss plans for your first exams, and provide feedback as your program develops. This advisor is not, in your first years, obligated to serve as your teaching mentor. The advisor follows your progress and reports to the Director at the end of the academic year.

Normally, after that, what happens is that you yourself discover the faculty member who will become your final advisor and dissertation director. It might well happen when you begin your major field exam; certainly it will be settled as you begin planning your dissertation. Sometimes this role is shared by two or three faculty members. In any case, after discussion with the relevant faculty member(s) who will serve in that capacity, you should notify the Director as soon as possible. Your advisor has the same responsibilities as before, but much of his or her work is aimed towards (a) completing your exam program (b) keeping tabs on your teaching, in the fourth year and beyond, and (c) working on the dissertation.

Teaching Mentors are worked out in coordination with that natural evolution, but their assignment is more specifically keyed to each year of your teaching experience. Mentoring will work in three phases:

(i) In your second year, when you serve as a TA, your faculty instructor for that course will serve as your teaching mentor.

(ii) In your third year, you will work one semester with the FWS mentoring system, and in the other semester, you will have an assigned teaching mentor. Generally, we will work this out in the spring semester of the previous year. I will be asking you to volunteer names for possible teaching mentors. We recommend two classroom visits, as well as at least one meeting to discuss the classroom experience.

(iii) In your fourth year, you and the director will work together to select a teaching mentor for each semester. The main idea, by the time you complete your teaching at BC, is to have someone (and more than just one person, certainly) who can say, in a future job letter, that they have seen you in the classroom.

**Negotiating the Language Requirement**

Our formal requirement asks for either (a) a reading knowledge of two foreign languages (that is, languages other than English, and including classical languages) or (b) a working knowledge and application of one such language and its literature. There are several different paths towards completing our language requirement. The ideal outcome, of course, is that you acquire language skills that will help you most in your teaching and research. It’s very important to consult with your advisor about what languages you'll need.

If you're following path (a), there are two common ways for fulfilling the requirement:

(i) You demonstrate reading ability through successful performance on two translation examinations in which one or two short texts must be translated adequately (with use of a dictionary) in two hours. These exams are offered at the end of each semester for both MA and PhD students. Most commonly, these departmental exams are offered in French,
Spanish, German, Latin, Italian, and Greek. Therefore, completing the language requirement in this way is limited to these languages. Of course, in this instance, you can use any method you like to prepare for the exam: tutoring, reviewing your previous work, or taking a class on your own. If you don't pass this exam, you can take it again on the next go-around.

(ii) You can also take one or more of the so-called ‘reading-intensive’ courses BC’s Romance Languages, German, and Classics departments offer in the summer term. If you complete that course with a ‘B’ or better, you then bring the final examination to the Director. The Director shows the exam to a faculty member competent in that language, and if that faculty member agrees, a ‘pass’ is awarded. Check ahead each spring to see which courses are actually offered that year.

If you're following path (b), you can do this in one of two ways:

(i) Demonstrate more extensive knowledge of one language and its literature by either writing a graduate-level critical paper using original texts, or producing a formal translation of a literary text or essay previously unavailable in English. In either case, you arrange with a BC faculty member to write the paper or translate the work. The BC faculty member issues the ‘pass’ when the paper or translation has been completed, and informs the Director. This faculty member can be from outside the English department, as long as the arrangement is approved by the Director.

(ii) Students have also fulfilled the requirement by taking a graduate level seminar on the Art and Craft of Literary Translation, which is regularly taught by Maxim D. Shryer.

Some frequently asked questions about the language requirement:

(i) What if I have already passed a language examination, for example in an MA program? We will accept an exam from another university MA program if the student gets a letter or transcript sent from that program attesting to the fact that he or she passed the exam. And we do accept, of course, our own MA exam (since it's the same exam).

(ii) What if I want to pursue a language other than the ones commonly offered at BC? The best idea here is to follow path (b). We can try to help you find a faculty member proficient in the language you want to pursue, and arrange for a literary translation exercise. But here, again, the endorsement of your advisor will be important, and is contingent on finding a faculty member who can guide your translation. Where possible, we need to understand how the language contributes to your professional development.

