Guidelines for

the PhD in English
at Boston College

fall 2021 edition
from the director

Welcome to the fall 2021 edition of the guidelines for the doctoral program in English. By offering these guidelines, we mean to collect together materials—much of which have existed in the program for years—that will assist doctoral candidates 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 candidates have customarily done, what past PhD directors and dissertation committee chairs 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 candidates 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 to your doctorate and beyond.

My particular focus this first summer as PhD director has been on gathering some practical kinds of information previously not included in the guide, such as internal and external funding opportunities, information about how the stipend is paid out, clarity on the history and rationale of the exam structure, advice for dissertators, and detailed academic and non-academic placement information for the past thirty years for our graduates. It is my hope that by making the mechanics and recent history of the program as transparent as possible, I can help you avoid some common difficulties and misunderstandings. The day-to-day operations of BC, in my experience, tend to be a little opaque, especially when it comes to money. If something is not clear to you, it may not be clear to me, either: just ask! I love learning new things about the institution in order to advocate better for you.

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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August 2021

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Aims of the program

Boston College’s PhD in English offers the opportunity to study with nationally recognized faculty in many periods, authors, and critical and theoretical traditions. Candidates select from a wide range of courses, and proceed through a streamlined series of exams culminating in a dissertation prospectus exam and the writing of the dissertation. Our candidates are prepared to teach, and to continue to do research, full-time in a college or university setting.

Increasingly of late, we are simultaneously thinking of how best to equip graduates for careers in adjacent fields, such as secondary education, journalism, publishing, editing, technical writing, library science, and higher education administration.

Upon completion of the PhD graduates will be able to

1. write academic articles and reviews at the scholarly level in informed, intelligible prose;
2. research, design, and be examined on two long reading lists in major and minor fields of literary study of their construction and choice;
3. demonstrate mastery of an individual chronological or national literary field of their choice;
4. choose or define a question in their chosen field of literary study, and write an effective dissertation answering it;
5. teach effectively courses in English, both at the introductory and advanced level, in the community-college, four-year-college, or university setting;
6. publish their research in peer-reviewed journals and present papers at conferences; and
7. secure an academic or teaching position.

Our program encourages candidates to tailor the program to their interests and needs. Candidates design their own field exams in consultation with their advisers. Though we offer a full range of graduate electives each year, the only courses candidates are required to take are four designated “PhD seminars,” a course in composition theory and pedagogy, and one research colloquium. Candidates also have the opportunity to work with accomplished faculty in literature courses, gain hands-on experience teaching literature, administer complex assignments, and design specific lessons. Each candidate begins by being a Teaching Assistant (TA) the second year, goes on to teach First-Year Writing Seminar (FWS) and Literature Core (“Lit Core”), and finally designs and teaches an advanced undergraduate seminar in her or his field.

Web resources

To get 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.

1. The program’s official website, linked to the English Department’s site. This is what most prospective candidates (and anyone else who’s surfing around) will see. It’s under
Funding, health insurance, and time to degree

We guarantee full funding and health insurance for five years. There are a variety of other internal and external funding sources available to you on a competitive basis at various stages of your degree. An extension of funding and benefits to the sixth year is often possible.

The point-person for all money matters in our department is English Department administrative assistant Linda Michel <linda.michel@bc.edu>.

Stipend and health insurance

The standard, minimum English PhD stipend for academic year 2021–22 is $25,500. Over the past decade, the administration has raised the stipend between $500 and $1,500 each year. We don’t have direct control over the budget for stipends, but I argue strenuously for a greater increase than that in our annual one-on-one meetings with the graduate deans, in recognition of your valuable research, teaching, and service work, the high cost of living in the Boston area, and the stipends offered by our peer English PhD programs.

The stipend is paid out semesterly in the first and second years and then it is paid out monthly once you begin teaching. This is because the university bureaucracy categorizes you differently when you make the transition from a student role to an instructor role. The monthly payments are distributed such that there is no check or deposit in January, June, July, or August. However, the total annual amount remains the same.

Health insurance is guaranteed at no cost to you for five years. You are automatically enrolled and may opt out. In the sixth year and beyond, you are automatically enrolled and pay a rather substantial semesterly fee to keep health insurance coverage through BC, or you may opt out. See
Massachusetts law requires that you have health insurance coverage.

Dissertation fellowships

**MCAS Dissertation Fellowships** provide one year of funding and health insurance over and above the five-year stipend provided to all doctoral candidates. No teaching is required. The graduate school funds them, and they are awarded on a competitive basis. The process takes place in the spring.

Applications are judged on the originality and quality of the work and the likelihood of the applicant finishing the dissertation within the fellowship year. **In recent memory, the graduate school has given English 1–2 MCAS fellowships per year.** Fellowships have occasionally been split between two people, or two fellowships between three people. Applicants entering their sixth year are not favored over applicants in other years; historically, the graduate school has tended to favor applicants entering years six through eight.

A second form of fellowship available to rising sixth-years and beyond on a competitive basis is the **Dean of Summer Session Teaching Fellowship (DSSTF).** DSSTFs require fellows to teach one course in each of two summer sessions and pay less than the MCAS fellowship ($4,000 in 2021), plus health insurance. The English Department is typically awarded at least one DSSTF.

There is also the **Dalsimer Fellowship** administered through Irish Studies. Unlike the other two, applications are restricted to the English and History departments. Your dissertation project need not be all-Irish to qualify. The required materials are a letter of interest, a CV, and two letters of recommendation. The process takes place in the spring.

The MCAS Dissertation Fellowship and Dalsimer Fellowship match the English PhD standard stipend, **$25,500** for 2021–22. As non-teaching fellowships, they are paid out in two installments, semesterly, with the first installment arriving in mid-September. The DSSTF is administered through the Woods College of Advancing Studies, not the graduate school of MCAS, and therefore has a different pay schedule.

**École Normale Supérieure (ENS) exchange program**

Thanks to a formal partnership that began in 1989, each year a Boston College graduate candidate is granted the position of pensionnaire étranger for one academic year at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris (and in turn, one ENS student comes to BC as Instructor of French). Founded in 1794, and located in the heart of the Latin Quarter (on the Rue d’Ulm), the ENS is one of the most prestigious institutions of higher learning in France. The position comes with free lodging, a government-subsidized meal plan, library privileges, access to classes, and advising, but **no stipend**.
This opportunity merits your attention if your research connects with France and the French language, because BC’s Romance Languages and Literatures department no longer grants the PhD. Our own Nell Wasserstrom held the ENS position in 2018–19.

There is no application form. All that is required is a statement of interest and a CV by November 15. Make an appointment to meet with Prof. Liesl Yamaguchi before submitting.

Graduate assistantships

Graduate assistantships are part-time on-campus positions filled on a rolling basis as needed. Here is an incomplete list of recurring positions in which English MAs and PhDs have worked (there may be other, ad hoc assistantships in any given year—the best policy is to ask around):

1. ArtsFest (spring)
2. Burns Library
3. Center for Digital Innovation in Learning (CDIL)
4. Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE)
5. Connors Family Learning Center (CFLC)
6. English Department Writing Prizes (does not pay very much)
7. English/History group for first-generation/low-income graduate candidates (the pay comes out of the grant money, so it does not pay much)
8. Institute for the Liberal Arts (ILA) – general
9. ILA – summer internships program
10. Irish Studies program
11. Literature Core program / Fresh Ink magazine
12. Lowell Humanities Series
13. Medical Humanities
14. O’Neill Library
15. Outdoor Adventures
16. Religion and the Arts book review editor
17. Winston Center for Leadership and Ethics (said to pay very well)
18. Women’s Studies program

Stipended graduate candidates are not permitted to work more than six hours per week during the academic year in on-campus roles. This relates to the number of hours per week that the university allots to study and teaching for official purposes. Boston College generally does not pay overtime wages; therefore, the university makes an effort to stay within the bounds of federal laws governing overtime pay.

