English, Master of Arts

The Master of Arts program in English introduces students to the professional study of literature.

The M.A. is appropriate for students who would like graduate training in English and who may have an undergraduate major in a different field or who may intend to earn a Ph.D. at another institution. Students interested in careers in any area of book studies (professional writing, editing, web design, or publishing) may wish to earn the M.A. as a terminal degree, as may teachers seeking to enhance their credentials or students pursuing intellectual growth unrelated to a specific career.

M.A. and Ph.D. students in English mix freely in graduate courses, share the same access to faculty, and meet the same standards of quality in their work.

Exam for the Master of Arts in Teaching

The department administers the English component of the exam for the Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) in coordination with the College of Education. M.A.T. students should contact the Department of Teaching and Learning for information.

Requirements

The Master of Arts program in English requires a minimum of 30 s.h. of graduate credit. The program’s focus is literary studies. Students may receive credit for up to 6 s.h. of transfer courses toward the M.A. degree. They must maintain a g.p.a. of at least 3.00 at the University of Iowa. Students who wish to transfer to Iowa’s Ph.D. program must complete two semesters or 15 s.h. of course work in literature (whichever is completed first) before applying for admission to the doctoral program.

Course Work

Each student must take five courses numbered 5000 or above as indicated below. Applicable transfer courses must be approved by the director of graduate study in English.

One course in criticism and theory numbered 5000 or above

Four courses numbered 5000 or above, chosen from the following five eras of British, American, and/or Anglophone literature and culture: pre-1500, 1500-1660, 1660-1800, 1800-1900, 20th and 21st centuries

Elective courses constitute half of the total credit for the degree and may be chosen from graduate courses both in and outside the English department. Students may wish to explore opportunities for interdisciplinary study, language study, experience in theory and practice of writing, or specialization in a field of literary scholarship.

Department of English graduate courses are repeatable with the written approval of the department's director of graduate studies.

Completion of the M.A. requires either a thesis or a portfolio. Students submit a written description of their choice to the director of the program before the semester in which they plan to graduate.

M.A. Thesis

Students who choose to write a thesis must submit a brief prospectus approved by a thesis director before they register for thesis credit and at least one semester before they submit the thesis. The thesis committee consists of the thesis director, the director of the M.A. program, and one other faculty member. The thesis is evaluated by the committee as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

A copy of the thesis must be presented to the Graduate College for approval. For detailed information about Graduate College deadlines and policies, see the Manual of Rules and Regulations of the Graduate College.

Portfolio

Near the end of their course work, students who do not choose the thesis option must submit a portfolio of work to the M.A. examination committee, which consists of the director of the M.A. program and two other English faculty members. All three must read the full portfolio. To pass, the candidate must have a majority vote of the committee.

Students take the first step toward preparing to submit a portfolio by meeting with the director of the M.A. program to discuss the portfolio, early during the semester in which they plan to graduate. After fulfilling all distribution and eligibility requirements and clearing all incomplete grades, students present the director with a draft of the portfolio’s introductory statement. Students planning to graduate at the end of fall semester should present the statement by the first week of October; those who plan to graduate at the end of spring semester should present the statement by the first week of March. Once the director approves the statement, the student must submit three copies of the full portfolio; the submission deadline is November 1 for students planning to graduate at the end of fall semester and April 1 for those who will graduate at the end of spring semester.

The work in the portfolio should demonstrate the student’s knowledge of literature as a broad historical and theoretical inquiry. Students submit approximately 50 pages (12,500 words) of their best work, along with a self-reflective introductory statement of five to seven pages. The body of the portfolio should contain papers originally produced for classes, revised for a broader audience unfamiliar with the original classes. The introduction should detail the student’s trajectory in the program and the literary-critical or methodological skills gained. It also should explain the contents of the portfolio; contextualize each paper; and give a brief overview of the writing. Students are expected to describe the research methods used in assembling their portfolios and the critical practices that ground their work.

Admission

Applications and all supporting documents for graduate admission must be submitted electronically by January 1. Applicants should submit their applications and supporting materials to the University of Iowa Office of Admissions website.

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations of the Graduate College.
Career Advancement

The Master of Arts in English degree helps prepare students for careers in professional writing, editing, web design, and publishing. It also is desirable for teachers seeking to enhance their credentials.