

THE M.A. THESIS IN ENGLISH AT RUTGERS/NEWARK

General description: Although it is not required for the degree and does not substitute for the Common Reading Exam, the 30 required credits may include 6 credits for a Master's Thesis (26:350:696, 697). This project is to be new research and writing, not just an expanded version of a previously-written seminar paper, and the equivalent of two full semesters of graduate course work. It is typically undertaken during the last two terms before graduation, after the student has taken most of his/her courses. Fifty pages of manuscript (exclusive of footnotes and bibliography), using MLA style, are expected. The Graduate School has further format requirements for submission of the work, and their deadlines must be met.

Who should do an Master's Thesis and why? Conceiving and executing an independent project that is longer than the typical seminar paper provides opportunities to survey a field of interest, explore a subject in depth, develop one's research skills, sift and manage one's findings, make original discoveries, and clarify one's thinking in writing at length. The product is a polished, coherent essay disciplined by a hypothesis advancing the student's own ideas; following academic standards of argumentation; supported by substantial research; and accurately documented. The final manuscript, submitted to the Graduate School–Newark, will be placed into the Rutgers Library collection.

For all its boons, however, writing a thesis is not for everyone, and only a few students here choose to undertake and complete it. The general English M.A. is not a specialized degree. Many students, especially those who entered the Program with limited undergraduate course work in literature, need the two semester-long seminars which the thesis project replaces and the dialogue they foster with other students. Everyone must take the Common Reading Exam, and many authors on the list will be taught in classes. The student engaged in thesis work must prepare more of these authors independently, and can come up against severe time constraints in trying finishing the project during the semester he/she takes the Exam. A realistic attitude toward what can be accomplished within a limited time and adherence to deadlines are essential for anyone contemplating a thesis.

For some, it may also be professionally desirable to have more literature courses listed on the transcript. Those who plan to apply to Ph.D or other advanced degree programs do *not* necessarily improve their chances by taking two semesters to write an M.A. Thesis. A substantial seminar paper demonstrating the applicant's abilities may just as effectively be submitted as the writing sample with an application for further graduate study. Admissions committees will judge its content and execution, not what it is called.

Students who desire to work with a particular professor, and produce a long paper, can alternatively arrange with him/her for a semester of **Independent Study** (350:522). This 3-credit option has many of the thesis' benefits without its drawbacks and may fit better within the student's time constraints. (The subject and scope of Independent Study projects must be decided upon by a faculty supervisor and the student in advance of the semester in which work commences. The Department Administrator, Madelyn Munoz Bertram, provides the Special Permission number to register after being presented with evidence of the professor's agreement to serve.)

Initiating a Thesis project and securing approvals: During the semester *prior to* the commencement of the work, the student writes a formal Thesis Proposal (see below), presents it to a potential faculty director for the project, and secures this professor's signature on the **Thesis Approval Form** (see p. 4). This form and the Proposal must then be presented to, and signed by, the English M.A. Program Director. These arrangements, and any special variations from this policy, must be approved *before* the student will be given a Special Permission number to register for the Thesis course.

It is the student's responsibility to find a **second faculty reader**, *no later than the end of the first semester of work*. Normally both readers are members of the English Graduate Faculty. **Changes:** If the project's nature or scope changes during the first semester, the student must inform both the principal faculty reader and the Program Director in writing.

The formal proposal for a project of this magnitude and complexity typically includes all of the following:

- * a statement of the *research goal* and an explanation of *the scholarly reasons* this goal is worth pursuing (an additional statement of personal interest in the subject is optional);
- * the *leading questions* to be investigated;
- * a description of the *critical and scholarly methodology* to be used;
- * a preliminary *bibliography* of at least 10 items, often constructed after consultation with the thesis director;
- * a projected *timetable* for the stages of the work, listing tasks for *both* semesters. The faculty director can refuse to take on a project that is not realistic.

The faculty director may ask the student to refine the Proposal before agreeing to serve. The Program Director must also approve it. *All this must be completed before registration*. These head starts are essential for a successful project; two full semesters will be needed to carry it out.

In the first semester the student uses a Special Permission number to register for 26:350:696 (fall) or 26:350:696 (spring), paying the usual tuition. Within the first two weeks, the faculty director and the student meet *in person* to discuss the project, schedule a series of conferences, and establish as firmly as possible what reading, research, and writing is to be accomplished by the end of the first term. (See "Grading" below.)