Summer internships

Last year, the Institute for the Liberal Arts, the provost’s office, and the graduate school cosponsored a new graduate summer internships pilot program to enable PhD candidates to explore alternative careers. There were nine internships, each paying a stipend of $4,000:
1. Boston College Libraries, Digital Scholarship Team
2. Boston College Libraries, Educational Initiative and Research Services
3. Burns Library, Boston College
4. Catholic Charities of Boston
5. Cotting School for Disabled Children (Lexington, MA) – fundraising and outreach
6. Cotting School for Disabled Children (Lexington, MA) – teacher evaluation and human resources
7. Mass Humanities (Northampton, MA)
8. McMullen Museum, Boston College
9. Schiller Institute, Boston College

Applications were due in the spring last year. While the pilot program has not officially been renewed, Mary Crane has indicated that she expects it to be renewed for this year (AY 2021–22) as well as the next (AY 2022–23).

Time to degree

The graduate school has set a nominal eight-year limit on doctoral study. Beyond the eighth year, you must submit an extension form in the spring for the following year. The chair of your dissertation committee, one of the graduate deans, and I all must sign the form. In practice, petitions for a degree extension are granted without incident provided the candidate is in good standing in the department.

Once you advance to all-but-dissertation (ABD) status, otherwise known as “candidacy,” the graduate school charges you a small doctoral continuation fee semesterly until you graduate. (I know!)

External funding

Scholarly societies, libraries, and government agencies offer various (typically highly competitive) grants, prizes, and fellowships supporting dissertation research. Sometimes they are earmarked to areas of interest to the society or agency. The library grants and fellowships tend to be less fiercely competitive though less lucrative. Check the scholarly societies that put on conferences in your field.

The time to apply for these is the fall before the academic year in which you intend to apply for jobs and defend your dissertation. That would normally be fall of the fifth year, or failing that, fall of the sixth year. Because most external funding opportunities have fall deadlines, you would apply for them before applying for the internal funding opportunities described above.
An incomplete list:

1. Alpha Lambda Delta Honors Society (up to $7,000)
   https://www.nationalald.org/fellowships
2. American Academy in Rome (ancient, medieval, early modern, or modern Italian studies) ($16,000/semester or $28,000/year)
   https://www.aarome.org/apply/rome-prize/application
   https://www.americanantiquarian.org/long-term-fellowships
   https://www.americanantiquarian.org/short-term-fellowships
5. American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education
   https://www.aahhe.org/graduate-fellows-program
6. American Association of University Women (AAUW) (general) (up to $30,000)
   https://www.aauw.org/resources/programs/fellowships-grants/current-opportunities/american/
7. AAUW (international candidates) (up to $30,000)
   https://www.aauw.org/resources/programs/fellowships-grants/current-opportunities/international/
8. American Council of Learned Societies (Buddhist studies) ($30,000)
   https://www.acls.org/programs/buddhist-studies/
9. American Council of Learned Societies (general) ($35,000)
   https://www.acls.org/Competitions-and-Deadlines/Mellon-ACLS-Dissertation-Completion-Fellowships
10. American Educational Research Association (AERA) ($25,000)
    https://www.aera.net/Professional-Opportunities-Funding/AERA-Funding-Opportunities/Grants-Program/Dissertation-Grants
11. American Heraldry Society ($1,500)
    https://www.americanheraldry.org/education-resources/william-barton-graduate-scholarship
12. American Indian Graduate Center
    https://www.aigcs.org/scholarships-fellowships/#grad-schol
13. American-Scandinavian Foundation (up to $23,000)
14. The Americas Research Network (US/Mexico transnationalism) ($4,000)
    https://arenet.org/fellowship.php
15. Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) (fellowship) ($25,000)
    https://www.aseeess.org/programs/ctdrf
16. ASEEES (grant) ($6,000)
    https://www.aseeess.org/programs/dissertation-grant
17. ASEEES (summer grant) ($6,000)
    https://www.aseeess.org/programs/aseeessummer-dissertation
18. Center for Jewish History ($22,500)
   https://www.cjh.org/research/fellowships-at-the-center
19. Children’s Literature Association (up to $1,500)
   https://www.childlitassn.org/hannah-beiter-graduate-student-research-grant
20. Consortium for Faculty Diversity
   https://www.gettysburg.edu/offices/provost/consortium-for-faculty-diversity/fellowships/
21. Council for European Studies ($27,500)
   https://councilforeuropeanstudies.org/grants-awards-fellowships/dissertation-completion/
22. Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC) (transregional research) ($11,500)
   https://www.caorc.org/multi-fellowship-guidelines
23. Council on Library Information and Resources (CLIR) (research in original sources)
   https://www.clir.org/fellowships/mellon/
24. Department of Education (foreign language and area studies)
   https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iegpsflasf/eligibility.html
25. Department of Education (research abroad)
   https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iegpsddrap/index.html
26. Department of State (language study abroad)
   https://clscholarship.org/
27. Dolores Zohrab Liebmann Fund ($18,000)
   https://fdnweb.org/liebmann/
28. Editing Press (editorial assistance for neglected topics of study) ($2,500)
   https://editing.press/bassi
29. Ford Foundation (diversity)
   https://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/FordFellowships/PGA_171962
30. Fulbright (for US citizens)
   https://us.fulbrightonline.org/applicants/types-of-awards/study-research
31. Georgia O’Keeffe Museum Research Center
   https://www.okeeffemuseum.org/research-center/research-center-programs/current-academic-fellows/
32. German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) (many available)
    https://www2.daad.de/deutschland/stipendium/datenbank/en/21148-scholarship-database/
33. Getty Museum (Los Angeles, CA) – at-large
    http://www.getty.edu/foundation/funding/residential/
34. Getty Museum (Los Angeles, CA) – predoctoral ($30,000)
    http://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/residential/getty_pre_postdoctoral_fellowships.html
35. Goizueta Foundation (Miami, FL) (Cuban heritage) ($3,000/month)
    https://www.library.miami.edu/chc/fellows.html
36. Guggenheim Foundation ($25,000)
    https://www.hfg.org/emerging-scholars
37. Hagley Museum and Library (Wilmington, DE) – dissertation fellowships ($6,500)
38. Hagley Museum and Library (Wilmington, DE) - research grants
   http://www.hagley.org/library-researchgrants
39. Harry Ransom Center (Austin, TX)
   https://www.hrc.utexas.edu/fellowships/
40. Hispanic Scholarly Fund
   https://www.hsf.net/scholarship
41. Houghton Library (Cambridge, MA) ($3,600)
    https://library.harvard.edu/grants-fellowships/houghton-library-visiting-fellowships
42. Huntington Library (San Marino, CA)
    https://www.huntington.org/fellowships
43. Institute for Humane Studies (classical liberalism) (up to $15,000 renewable)
    https://theihs.org/funding-career-resources/humane-studies-fellowship/
44. Institute of Historical Research (United Kingdom)
    https://www.history.ac.uk/join-ihr/fellowships/junior-fellowships/ihr-doctoral
45. Josephine de Karman Fellowship Trust
    http://www.dekarman.org/
46. Keats–Shelley Association
    https://ksaa.org/awards/carl-h-pforzheimer-jr-research-grants/
47. Kenyon College (Gambier, OH) (candidates from underrepresented groups) ($36,000)
48. Lewis Walpole Library (New Haven, CT)
    https://walpole.library.yale.edu/fellowships/visiting-fellowships-and-travel-grants
49. Library Company of Philadelphia
    https://librarycompany.org/academic-programs/fellowships/
50. Lilly Library (Bloomington, IN) (general) ($1,500)
    https://libraries.indiana.edu/lilly-library/fellowships
51. Lilly Library (Bloomington, IN) (study of Bernardo Mendel) ($1,500)
    https://libraries.indiana.edu/lilly-library/fellowships
52. Louisville Institute (North American Christianity) ($25,000)
53. Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI) (candidates from underrepresented groups)
    https://www.marquette.edu/provost/mitchem-dissertation-program.php
54. McNeil Center for Early American Studies ($25,000)
    http://www.mceas.org/dissertationfellowships.shtml
55. Medieval Academy of America (late medieval Britain) ($30,000)
    https://www.medievalacademy.org/general/custom.asp?page=Schallek
56. National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC) (several available)
    https://www.nga.gov/research/casva/fellowships/predoctoral-dissertation-fellowships.html
57. National Institute of Justice
    https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/fellowships/graduate-research-fellowship-program
58. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) (marine policy)
    https://www.seagrant.noaa.gov/Knauss-Fellowship-Program
59. Newberry Library (Chicago, IL) 
   http://www.newberry.org/fellowships
60. Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans 
   https://www.pdsoros.org/apply/eligibility
61. P.E.O. (for women candidates) ($20,000) 
   http://www.peointernational.org/about-peo-scholar-awards
62. Princeton Library (up to $4,000) 
   https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/friends-princeton-university-library-
   research-grants
63. Rockefeller Archive Center (up to $5,000) 
   https://rockarch.org/collections/research-stipends/
64. Rossell Hope Robbins Library (Rochester, NY) (for women candidates) (medieval studies) 
   ($24,000) 
   https://www.library.rochester.edu/spaces/robbins/fellowship
65. School of Advanced Research 
   https://sarweb.org/scholars/resident/
66. Smithsonian 
   https://www.si.edu/ofi
67. Social Science Research Council (SSRC) (non-US or US indigenous cultures and societies) 
   ($23,000 on average) 
   https://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/view/idrf-fellowship/
68. SSRC (religion, spirituality, and democracy in the United States) (up to $15,000) 
   https://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/view/religion-spirituality-and-democratic-renewal-
   fellowship/
69. Soroptimist International Founder Region (for women candidates) 
   https://founderregionfellowship.org/
70. Spencer Foundation ($27,500) 
   https://www.spencer.org/grant_types/dissertation-fellowship
71. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, DC) ($4,000/month) 
   https://www.ushmm.org/research/opportunities-for-academics/fellowships/annual
72. United States Institute of Peace (conflict, peacebuilding, security studies) (up to $20,000) 
   https://www.usip.org/grants-fellowships/fellowships/peace-scholar-fellowship-program
73. University of Notre Dame (South Bend, IN) (for African-American candidates) 
   https://africana.nd.edu/about/peters-fellows-network/
74. University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, PA) (diversity) ($37,000) 
   https://provost.upenn.edu/predoctoral-fellowships
75. University of Virginia (African/African diaspora studies) 
   https://woodson.as.virginia.edu/fellowship-about
76. Williams College (diversity) ($50,000) 
   https://faculty.williams.edu/graduate-fellowships-2/graduate-fellowships/
77. Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library (Winterthur, DE) ($1,750/month) 
   https://www.winterthur.org/fellowships-available/
78. Woodrow Wilson Foundation (ethical and religious values) ($27,500) 
   https://woodrow.org/fellowships/newcombe/
79. Woodrow Wilson Foundation (women’s studies)
   https://woodrow.org/fellowships/womens-studies/ ($5,000)
80. Yale Center for British Art (New Haven, CT)
   http://britishart.yale.edu/research/residential-scholar-awards
81. Yale University (New Haven, CT) (American Indian and indigenous studies)
I. Advising, coursework, and program requirements
Coursework