(iii) Will BC pay for summer language courses or courses during the regular academic year? BC does not guarantee payment for summer courses here or elsewhere, but we have often had success in getting your tuition ‘waived’ for courses offered during the regular year, and sometimes during the summer. This is arranged on a case-by-case basis, so plan ahead and be sure to request credits for proposed classes from the Director.

(iv) How do I find faculty members proficient in a given language to pursue track (b)?
Both the MA Director and the PhD director try to keep a running list of faculty who can be helpful in this regard. But your fellow students are also good resources for discovering arrangements that have been made in the past.

**Service and Teaching Prizes**

Doctoral candidates are eligible for the Donald J. White Teaching Excellence Award, which is given each spring. Currently, award winners are nominated by the PhD director and the Director of the First Year Writing seminar, with consultation of each student’s advisor and past or present teaching mentors.

The Director and Assistant Director of the PhD program also give out a ‘Director’s Service Award’ to a student or students who, in their judgment, have made a significant contribution to the experience and growth of other students in the Program.

**Going to Academic Conferences**

During your time as a graduate student, it’s a good idea to present a conference paper at a scholarly conference or two. Although graduate student conferences offer opportunities to practice paper delivery skills and connect with other students, it’s generally not a good idea to invest a great deal of time or money attending multiple graduate student conferences outside the Boston region. Instead, target conferences open to faculty and graduate students in your field (for example, The Shakespeare Association or the Victorian Studies Association) or apply to attend a regional or national MLA Conference. Talk to your faculty advisor about upcoming opportunities, and think of your seminar papers as possible topics for conferences.

Each year, graduate students can obtain up to $350 of reimbursement from the university for presenting a paper at one scholarly conference. We will offer an additional $150 of reimbursement to students in English who are presenting papers at professional conferences that are not graduate student conferences.

In order to receive reimbursement from the university and/or the English Department, students must request approval BEFORE attending the conference and submit the appropriate receipts within 30 days after attending the conference.

1) To request approval and receive reimbursement from the university (up to $350 total) follow the procedures outlined on the GSAS website: www.bc.edu/content/bc/schools/gsas/currentstudents/conference.html

2) If your conference expenses will exceed the $350 reimbursed from the university and the conference at which you will be presenting is NOT a graduate student conference, you may apply for an additional $150 from the English Department. The English
Department conference approval form should be submitted to Linda Michel, the administrative assistant for finances in the English Department, before the conference. See Linda for the English Department form.

**A Few Guidelines for Doctoral Examinations**

Normally, every exam has what we call a ‘prelim’ or preliminary meeting, and then the exam at a date agreed upon by the student and the examining committee. Reading lists for both major and minor field exams taken in the past, as well as a few standardized reading lists, are now posted on the PhD program’s WebCT site, and are also on file in a black notebook in the conference room; these are often helpful in imagining the length of the reading list.

After consultation with his or her advisor, a chosen faculty member, and the PhD Director, the student selects a topic and a potential chair for the examining committee. In consultation with that chair, the student first develops a tentative reading list for the exam and discusses appropriate committee members with him or her. The chair can then help the candidate contact the other two members of the exam committee (if it has not already been done).

Normally, the prelim should be scheduled as soon as possible after the tentative list has been developed. Its purpose is to invite all the members of the committee to add or delete works on the list, and to agree on the general scope of the exam. The prelim is a working meeting, not an exam; the student is not expected to know the material or to have a developed approach to it. It may also make sense for the committee to meet again if the list or approach has been substantially modified.

A reasonable projected date for the exam should be set during the prelim. Of course, timetables depend on the past experience of the student. But in recent years, a minor exam has normally been a four-to-six-month project; a major exam normally no more than a ten-month project. It is up to you and your committee chair to decide how often to meet with that chair or the other faculty members.

The student should normally meet with all the members of the committee during exam preparation, though the emphasis of preparation falls upon work with the committee chair. Regular updates on your preparation are thus vital. Some students in the past have also registered for a formal readings and research course in order to prepare for an exam.