The professor then meets with the student *in person regularly, at least every 3 weeks*, to monitor progress through the projected timetable, assisting where necessary with revisions in project goals, direction of research, or methods used. (Phone and e-mail contacts *do not replace such meetings* as though this were a correspondence course.)

It is often desirable to produce a speculative *draft of one's central argument* (not necessarily of the whole Thesis) before the end of the first semester in order to clarify the direction of the essay and to set down tentative conclusions from research and thinking so far. Where the project has several distinct parts or stages, it is wise to draft more than one by the end of the first term. Students and faculty should keep in mind that **more than half the work must be done in the first semester**. The second term will be shortened, by as much as 7 weeks, to allow for faculty reading, revisions, and

Graduate School deadlines. Working ahead of schedule is even more desirable for students taking the M.A. Exam in the spring.

Grading: At the end of the first term, *the faculty director turns in a letter grade* based on how well the student has reached the agreed-upon goals for that semester. *“Incomplete” is not an option:* by definition the project is not yet finished. The overall grade for the completed thesis is not ‘retroactive’ and is turned in at the end of the second semester. (The two grades, therefore, can be different.) In some cases, the professor may recommend it is in a student’s best interest to abandon the project, with a grade for the first semester’s completed work, and take an additional seminar subsequently to meet the degree requirement of 30 credits.

In the second semester, the student registers for the other Thesis number. Meetings with the faculty reader continue as the Thesis goes through its final stages. Successive drafts may be read and discussed. ***The final draft must be submitted to the faculty reader in time for him/her to read it and for necessary revisions to be made.*** Once they are done, the revised manuscript is presented to the second reader as well as the first for final approval before the Graduate School candidacy deadline. This phase of reading, revision, and re-reading can take 5-7 weeks . The principal thesis director then turns in an overall thesis grade for the student’s second semester of registration.

Preparation and submission of the Thesis: Theses become permanent holdings in the Rutgers Library collection. Besides using MLA style, the manuscript must be prepared in strict accordance with the Graduate School–Newark’s guidelines for submission of theses and dissertations. Two print-outs on 8 ½ x 11" white 16- or 20-pound, 100% rag or cotton paper are to be submitted, unbound and without punch holes, to the GS-N Dean’s Office. The principal reader’s signature must appear on the title pages of both.

The Thesis must be in the Graduate Dean’s hands by or before the candidacy deadline (the date by which all requirements for the degree must be completed). *It cannot be handed in ‘later.’* The faculty readers will have separate physical manuscripts and do not turn them in for the student.

Working ahead of the following deadlines* is essential:

	<u>October diploma</u>	<u>January diploma</u>	<u>May diploma</u>
Turn in Diploma Application to GS-N	August 1	November 1	March 1
Turn in Candidacy Form to the M.A. Program Director	September 20	November 22	April 19
File approved Thesis with GS–N (candidacy deadlines)	October 1	January 4	May 1

*To confirm GS-N’s dates for a particular year, consult <http://gsn.newark.rutgers.edu>.

End Game: To recapitulate, the last stages the student must negotiate are as follows:

* *At least 7 weeks* ahead of the candidacy deadline, submit a polished draft of the thesis to the principal faculty reader. Give this professor two weeks to read it.

Turn in the candidacy form, with the front filled out and thesis title on its line on the back, with the two readers’ names under it, to the Program Director.

* *At least 3 weeks ahead:* Any necessary revisions or technical corrections must be finished. Re-submit the manuscript to the principal reader and give another copy to the second reader. Expect they will take at least a week to read it. (Faculty may keep their copies or return them to the student with final comments and, where appropriate, advice for preparing the manuscript for submission to a journal.)

* *At least 2 weeks ahead:* If they approve, the student prepares the manuscript for submission to the Graduate School and secures the principal reader's signature on both copies. These physical manuscripts must be submitted to GS-N before their final candidacy deadline.

* *A week or more ahead:* Faculty readers communicate their approvals to the Graduate Director and sign the Candidacy form. The Director gives it to GS-N before their final deadline. The principal reader puts in as the second semester's grade the grade for the whole project.

Thesis Approval Form

Name:

Contact information:

Thesis subject:

Tentative title:

Attach proposal.

We approve this project for the thesis.

_____ First faculty reader _____ Date

_____ Graduate Program Director _____ Date

Our reservations (optional):

This form and the attached proposal will be placed in the student's file.

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