PhD candidates in English are required to take a PhD seminar in each of their first four semesters. The seminar is on a different topic and taught by a different faculty member each semester. We do our best not to have the PhD seminar conflict with other English graduate courses or with your teaching schedules, but in the nature of things no guarantee is possible.

Candidates may take electives, including regular graduate seminars, independent study courses (called Readings and Research or “R&Rs”), and courses at partner institutions (see subsection below). Note that faculty are not compensated for R&Rs. Candidates participate in the pedagogy seminar in their second and third year. In their third or fourth year, they enroll in the Advanced Research Colloquium, a professionalization seminar covering the making of a CV, writing a job letter and a dissertation prospectus, and placing an article in a scholarly publication. To teach FWS, which is required of all candidates in the third year, you must take ENGL8825 Composition Theory and the Teaching of Writing, offered each spring. (Or you may supply documentation that you’ve completed a comparable course before.)

Because some candidates arrive with MAs and thus an extensive graduate course background already, the number of additional courses a candidate may take varies widely. A common sequence among many of our current graduate candidates is to take four to six courses, overall, in their first year, and three or four in their second (see the year-by-year overview below). Candidates sometimes return to take courses in their third and fourth years, or even audit one in their fifth. While we have had success negotiating for free tuition for sixth-years, seventh-years and beyond who wish to enroll in a course will be charged one credit (currently $1,812) per semester.

Options for coursework beyond BC

Boston College is a member of three Boston-area consortiums:

1. **Boston-Area Graduate Consortium.** Candidates are eligible to cross-register for one course per semester at Boston University, Brandeis University, or Tufts University.

2. **The Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies (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 candidates are drawn from BC, BU, Brandeis, Harvard University, MIT, Northeastern University, Simmons College, Tufts, and the University of Massachusetts at Boston. Several of our faculty members (notably Frances Restuccia, Kalpana Seshadri, and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace) have taught in the consortium. I subscribe to the listserv and will forward all communications to you. There is an application process for enrolling, so keep your eye on this page if you’re interested: [http://mit.edu/gcws/](http://mit.edu/gcws/).

3. **Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium.** Member institutions are the BC Theology Department, the BC School of Theology and Ministry, the BU Graduate Program in Religion, the BU School of Theology, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hartford Seminary, Harvard Divinity School, Hebrew College, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School...
of Theology, and Saint John’s Seminary and Theological Institute.
https://www.bostontheological.org/

Graduate colloquium, pedagogy seminar, and working groups

Four recurring events and activities in the program aim to build community among graduate candidates at all levels and between candidates and the faculty.

1. The **graduate colloquium** is a joint MA–PhD, candidate-run 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 candidates, 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. One first-year and two second-year PhD candidates organize these events, and in general, the more volunteers participate, the easier it is for everyone. This is a great way to gain experience with higher education administration, event planning, and academic networking.