About a month or so before the projected exam date, the student should begin to schedule the actual time and place for the exam, and confirm the date with all committee members. To schedule a date, contact our secretary (currently Tracy Downing, downingt@bc.edu), and let her know the general time frame and the names of the committee members. Tracy will arrange the time and book the conference room. Summer dates should be definitely set before the end of the second semester. The chair or the student should notify the program director of the exam date.
The Minor Field Examination

As English literary studies have changed over the past decade or so, the definition of a minor exam, its scope and its purposes, has often varied among individual faculty and PhD candidates themselves. This is why it is vital that the student’s faculty chair for the exam take a central role in delineating the parameters of the exam. The following guidelines have been developed in an attempt to set out the range of possibilities.

Goals and purposes
The minor field exam is akin to a self-designed reading course which allows the candidate to survey a certain kind or period of writing, and to develop, in the course of studying for the exam, some approaches and topics which will give him/her a command of the material. It is useful to think of the minor exam as (i) the development of an area outside of the major field in which the candidate will be prepared to teach undergraduate courses (ii) an opportunity to do intensive work with a limited and well-defined period and genre.

Defining the Reading List
The reading list begins as a collaborative project between the candidate and the chair of the exam committee. It should be determined both by the interests of the candidate and by the direct advice of the chair: once a candidate has defined an interest, the chair should contribute those titles that are essential to work in the designated field. The candidate is not responsible for having a single approach or a thesis idea before the reading list is established. Shaping ideas and topics is the work of the study period and the subject of discussion during the exam itself.

Once the candidate and the chair have worked out a tentative reading list, the prelim with the whole committee is set. In this meeting the list is shaped to its final form: some works are added, others deleted, etc., until there is general agreement on the list. The length of the list depends, of course, on the kind of material to be studied, so it is difficult to specify in general terms. Some rough estimates have circulated: about 20 prose narratives, about 30 dramas, for example. Again, check the WebCT site for previous examples.

Critical and theoretical works may figure in different ways on different exams. Generally, it’s a good idea for the examining committee and the student to agree about whether ‘secondary’ or critical works (and which ones) are ‘in bounds’ for the oral examination as such. Of course, if they are primary texts on the list, they are ‘counted’ and subject to direct questioning and analysis during the exam. If they are set aside as suggested supplementary texts, the candidate is expected to use them in preparation, and perhaps to bring them up as they are relevant to the discussion of primary texts, but s/he is not expected to address those texts themselves. Again, the key thing here is to establish clarity at the prelim meeting.
Shortly before the exam itself, many candidates submit to their committees a statement which outlines the main interests or topics or approaches that they have developed in studying for the exam. Questioning will be shaped, but not necessarily completely determined, by these outlines.

**Kinds of Minor Exams Undertaken in the Past:**
The candidate may wish to shape the exam for one of the following purposes:
*Field Exam* To survey and learn the material in a particular field of writing. Emphasis on primary texts, with a few central secondary works as part of the list.
*Teaching exam* To consider a group of primary texts from the point of view of teaching them to undergraduates. This usually includes the design of a course syllabus, which is used as a center of discussion during the exam itself.
*Theory exam* To master and critique central works of one or more theoretical approaches, and to discuss these approaches in relation to a body of relevant primary texts.

**Possible ways to organize a minor field reading list**

(i) By literary field:
   a) A collection of important works in a certain genre during a relatively brief period of history (Renaissance Lyric Poetry; American Realism and Naturalism; Modernist Novel 1900-1930; Victorian Prose Writers)
   b) A literary movement, group, or culture (20th Century African-American Fiction; 18th Century Women's Writing; Harlem Renaissance; British Social-Problem Novels; Anglo-Irish Fiction)
   c) The development of a genre or subgenre over a longer period of time (Self-Reflexive Novel; Epic Poems; American Family Drama)

(ii) By writer:
   a) Single-author exams (only a few writers may be considered appropriate by chairs or the director). Would normally involve reading the complete works, along with the major critical approaches.
   b) Focus on 2-4 major writing careers and the connections between or among them.

