

## **Assessment Plan—MA in English & Comparative Literature, University of Cincinnati**

**December 2017**

Graduate studies in English at the University of Cincinnati began in 1906, and by 1913, the program offered a sophisticated graduate curriculum. The department established the creative dissertation for PhD candidates in the 1960s, as one of the first in the country. The graduate program has had a history of distinguished faculty and graduates in literary research, critical theory, rhetoric and composition, professional writing, and creative writing. Currently the program offers unique and significant interdisciplinary opportunities, particularly with the Departments of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, History and Romance Literatures and Languages.

### **Program Overview**

The MA program in English offers two tracks, Literature & Cultural Studies and Creative Writing. These programs are designed for students who wish to extend their liberal education beyond the bachelor's level, to acquire professional training for teaching in high schools and junior and community colleges, and/or to prepare for further graduate study, whether the PhD, the MFA, or for professional degrees in law, education, or related fields (including those outside academe).

a) Students will demonstrate competence in a range of ways to analyze, study, and write about texts, focusing on an awareness of the relationships among language, stylistic choices, and social factors.

### **Goals for Student Learning**

b) Students will demonstrate knowledge of appropriate critical and theoretical vocabularies and perspectives about reading and writing and understand a range of contexts, including wide-ranging cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, and linguistic contexts, for the study of literature and writing.

c) Students will demonstrate the ability to critique, edit, and revise written texts, whether their own, their peers', or their students'.

d) Students will learn the conventions of writing a paper suitable for presentation at a professional conference and have opportunities to apply that knowledge.

e) Students will learn and refine a variety of strategies, ranging from the traditional to the innovative, to help improve the reading and writing of others, being helpful and responsible to the needs of their peers and especially to those of less experienced students.

f) Students will complete and defend a substantial scholarly essay or body of creative work.

Goals a, b, and c: These learning goals are central to all seminar coursework in the department, across both of our interrelated MA areas (Literature & Cultural Studies and Creative Writing), and are introduced and reintroduced in each seminar or workshop. Goal a is served specifically, too, by our course requirement in Literary Theory (either a graduate-level Introduction to

Theory or, for those already conversant with a variety of theories, another theoretically based seminar). The student's accomplishments in this area are assessed at the end of each semester by his or her professors, who grade and comment upon final essays, creative works, or scholarly projects as well as on drafts and written work assigned throughout the semester. This skill is assessed again at the time of the MA thesis, a substantial piece of scholarship (generally around 35 pages) or of creative writing (generally 30-40 pages for poetry, 75-125 for prose) undertaken with intensive one-on-one mentorship by a faculty member and then defended before the thesis director and a second faculty advisor.

### **Where these goals are introduced, developed, and achieved**

Note: Peer review and editing (goal c) is a crucial element in a wide variety of coursework in our department; it is integral to all creative-writing workshops, to the teaching practicum, and to the required Teaching College Writing seminar.

Goal d: Goal d is an implicit aim of almost all seminars in literature and in creative-writing workshops. The subject is introduced and developed in—is, in fact, the fundamental core of—the Introduction to Graduate Study required of first-year MA students. Not all students intend to move on to further graduate study, of course, and our aim here is to expose students to professional norms, expectations, and protocols, teach them the conventions of academic discourse and publishing, show them how to seek out opportunities—and then to work closely and individually with interested students to get them involved in the intellectual conversations and exchanges of our discipline(s). We have established and are developing further departmental structures to aid in this goal. We have formed a Professionalization and Job Placement Committee, and each year, in cooperation with the English Graduate Organization, we conduct meetings and workshops on identifying relevant conferences, applying to them, and writing and revising conference papers; on writing and revising job and fellowship letters; and on job placement (a meeting we follow up with individual tutorials and, where desired, mock interviews). We are also offering an every-other-year seminar on revising academic writing. And EGO, in conjunction with faculty members in the department, designs, announces, promotes, and hosts an annual academic conference in the spring, in which MA students play a substantial role.

Goal e: Teaching is a crucial part of the MA in English & Comparative Literature at UC, and we have an exceptionally good and thorough teacher-training program, conducted under the auspices of the Rhetoric & Composition Program, with help from the area directors and supervision by the Director of Graduate Studies. The goal is introduced both in an intensive orientation and in the first semester, secondarily in the Introduction to Graduate Study and primarily in the teaching practicum; it is developed further in the required Teaching College Writing seminar traditionally taken in the second semester of the first year. Students teaching composition make extensive use of the advising system in place for First-Year Writing. We have also instituted courses in specialized pedagogy for those who want to enhance their teaching and build their expertise in pedagogy as an academic field: Teaching Literature and Teaching Creative Writing.

Goal f: Goal f is the thesis, the culminative work and capstone of the MA in English & Comparative Literature.

The department tracks graduates' employment and placement in jobs and further graduate study.

### **Gathering and Using Information about Student Achievement of Goals**

The department tracks students' publications, presentations, prizes, and other distinctions.

The department has conducted occasional exit surveys of its students, and the Graduate School annually compiles data from its broader exit survey and shares it with the department.

The department conducts a first-year review of MA students to make sure all continuing students are on track to graduate on time.

### **Recommendations for Changes in the Assessment Procedures**

- 1) The department is in the process of making its tracking of graduates' employment more systematic, and we'd like to analyze the last several years of data and move toward compiling and sharing statistics that might be useful to students and to applicants.
- 2) The Director of Graduate Studies will be proposing to bulk up the first-year review, which to this point has mainly focused on grades and curricular requirements. He'll recommend that both MA tracks, Literature & Cultural Studies and Creative Writing, hold a year-end meeting to monitor/discuss the progress of continuing students and identify or anticipate any potential problems. Students will be apprised of any areas requiring special attention or improvement.
- 3) The department will ask each graduating MA to complete and turn in a brief exit survey. We hope the responses to this simple survey will help us identify ways in which we can improve the program: our curriculum; our advising; our expectations; our administrative structure or function; our efforts to build and maintain a healthy and happy community of students; issues specific to individual tracks; etc. We'll keep these surveys on file, and the Director of Graduate Studies will report annually on the results to the Graduate Studies Committee and the Department Head, with an eye toward making any necessary adjustments or improvements.