2. **All PhD candidates are required to participate in a candidate-run pedagogy seminar in their second and third years.** Naturally, candidates in all years are always welcome and are encouraged to attend. The group meets two or three times a semester for two hours or so. Topics are generated by the whole group. Past topics have included “Creating syllabi and designing courses,” “Dealing with troubled and troubling students,” “Work/life balance,” and “Teaching outside BC.” Traditionally, the first hour is candidate-only, in which candidates 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 Linda), and purchase snacks (save receipts and turn them in to Linda for reimbursement). The director for 2021–22 is Dan Dougherty <doughedd@bc.edu>.

3. In prior years, candidates and faculty had an opportunity to participate in a series of Research Collaboratives organized and run jointly by candidates and graduate faculty. This was funded by the graduate school under the rubric of “Preparing Future Faculty,” as part of a large teaching development grant to the university, and they were a great success for us. Most of the graduate **working groups** (https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/english/graduate/working-groups.html) began as Research Collaboratives. The Research Collaboratives program ended some time in the 2010s, but there is still some money available from the graduate school on a competitive basis for working groups or other collaborative extracurricular events. Midway through the fall semester you will get a call for proposals. Working groups are get-togethers that combine socializing and coordinated discussion, sharing of common research interests and resources, and/or common reading in specific research areas. In years past, groups met to work on drafts of essays together, attended a film in their professional field; or had dinner together following a series of common readings. Other formats are possible as well. For
instance, candidates and faculty might form a panel to try out paper presentations for an upcoming conference. The graduate school’s primary concern is that these events combine socializing and mentoring functions, and that these events prepare candidates to become the well-rounded faculty members we know they can be. In other words, these meetings are intended as professional training.

4. The **first-generation graduate group** is a new (2019–) initiative in English and History, founded by Megan Crotty and sponsored by the Institute for the Liberal Arts. The group provides a confidential space for first-generation graduate candidates and graduate candidates from underrepresented communities to share experiences and resources. The director for 2021–22 is Cassidy Allen <allenhg@bc.edu>.

**Year-by-year overview of goals**

It isn’t possible to describe a single template for every candidate’s experience. We pride ourselves on our flexibility. But here is an overview of a typical (or at least not atypical!) progression.

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<th>teaching</th>
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<td>begin RSI program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[optional: 3–4 electives]</td>
<td></td>
<td>prepare for minor field exam</td>
<td>(see below)</td>
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<td>[optional: pedagogy seminar]</td>
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<tr>
<td>year 2</td>
<td>2 PhD seminars; ENGL8825</td>
<td>TA (1 semester)</td>
<td>second language exam</td>
<td>finish RSI program; pedagogy seminar</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[optional: 1–2 electives]</td>
<td></td>
<td>minor field exam (required by end of year)</td>
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<tr>
<td>year 3</td>
<td>Advanced Research Colloquium (if offered)</td>
<td>FWS + Lit Core</td>
<td>major field exam</td>
<td>pedagogy seminar</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[optional: 1 elective in area of interest]</td>
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<tr>
<td>year 4</td>
<td>Advanced Research Colloquium (if not in year 3)</td>
<td>in-field elective + FWS, Studies in Narrative, or Studies in Poetry</td>
<td>dissertation prospectus; dissertation prospectus exam</td>
<td>[optional: pedagogy seminar]</td>
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<td>[optional: 1 elective in area of interest]</td>
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<td>year 5</td>
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<td>dissertation [optional: pedagogy seminar]</td>
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<td>years 6+</td>
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<td>dissertation; seek jobs [optional: pedagogy seminar]</td>
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Teaching

Doctoral candidates divide their teaching opportunities over three years in the program. **In your second year, you serve as a TA** for one semester in an undergraduate course, normally an elective or Lit Core, taught by one of the faculty. TAs attend all meetings of the class and may be asked to assist in grading, and they also lead one or more class sessions, hold office hours, and meet frequently with the instructor to discuss the readings, background materials, and pedagogical strategies. The exact nature of the position is open to the interpretation of the TA and the instructor. We generally arrange these in the spring of the previous academic year, when I will ask you about your preferences. At that point it is appropriate to meet with the instructor to set expectations for fall TAships; for spring TAships, that meeting could happen in December.

**In your third year, you teach one semester of FWS and participate in the FWS workshops, peer groups, and evaluations.** You will find our department has an elaborate and effective administrative structure supporting sections of this course. Then, **in the other semester, you commonly teach either Lit Core or an introductory course for English majors:** Studies in Narrative (SIN) or Studies in Poetry (SIP). For the non-FWS course, you will be assigned a faculty teaching mentor (see the next page).

**In your fourth year, you teach an undergraduate elective of your own design in consultation with me and the Chair and either Lit Core, FWS, SIN, or SIP in the other.** During this year, you will again have a teaching mentor. In addition, you may want to invite your adviser or another faculty mentor to visit your classes. Many professors have noticed that opportunities for true intellectual exchange about teaching are shockingly few and far between in the academic life, outside of high-stakes hiring and firing discussions. I know it’s scary, but seize the opportunity to get constructive, lower-stakes feedback!

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 (for example at BC’s Connors Family Learning Center, the CFLC), teaching in the summer (for example in the Opportunities Through Education program), or teaching at other local institutions in the fifth year and beyond.

Advisers

Every candidate in the program, at every stage, will have a designated faculty adviser. If you don’t know who your adviser is or if you would like to change your adviser (no questions asked), let me know. In some cases, your work may be jointly overseen by two advisers. The roles and functions of these advisers naturally evolve during the course of your years at BC.

In your first year, you will be assigned an adviser. Normally, it will be someone with tenure 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 adviser can vary widely. **At a minimum, check in with your adviser twice per semester.** Your adviser can
review your course choices, discuss plans for your first exams, and provide feedback as your program develops. This adviser may, but is not obligated to, serve as your teaching mentor. The adviser follows your progress and reports to me at the end of the academic year.

After that, you yourself discover the faculty member who will ultimately chair your dissertation, if it is not going to be your initial adviser. It might well happen when you begin your major field exam; certainly it will be settled as you compose your dissertation prospectus and prepare for the dissertation prospectus exam. Please notify me if and when there is a change in adviser. Your adviser has the same responsibilities as before, but much of her or his work is aimed towards (i) completing your exam program, (ii) keeping tabs on your teaching, (iii) supervising work toward the dissertation, and (iv) supporting you as you seek academic or non-academic jobs.

Teaching mentors

Teaching mentor assignments are made each spring.

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

In your third year, you will work one semester with the FWS mentoring system. In the other semester, you will have an assigned teaching mentor. In the spring, I will ask you to volunteer names for possible teaching mentors. We recommend two classroom visits, as well as at least one meeting afterwards to discuss the classroom experience.

In your fourth year, you and I will work together to select a teaching mentor for the year. 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 excel in the classroom. Teaching experience at multiple levels is valuable for all academic jobs, but teaching letters are particularly essential for applications to work at community colleges and small colleges.

Language requirement

You must demonstrate either

i. a reading knowledge of two languages other than English, including Old English and classical languages, or

ii. a working knowledge of one such language and its literature.

“Working knowledge” is a higher bar than “reading knowledge.” The ideal outcome, of course, is that you acquire language skills that will aid you in your teaching and research. Strategize with your adviser about what language(s) you’ll need.
If you’re following path (i), there are two common ways to fulfill the requirement:

1. You demonstrate reading ability through successful performance on two translation exams in which one or two short texts must be translated adequately, with use of a dictionary, in two hours. We offer these exams at the end of each semester for both MA and PhD candidates. Typical languages are Ancient Greek, French, German, Italian, Latin, and Spanish, but we have in the past offered a very wide range of languages and can accommodate pretty much any language you might know how to read. I haven’t been stumped yet. If you don’t pass this exam, you can take it again in a future semester.