(iii) By theoretical approach (Postcolonial Theory and Fiction; Narratology; American and French Feminisms).

**The Exam Itself**
Minor field exams usually last about 90 minutes (including faculty consultation at the end). It is fairly standard (though not required) for the student to prepare a brief (5-10 min) oral presentation to be given at the beginning of the exam. This gives you a good measure of control over the questions that will form the central part of the exam. The questions during the exam itself are really up to the committee, and they can share them as they see fit.

**The Major Field Examination**

The Major Field exam normally covers a broad list of the major texts and secondary works in the candidate's primary field of study.
Choosing a Field
Candidates should define an area for this exam that will be recognizable to others as a coherent field. It will normally include the area of your dissertation topic and will also in many cases provide a basis for defining your field of expertise when you apply for jobs. Although some fields seem standard and easily defined, others, especially in contemporary areas of study, are constantly changing. In the case of these less stable fields, candidates might consult the MLA Job List to see how such fields tend to be defined there. Faculty are an especially important resource in helping you define a field that makes sense in relation both to your own interests and also to the wider disciplinary structures of literary study today.
As with other exams, you should identify a potential chair who can help you formulate a preliminary reading list and also advise you on the other two members of the committee. The chair's advice is especially important in helping you to identify a coherent and manageable field.

Scope of the Exam
The Major Field exam should cover the central primary and secondary works in the field. Fields should not be defined so broadly that this coverage becomes impossible. What constitutes such coverage will be determined by the three members of the committee in consultation with the candidate at the prelim and in subsequent discussions. Again, it is difficult to specify a rough number of works to be covered in a major field exam, since fields vary so widely in shape, scope, and balance of primary and secondary materials. However, the reading list should usually exceed the 20 to 30 works included in a minor field exam. In the case of major field exams, of course, secondary works normally ‘count’ as part of the material prepared for the examination and candidates may be directly questioned about them. Major Field exams last for two hours. As in the minor field exam, candidates often prepare an opening statement of some kind, generally including a statement that briefly describes the place of a potential dissertation topic within the field.

The Dissertation Field Examination

The Dissertation Field Exam
This exam explores in a focused way a topical area in which the dissertation is likely to take place. The basic ideas are to explore both the primary and secondary texts on your topic; to explore theoretical concerns related to the topic; and to consult other disciplinary perspectives on it.

Just as the minor exam implicitly looks ahead to the major field, the dissertation field exam will often work in tandem with your major field exam. In particular, the dissertation field exam should free up the major field exam from the burden of laying out a dissertation topic. We encourage you to forestall your dissertation focus while you conduct your major field exam.

At this point, you should make every effort (in consultation with the PhD director) to include on the dissertation exam committee faculty members who will serve as readers for the dissertation, especially the eventual director of the dissertation. Naturally, we recognize that sabbaticals, leaves of many kinds, and the quite customary changes in intellectual bearings will not always make this
possible. But your program should culminate with a group of faculty mentors who have, through the exam collaboration, already contributed to your thinking as you plan your dissertation.

The dissertation exam will be organized in the way other exams are and will be graded in the usual way: distinction, pass, fail. Although this exam is not an approval process for any one dissertation topic, it should lead directly to the dissertation prospectus; in many cases, students have used the process of the exam to draft a prospectus. But even if this is the case, the student still needs to submit the prospectus subsequently through the process described below.

The preparation for the dissertation field exam should take no longer than that of minor field exam, and certainly not as long as a major field exam. Understanding the limited scope of the exam's objectives is one way to keep the time-frame workable. The dissertation field represents a body of texts, and an approach to those texts, that will necessarily be expanded and reformulated as the dissertation is written. Students should realize that a prospectus, as described below, is not intended to be a fully-fleshed out set of conclusions, nor even a final description of what the dissertation will look like. Rather, it offers a ‘prospect.’ The prospectus is not a ‘contract about an argument’ (or about a particular approach) between the faculty committee and the student. Rather, the prospectus creates an agreement with faculty members to sign on for a plan, your best professional sense of where you're headed. It would be a mistake to delay completing the prospectus in order to further polish a document that, professors themselves all recognize, may quickly look outdated as the dissertation proceeds.