2. Or you can take two reading-intensive summer language courses with BC’s Romance Languages, German, and Classics departments. If you earn a “B” or better in those courses, you fulfill the requirement. Check ahead of time, as course offerings vary each summer.

You can of course mix and match, taking one language exam and one intensive course.

There are also two ways to fulfill the requirement following path (ii):

1. Demonstrate more extensive knowledge of one language and its literature by either writing a graduate-level critical paper in that language 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. This faculty member can be from outside the English Department, as long as the arrangement is approved by me ahead of time. I keep a running list of English Department faculty languages. Your fellow candidates are also good resources for discovering arrangements that have been made in the past.

2. Pass Maxim Shryer’s graduate seminar RLRL8899: The Art and Craft of Literary Translation. In this course you will do intensive work between English and another language of which you already have some knowledge. The final project, a polished English translation of 200–250 lines of poetry or 20+ pages of prose in your chosen language, meets or exceeds the standard of option #1.

We will accept a language exam from another university MA program if the candidate furnishes 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, a language exam passed during our own MA degree. It’s the same exam.

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 alert me and Linda to requested credits for proposed classes well in advance. Sometimes the graduate school charges you for tuition up front and then reimburses you later, which is annoying, but I don’t have control over it.
Research and Scholarship Integrity (RSI) requirement

The university organizes a series of panels for PhD candidates on ethical issues that arise over the course of a professional career. **Attendance of the full series is required in our program**, as we feel these are valuable professionalization events. There are two components to this requirement:

1. **There are two three-hour general sessions.** Part I is offered three times in the fall, part II three times in the spring. They discuss issues related to the mentor–mentee relationship, responsible authorship and publication practices, research misconduct, and professional collaborations.

2. **Then there is a seminar series that covers a wide variety of topics.** Seminars focus on topics specific to particular divisions in the university (natural sciences, social sciences, or humanities), although there will likely be overlap. Topics have included: conflict of interest, data acquisition and tools, data management, data access and stewardship, academic peer review, grants, book publishers, researchers’ social responsibilities, and human and animal subjects protections. To complete the Seminar Series, you must participate in **four of the seminars**. The final schedule will be announced and posted to the RSI website.

The two components can be completed in any order, **within your first two years**. For all of the sessions, you must register ahead of time at [http://www.bc.edu/rsi](http://www.bc.edu/rsi). Direct questions to the RSI director, Erin Sibley <erin.sibley@bc.edu>.

Teaching and writing prizes

Doctoral candidates are eligible for the **Donald J. White Teaching Excellence Awards**, which are given each spring. Award winners are nominated by me and the FWS director, in consultation with each candidate’s adviser and past or present teaching mentors, and chosen by a three-person faculty committee, normally identical to the PhD admissions committee (the personnel changes every year).

Doctoral candidates also compete for the **Von Hendy Award** for an article-length piece of critical writing (published or unpublished). One award goes to a PhD candidate, another to an MA candidate. The MA director announces and administers the Von Hendy Award. There is a special faculty selection committee for this award, unconnected to the PhD admissions committee.

Academic conferences

During your time as a graduate candidate, it’s a good idea to present a paper at a scholarly conference or two. Although graduate conferences offer opportunities to practice paper delivery skills and connect with other candidates, it’s generally unwise to invest a great deal of time or money attending multiple graduate conferences outside Boston. Instead, target conferences open
to faculty in your field like Shakespeare Association (#ShakeAss) or the Victorian Studies Association, or apply to attend a regional or national MLA conference. Talk to your adviser about upcoming opportunities, and think of your seminar papers as possible topics for conferences.

Each year, graduate candidates can obtain up to $350 of reimbursement from the university for presenting a paper at one scholarly conference (or $150 for attending but not presenting). See https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/mcas/graduate/current-graduate-students/forms/graduate-student-reimbursement-guidelines.html for details.

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) has a program offering up to $125 of reimbursement by application. See https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/graduate-student-life/grad-student-association.html for details.

The English Department offers an additional $150 of reimbursement to candidates in English who are presenting papers at professional conferences excluding graduate conferences. Submit the English Department conference approval form to Linda before the conference. Linda has the form.

In order to receive reimbursement, candidates must request approval before attending the conference and submit the appropriate receipts within thirty days after attending the conference.

In years past, it has been possible, at the PhD director’s discretion, to put the graduate school and departmental conference funding toward an event that is not an academic conference but is analogous, such as a professionalization seminar or a non-academic conference. Please ask me!

**Publishing scholarship**

In and out of class, you may begin contemplating publishing your scholarship. This is a very good idea if your goal is a full-time academic position (teaching or administrative). Scholarship is the coin of the realm. You may have heard the advice to wait to publish until you are more confident in your ideas or further along in your career. Speaking personally, I have never understood that advice, even in the past when jobs were less scarce. Publishing is, in part, how you get further along in your career in the first place. Don’t worry about publishing something you’ll later disagree with: that’s just an opening to publish again! No one is checking your self-consistency over the years. Think of your career of publications less as a bunch of isolated attempts at perfection and more as the record of your evolving thought: what you are reading, whose ideas interest you, how you understand the relationship between literature and the world. It’s entirely understood that these are always changing.

Prior to the scholarly monograph, which will grow out of your dissertation, there are four main genres of scholarly writing (in ascending order of prestige):

1. book review,
2. note,
3. book chapter, and
4. article.

A book review is a commissioned (invited) review of a recent title. Some journals accept unsolicited offers to review, but most don’t. A scholarly note is a short (1–6 pp.) and focused discussion of a small point that could have big ramifications. (It’s one of my favorite forms; if you write it the right way, it can have as much heft as an article without all the extra hoopla. See https://ericweiskott.com/2020/02/12/consider-the-note/. Three journals that consider notes are ANQ, English Studies, and Notes and Queries.) An article is a longer statement. A book chapter has a little more flexibility in length and focus, depending on the book. Usually you must be invited to contribute, which means it will probably be someone you know who first invites you. However, some books grow out of conferences that had calls for papers. This is another reason to attend conferences—particularly one-off conferences on topics closely related to your research, as these tend to be the ones that become books.

A word on picking a journal. All journals are not created equal. Just as there is a pecking order of universities, there is a pecking order of journals. In English studies the top generalist journals are ELH and PMLA, with Modern Philology, New Literary History, and Representations close behind. Then come the top field journals, like Speculum for medieval and Victorian Studies for Victorian studies, as well as well-regarded generalist journals not quite on the top shelf, like Review of English Studies. Aim for the most prestigious appropriate journal and work your way down from there if necessary. Resist the impulse to protect yourself from rejection by aiming low; on the academic job market, one article placed in Modern Philology is worth three (or more) in Oklahoma Studies in [subtopic]. See https://ericweiskott.com/2018/03/29/how-to-get-your-research-published/.
II. The exams
General guidelines

The exams are the heart of our program, separating coursework from dissertation work. On the one hand, don’t underestimate how long it will take to assemble lists and committees and do the reading. On the other hand, don’t belabor this stage. We expect you to complete the minor field exam by the end of the second year. I recommend to my own advisees that they complete the major field exam and the prospectus exam by the summer between the third year and the fourth year, leaving two full years of guaranteed stipend to dissertate.

Reading lists for past major and minor field exams, as well as standardized reading lists, are on file in a black notebook in Stokes S476. I have several digital examples, too, available upon request. (Thanks to Noël Ingram for gathering these in 2021.) Examples are often helpful in imagining the length of the reading list.

After consultation with her or his adviser and me, the candidate selects a topic and a potential chair for the exam committee. By longstanding convention, all exam committees have three members. In consultation with the committee chair, the candidate first develops a tentative reading list for the exam and discusses appropriate committee members with her or him. The committee chair then helps the candidate recruit the other two members of the committee.

Candidates meet with the committee, individually or all together, to flesh out the list. (We used to refer to this as a “prelim,” but that makes it sound much more formal than it has become in practice.) The candidate invites all the members of the committee to add or delete works on the list and to agree on the general scope of the exam. At this stage, the candidate is not expected to know the material or to have a developed approach to it. The candidate meets with all the members of the committee during exam preparation, though the emphasis of preparation falls upon the committee chair. Some candidates in the past have also registered for a formal readings and research course in order to prepare for an exam. Another format is for the candidate to circulate brief response papers to the committee at predetermined intervals during the reading months.

A reasonable projected date for the exam should be set. A minor field exam or dissertation prospectus exam tends to be a four- to six-month project. The minor field exam must be completed by the end of the second year. A major field exam is no more than a ten-month project. It is up to you and your committee chair to decide how often to meet during this time.

About a month or so before the projected exam date, the candidate schedules the time and place for the exam and confirms the date with all committee members. Contact Tracy and let her know the date, the length, and the names of the committee members. She will reserve a room. Summer dates should be set before the end of the spring semester. Please notify me or have the committee chair notify me of the result after the exam. Exams are graded “pass with distinction,” “pass,” or (never in my years here!) “fail.”
The minor field examination

As English literary studies has changed, the definition of a minor field exam, its scope and its purposes, has often varied among individual faculty and PhD candidates themselves. This is why it is vital that the faculty member chairing the exam committee take a central role in delineating the exam’s parameters. The following guidelines have been developed in an attempt to set out the range of possibilities. (These guidelines originated with Chris Wilson’s overhaul of the exam structure in 2006.)

Goals and purpose

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

Scope

The reading list should be determined both by the interests of the candidate and by the direct advice of the committee chair: once a candidate has defined an interest, the chair contributes those titles that are essential to work in the designated field. The candidate is not responsible for having a single approach or definite 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 committee chair have worked out a tentative reading list, the candidate meets with the rest of the committee individually or all together. In these meetings 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: about twenty prose narratives, about thirty dramas, or about fifty poems of varying lengths, for example.

Critical and theoretical works may figure in different ways on different exams. Generally, it’s a good idea for the exam committee and the candidate to agree about whether secondary works (and which ones) are in-bounds for the oral exam. Of course, if secondary works are principal texts on the list, as for example a minor field exam in critical theory, then they count and are 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 before the exam itself.

Shortly before the exam, many candidates submit to their exam committees a statement that 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. An alternative and equally acceptable format is for the candidate to read this statement for the first time at the beginning of the exam.

Kinds of minor field exam undertaken in the past

The candidate may wish to shape the exam for one of the following purposes:

1. **The field exam** surveys the material in a particular field of writing. Emphasis on primary texts, with a few central secondary works.
2. **The teaching exam** considers 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 serves as a center of discussion during the exam.
3. **The theory exam** is used to master and criticize central works of one or more theoretical approaches and to discuss these approaches in relation to a body of relevant primary texts.

Possible modes of organization

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

2. By writer:
   (a) Single-author exams. One would normally be expected to read the complete works, along with major critical writings.
   (b) Focus on two to four major writing careers and the formal, historical, biographical, or other connections among them.

3. By theoretical approach (Postcolonial Theory; Narratology; American and French Feminisms; Queer Theory).

The exam

Minor field exams last for ninety minutes, including faculty consultation at the end. It is traditional, though not required, for the candidate to give a brief (5–10 minute) oral presentation at the beginning of the exam. This gives you some measure of control over the ensuing questions. The questions during the exam itself are up to the committee, and they can share them ahead of time, or not, as they see fit.
The major field examination

The major field exam covers a broad list of the major texts and secondary works in the candidate’s principal field of study.

Goals and purpose

Candidates should define an area for this exam that will be recognizable to others as a coherent field. It will include the area of your anticipated 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 are constantly changing. Candidates might consult the MLA Job List (https://joblist.mla.org/jobs/english/) 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 committee chair who can help you formulate a preliminary reading list and advise you on selection of the other two members of the committee. The goal is to identify or craft a field that is both coherent and manageable.

Scope

The major field exam covers 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 exam committee in consultation with the candidate. Again, it is difficult to specify a number of works to be covered in a major field exam, since fields vary in shape, scope, and balance of primary and secondary materials. However, reading lists usually exceed the twenty to thirty works included in a minor field exam. In the case of major field exams, secondary works count as part of the material prepared for the exam and candidates may be directly questioned about them.

The dissertation prospectus and dissertation prospectus exam (see below) free up the major field exam from the burden of laying out a dissertation topic. We encourage you to forestall your dissertation focus, to a certain extent, while constructing and reading for your major field exam.

The exam

Major field exams last for two hours. As with the minor field exam, candidates often prepare an opening statement, generally including a brief description of the place of a potential dissertation topic in relation to the field.
The dissertation prospectus

The dissertation prospectus consists of a brief essay (10–12 double-spaced pp., inclusive of bibliography) with the following elements:

1. A statement of purpose: a description of the dissertation topic, the materials to be covered (such as the relevant authors), and any provisional hypotheses.
2. A chapter-by-chapter overview of the intended project.
3. Mention of any unusual primary materials or research collections to be consulted, and/or any special methodological considerations.
4. A 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.
5. A bibliography that can be referred to in carrying out the above. Annotation is helpful but not required.

The candidate drafts the prospectus in consultation with her or his adviser and the intended dissertation committee. Committee members are chosen from among BC’s faculty in English or related fields, or one or two (but usually not the committee chair) may be affiliated with other institutions.

A prospectus offers a prospect, not conclusions. Think of it as a hunting license. The prospectus creates an agreement with faculty members to sign on for a plan, the best professional sense of where one is headed. It is a placeholder. There is no need to delay completing the prospectus in order to further polish a document that will certainly change and adapt as the dissertation is written.

The dissertation prospectus examination

There used to be a separate “dissertation field exam,” independent of the prospectus. James Najarian folded that into a prospectus exam in 2017, in an effort to streamline progress from coursework to dissertation. The exam examines the prospectus, rather than an abstract field of knowledge. While this last exam retains the name of “exam,” there’s a growing sense in our department (at least among some advisers!) that, in effect, the candidate passes it prior to its taking place, through the future dissertation committee’s implicit approval of the prospectus as a document. Although the exam culminates in a formal ‘pass’ vote that initiates the all-but-dissertation (ABD) years, the purpose of the exam is not so much to examine the prospectus in the abstract, as a finished document, but instead to guide and encourage the candidate at the outset of dissertation research. It is (and here, perhaps, I speak mainly for myself) an exam that shades into a collegial meeting.