**The Dissertation Prospectus**

The dissertation prospectus consists of a brief essay providing (i) a statement of a proposed topic for the dissertation (ii) a bibliography. Approval of the prospectus constitutes formal acceptance of a dissertation topic and the establishment of a committee of readers.

Normally, the prospectus will include:

(i) A description of the topic, the materials to be covered (e.g. the relevant authors), and any provisional hypotheses that can be projected.

(ii) A short summary of the relevant scholarship presently existing on this subject, summing up the ‘state of the discussion’, if any, and what the contribution of the proposed dissertation might be.

(iii) Mention of any unusual primary materials or research collections to be consulted.

(iv) A brief bibliography which can be referred to in carrying out (ii) above; annotation is helpful but not mandatory.

Normally, the length for such a prospectus will not exceed three or four single-spaced pages, including bibliography.

**Procedures**
The candidate should meet with prospective members of the dissertation committee (and anyone else whose advice you would like) to discuss the topic before writing the prospectus. Various readings and approaches may be discussed at such meetings. The candidate should submit five copies of the prospectus to his or her advisor. At that time, the student, advisor and PhD Director will establish a provisional committee of three readers, one of which is the advisor. Normally, this will be the same as the committee for the dissertation field exam.

The advisor will confer with the two other readers, and then the committee will meet with the candidate to discuss the prospectus. At that time (a) the dissertation topic will be approved, or (b) the prospectus will be sent back for further revision. As a prospectus reaches approval, the committee of readers (including the advisor) may be adjusted in accordance with the student's needs and wishes.

**The Dissertation Defense**

After the dissertation is complete and has been approved by all the committee members, a dissertation defense will be scheduled before graduation. The functions of the defense are:

(i) to bring to a close the intellectual conversation between the student and his/her dissertation committee
(ii) to suggest ways in which the dissertation might be revised in the future, most usually as a published book
(iii) to allow the student to share the results of their research with any interested faculty members, students, and friends
(iv) for the department to recognize and celebrate the student’s achievement over the course of his or her doctoral degree

The format for the defense is informal, but should begin with the student giving a brief (10-15 minute) presentation summarizing the main points of the dissertation and discussing its contribution to the field. Others attending the defense will then have the chance to ask questions, make suggestions, and otherwise contribute to the conversation. All committee members will be present, and the defense will be announced in the Monday bulletin and open to anyone interested; this might include other English department faculty, faculty from other departments in related fields, and the student’s friends and colleagues. The student and director may wish to encourage particular people to come. The defense will be followed by a reception at which we can celebrate the successful completion of the dissertation and the degree.

**Dissertation Fellowships**

Dissertation Fellowships provide one year of funding over and above the 5-year stipend provided to all doctoral students. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) provides the funding, and it is done on a competitive basis. The process is as follows:
1. The PhD Director announces the fellowship and asks for applications from all interested students; the application includes the application form, a dissertation prospectus, a 20-page sample from the dissertation, and a confidential letter of support from the student’s dissertation director.

2. The director sends all the applications to a 3-person faculty committee, normally identical to the PhD admissions committee (the personnel changes every year). Faculty who are directing dissertation students who have applied for the fellowship are recused from sitting on the committee and replaced with another faculty member. The committee sends written evaluations to the director.

3. The director reads the committee’s evaluations, consults with the committee where necessary, and uses them to rank the candidates. The director then sends recommendations for the top 2 or 3 candidates to GSAS; the recommendation consists of a summary of the topic of the dissertation, its importance in the field, and the likelihood of completion.

4. Within 2 to 3 weeks, GSAS informs the director of how many fellowships they have granted the department, and they are awarded accordingly.

Note the following:

- Applications are judged on the originality and quality of the work and the likelihood of the student finishing within the fellowship year.
- In recent memory, GSAS has never given English less than 1 or more than 2 fellowships.
- Students in their 6th year are not favored over students in other years; historically, GSAS has tended to favor students in years 6 through 8.