The committee assembled for this exam, ipso facto, becomes the dissertation committee (barring any last-minute personnel adjustments due to unforeseen circumstances or at the candidate’s
discretion), and the chair of this exam is expected to chair the dissertation committee. The prospectus exam serves as the official approval process for the dissertation prospectus. Approval of the prospectus, in turn, constitutes formal acceptance of the chosen dissertation topic as well as ratification of the dissertation committee. After completion of the exam, the candidate is officially ABD and is eligible for dissertation fellowship support.

At the exam, the committee discusses and inquires about the prospectus with an eye toward the intended dissertation project it represents. During the exam, the committee might choose to explore the basic ideas of both the primary and secondary texts in your prospectus; to explore theoretical concerns related to the topic; and/or to consult other disciplinary perspectives on it.

**Dissertation prospectus exams last for ninety minutes.** The exam’s objectives are limited to the prospectus and its dissertation project. It is understood that the prospectus is provisional and will necessarily be reformulated as the dissertation is written. Often the prospectus generates language that will eventually find its way into the introduction to the dissertation and, after that, the book.
III. The dissertation
General advice

A dissertation is a book-length, researched writing project. In the past, BC English dissertations have ranged in length from 31 pages (Steven Abrams, 1976) to 1,063 pages (Jorg Feodor Drewitz, 1994). My current recommendation for length, keeping in mind that the dissertation is often the template or first draft of an academic monograph, is 150–350 pages.

The dissertation is an academic rite of passage. In most cases it is the largest, longest intellectual project you will have ever undertaken—and ever will, as subsequent book projects may tend to feel less metaphysically consequential. Every candidate, every dissertation, and every committee is different, and there are many paths to success. However, I can recommend the following points as generally applicable:

1. **Quantity vs. quality.** When it comes to the ideas, it’s quality that counts, of course. Your dissertation will be boiled down to a paragraph in a job application, a sentence in an MLA interview, a phrase at a cocktail party, or a blurb on the back cover of the book. Make it a good one. But when it comes to writing time, it’s quantity that counts. Instead of waiting until inspiration strikes and then attempting to draft a chapter in two days, set aside regular time to write. Some days, all you do is reorganize the footnotes and change illustrate to demonstrate (and back). Other days, paragraphs flow easily. On the worst days, it feels like you are moving backwards, unthinking thoughts that you thought were thought through. But before you know it, the project will be done. Sitting down to write regularly keeps the contours of your evolving thinking clear and fresh in your mind. I find that this helps the mind be receptive to related ideas as you read, chat with colleagues, or exercise.

2. **Exercise.**

3. **Listen to your committee.** It’s rare, in postdoctoral life, to have three alert readers who are essentially being paid to tend to your words and ideas. Make the most of it. Your committee knows the field and has experience writing and advising dissertations. They can help you avoid minefields, assert yourself, and connect ideas. Resist the temptation to protect what you’ve written, at all costs, from their constructive criticism.

4. **Surrender to the journey.** Part of what makes the dissertation feel weightier than any subsequent book-length project is that you are probably simultaneously learning how to write a (any) book-length project and learning how to write this particular one. Depending on your topic and work habits, that creates the potential for dissonance that can be hard to tease apart, especially in the beginning. Don’t stress if the shape of the whole project eludes you when you are writing the first chapter or beginning the second. It will all come clear, more or less, once the second chapter is done. That’s a major turning point, as you will now have two examples of your main idea to compare and extrapolate from. Every successful dissertation reflects one or more un-anticipatable “aha!” moments. Be open to them.
The dissertation defense

After the dissertation is complete and has been approved by all the dissertation committee members, it is time to schedule a dissertation defense. The defense

1. brings to a close the intellectual conversation between the candidate and her or his dissertation committee;
2. allows the candidate to share the results of her or his research with any interested faculty members, candidates, friends, and community members;
3. suggests how the dissertation might be revised in the future, most usually as a published book; and
4. allows the department to recognize and celebrate the candidate’s achievement over the course of her or his doctoral degree.

The format for the defense is informal but should begin with the candidate giving a brief (10–15 min.) presentation summarizing the main points of the dissertation and discussing its contribution to the field. The dissertation committee may then ask questions, make suggestions, and otherwise contribute to the conversation, followed by the audience at large. All committee members attend, and the defense will be announced in the Monday departmental bulletin and will be open to the public. The audience might include other English Department faculty, faculty from other departments in related fields, and the candidate’s friends, colleagues, and family. The candidate and PhD director may wish to encourage particular people to come. The defense is followed by a reception to celebrate the successful completion of the dissertation and the degree.
IV. Program outcomes
Placement officer

The job placement officer works closely with me to advise, guide, and track all jobseekers each fall. The primary focus is on academic employment, but the placement officer can also collaborate with the Career Center to advise on non-academic job opportunities. The most important tasks are close reading of all job materials, strategic advice on where to apply and how to present oneself to best advantage, and mock interviews later in the fall semester in preparation for MLA (or other) interviews in the winter. Conventionally, the Associate Director for the PhD program serves as the placement officer. My Associate Director for 2021–22 is James Najarian <najariaj@bc.edu>.

Time to degree

Excluding Nansi Boisvert, a non-traditional candidate who entered the program in 1989 and returned to complete her dissertation in 2020 after more than two decades away from academia (see below), the average time-to-degree in our program since 2011 is 7.4 years. This is typical for a humanities PhD program.

Full-time academic placements, 2011–1

1. '20 : Keough-Naughton Institute National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, University of Notre Dame; was Postdoctoral Researcher, University College Cork
2. '18 : Library Assistant, St. Louis County Library
3. '18 : Visiting Assistant Professor (VAP), Wake Forest University
4. '18 : Assistant Director of Digital Fundraising, Penn State University at University Park
5. '18 : Assistant Professor, State University of New York at Plattsburgh (tenure-track)
6. '17 : Assistant Professor, Saint Mary’s College, CA (tenure-track)
7. '15 : Assistant Professor, University of Montevallo, AL (tenure-track)
8. '15 : Lecturer on English and Allston Burr Resident Dean of Harvard College, Leverett House, Harvard University (non-tenure-track); was VAP, United States Military Academy aka West Point
9. '14 : Assistant Professor, Molloy College, MA (tenure-track); Assistant Professor, Hostos Community College, NY (tenure-track, declined)
10. '14 : Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow, University College Dublin (two-year)

1 The total number of graduates from our department since 2011 was 35: the 34 named here, and Kiara Kharpertian '16, who tragically passed away soon after graduation. From 2005 to the present, another 12 candidates withdrew prior to completing a dissertation, so that—in the interest of transparency, and to the best of my knowledge based on existing records—these 20 full-time academic placements represent 59% of all candidates who completed the program since 2011, excluding Kharpertian, or 43% of those who entered the program since 2011, excluding Kharpertian and current candidates. Please note that this list does not represent the number of years, if any, between graduation and commencement of the position(s) listed. In certain cases candidates spent a number of years employed as adjunct instructors, or employed outside academia. Our attrition rate of 26% compares favorably with the national median for English PhD programs during the period 1996–2006, namely 54%. See https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/attrition-humanities-doctorate-programs (Indicator II–32b).
11. ’14: Assistant Professor of the Practice, Boston College (non-tenure-track)
12. ’14: Clinical Associate Professor, New York University (non-tenure-track); was VAP there
13. ’14: Academic Center Manager, University of Connecticut at Avery Point
14. ’14: teacher, Upper Division of The Bryn Mawr School
15. ’13: Assistant Professor, Quincy University, IL (tenure-track); was VAP there
16. ’13: Assistant Professor, Arcadia University, PA (tenure-track)
17. ’13: VAP, Skidmore College (three-year)
18. ’12: Advisor, Academic Standards Board, University of Michigan; was Assistant Professor, Marygrove College, MI (tenure-track)
19. ’11: Associate Professor, Brigham Young University (tenured); was VAP and then Assistant Professor there
20. ’11: teacher, Lusher Charter School, LA; was faculty at New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts and Postdoctoral Fellow, Tulane University

Part-time academic placements, 2011–

21. ’21: Boston College
22. ’21: Boston College
23. ’21: Boston College and Emerson College
24. ’18: Boston College and Emmanuel University
25. ’18: Tufts University; Visiting Scholar in women’s, gender, and sexuality studies, Northeastern University
26. ’14: Lesley University

Full-time non-academic placements, 2011–

27. ’18: Deputy Managing Editor, Ledger (cryptocurrency journal); published novelist
28. ’17: Content Development Manager, NIIT (corporate training)
29. ’13: Communications Manager, SEAF (private equity); was Senior Writer, AllianceBernstein (private equity)

Other, 2011–

29. ’20: [no data], New Hampshire
30. ’19: co-director, New York University Prison Teaching Project, and J.D. candidate, New York University
31. ’17: homemaker, New York
32. ’12: candidate for Massachusetts State Representative, 2014; was researcher for Boston Mayor Marty Walsh’s transition team
33. ’11: published poet, Maine; was editor, Hunger Mountain (literary journal)

Thanks to Noël Ingram for conducting independent research in June 2021 underlying this list and the next two.
34. ’11: homemaker and homeschool teacher, Massachusetts

Full-time, permanent academic placements, 1990–2010³

1. ’10: Assistant Professor, Penn State University at Altoona (tenure-track)
2. ’10: Lecturer in Writing, Dartmouth College (non-tenure-track)
3. ’10: Director of Academic Services, Salem State College
4. ’09: Assistant Professor, Diablo Valley College, CA (community college) (tenure-track)
5. ’09: Senior Learning Experience Designer, Center for Digital Innovation in Learning, Boston College
6. ’09: Lecturer in the Writing Seminar Program, Princeton University (non-tenure-track)
7. ’09: Digital Marketing Officer, University of Manchester
8. ’09: Associate Professor, Gordon College, MA (tenured); was Assistant Professor, University of Mobile (tenure-track)
9. ’09: Director of First-Year Seminars and Assistant Professor, Kennesaw State University, GA (tenure-track); was Assistant Director of Academic Success, Georgia Institute of Technology
10. ’09: Assistant Professor, University of Arkansas (tenure-track)
11. ’08: Associate Professor, Wayne State University (tenured)
12. ’08: Associate Professor, Brigham Young University (tenured)
13. ’07: Associate Professor, University of Akron (tenured); was Assistant Professor, Macon State College (tenure-track)
14. ’07: Associate Professor, Hood College, MD (tenured)
15. ’07: Professor of Law, Oklahoma City University (tenured)
16. ’06: Associate Professor, University of South Carolina Upstate (tenured)
17. ’06: Associate Professor, Idaho State University (tenured)
18. ’05: Associate Professor, University of Nebraska at Omaha (tenured)
19. ’05: Associate Professor, Simmons College (tenured)
20. ’04: Associate Professor, Western Michigan University (tenured)
21. ’04: Professor, LeMoyne College, NY (tenured)
22. ’03: Associate Professor, Monroe Community College, NY (tenured)
23. ’03: Assistant Professor, College of the Holy Cross (tenure-track); was Assistant Professor, Bryant College, RI (tenure-track)
24. ’03: Associate Professor, University of Mount Union, OH (tenured)
25. ’03: teacher, Indian Hill High School, OH; was teacher, Weston High School

³ The total number of graduates from our department between 1990 and 2010 was 62. At least 25 more candidates withdrew prior to completing a dissertation between 1985 and 2004 (records are admittedly spotty), so that these 44 full-time, permanent academic placements represent 71% of all candidates who completed the program between 1990 and 2010 or 51% of those who completed or would have completed the program in the same period. Offers declined are not included in the list. Nor are VAPs or other temporary full-time positions. However, I’d like to take the opportunity to note that we have had remarkable success placing graduates in VAP positions in the English department at Wake Forest University: five BC PhDs (’04, ’07, ’08, ’09, and ’18) have successively taken up that position since 1990!
26. '01 : Associate Professor, University of Massachusetts at Amherst (tenured); was Assistant Professor, Long Island University (tenure-track)
27. '00 : Instructor, Las Positas College, CA (non-tenure-track)
28. '00 : Associate Professor, Reed College (tenured); was Assistant Professor, University of Vermont (tenure-track)
29. '00 : Associate Professor, Boise State University (tenured); was Assistant Professor, Howard University (tenure-track)
30. '99 : Assistant Professor, William Patterson University, NJ (tenure-track)
31. '99 : Associate Professor, Boston College (tenured); was Assistant Professor, Penn State University at University Park (tenure-track)
32. '96 : Associate Professor, Metropolitan College of New York (tenured); was Assistant Professor, Austin Peay State University, TN (tenure-track)
33. '95 : Assistant Professor, Christendom College, VA (tenure-track)
34. '93 : Associate Professor, Mount Holyoke College (tenured); was Assistant Professor, Cornell University (tenure-track)
35. '93 : Associate Professor, University of Michigan at Flint (tenured)
36. '93 : Associate Professor of the Practice, Boston College (non-tenure-track)
37. '93 : Chair of English, University of Toledo (tenured)
38. '92 : Master Lecturer (rhetoric), Boston University (non-tenure-track)
39. '92 : Chair of Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama, University College Dublin (tenured); was Associate Professor, Maynooth University, Ireland (tenured)
40. '92 : Professor, University of Illinois at Springfield (tenured)
41. '92 : Associate Professor, Sarah Lawrence College (tenured); was Assistant Professor, Barnard College (tenure-track)
42. '92 : Chair of Rhetoric, Boston University (tenured)
43. '91 : Professor, Fairmont State University, WV (tenured)
44. '90 : Assistant Dean, Columbia University
Appendix. List of current candidates, 2021–22

first year
Cassidy Allen
Kelley Glasgow
Andrew Petracca
Troy Woolsey

second year
Kelly Gray
Ken Haley
Noël Ingram
Johnny Murray
Ben Paul

third year
Lauren Crockett-Girard
Grace Gerrish
Julia Woodward

fourth year
Dan Dougherty
Catherine Enwright
Teddy Lehre
Sharon Wofford

fifth year
Jocelyn Rice
Chandler Shaw
Sabina Sullivan

sixth year
Megan Crotty
[Elle Everhart: withdrew]
Megan Lease
Matt Mersky
Alicia Oh
Margaret Summerfield

seventh year
[Anne Blum: withdrew]
Matt Gannon
Laura Sterrett
eighth year
Emma Hammack
Kelsey Norwood
Nell Wasserstrom

eleventh year
Rowena Clarke
[Eric Pencek: withdrew]

[2021 graduates
Deanna Malvesti Danforth (July)
Alison Cotti-Lowell (July)
Alex Moskowitz (April)]