PhD in English

Admission Contact Information
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Admission Criteria
Fall deadline: January 1
• Minimum TOEFL scores:
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<th>Internet-based test (iBT)</th>
<th>Paper-based test (PBT)</th>
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<td>80</td>
<td>550</td>
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  • Minimum GRE score: not set
  • MA in English or its equivalent

Required Application Materials
To the Office of Graduate Studies
• All required Graduate Admissions documents

To the English Program (https://english.missouri.edu/grad/admissions):
• English department application form
• GRE scores; The general test is required. Students are also welcome to submit subject test scores, and strongly encouraged to do so if their previous work is in a field other than English.
• 3 letters of recommendation (use departmental form)
• Official transcripts
• Statement of purpose
• 2 10-20 page critical/scholarly papers (1 for creative writing applicants)
• Creative writing applicants: also submit a sample of your fiction (30 pages) and/or poetry (20 pages) or a one-act play
• Supplementary information sheet

Financial Aid from the Program
Some programs require an extra form or statement from those who wish to be considered for internal assistantships, fellowships or other funding packages. Check the program website or ask the program contact for details.

Plan of Study
The PhD is a 5-year program with 30 hours of course work beyond the MA. At least 18 hours in English must be taken at the 8000-level (ENGLISH 8095 and ENGLISH 9090 do not count toward the 18-hour requirement). Candidates with insufficient background in English may be required to take additional hours upon the recommendation of the advisory committee.

A student may elect one English 8000 problems course (a maximum of three hours of credit), with the prior consent of the director of graduate studies. A minimum of 18 hours of course work beyond the MA (excluding research hours) must be taken in residence at the Columbia campus in order for the candidate to be eligible for a PhD from the University.

Language Requirement
All PhD students must fulfill a foreign language requirement to ensure that all students have familiarity with a language and a literature other than English. All of our students, regardless of specialty, gain substantially by situating their work globally. A student may satisfy the foreign language requirement for the PhD in English by demonstrating either 1) advanced proficiency in one foreign language or 2) basic proficiency in two foreign languages.

PhD students should determine how they will fulfill the departmental language requirement in consultation with their faculty advisor and other committee members, since different projects and different areas of study will require different levels of language proficiency. A student's committee can always recommend that the student pursue language study above and beyond the level required by the departmental language requirement for the purpose of their chosen dissertation project.

To obtain advanced proficiency, the student has several options. One is to pass with a grade of B or better two upper-class undergraduate courses (3000- or 4000-level, or the equivalent elsewhere, taken within the seven years prior to the candidate's enrollment in the PhD program at the University of Missouri) in the literature of the language chosen. A second is to pass with a grade of B or better one graduate class (7000- or 8000-level, or the equivalent elsewhere, taken within the same time period as above) in the literature of the language chosen. These courses may not be in translation, and any graduate course in a modern language must be taught in that language. A third option is to demonstrate advanced proficiency in a manner approved by the student's advisor and the director of graduate studies; the mechanism for doing so will be proposed by the student and advisor, and is subject to the approval of the director of graduate studies. One example of that third option is to take the Sixteen-Point Exam from the NYU School of Professional Studies, and achieve a score of at least fourteen. Advanced proficiency does not require fluency; it requires advanced reading knowledge of and extended engagement with another culture's language and literature.

To demonstrate basic proficiency the student must pass with a grade of B or better a) the intensive introduction to a language or b) the three-semester introductory sequence or c) one course at or beyond the third semester level in the language chosen, or the equivalent of these courses elsewhere. The courses must have been completed or the examinations taken not more than seven years prior to the candidate's enrollment in the PhD program. Because not all languages are taught using this format at the University of Missouri, students have the option to demonstrate basic proficiency in one of their two chosen languages by taking an introductory course in any language that is relevant to their research. The Director of Graduate Studies will work with students to try to arrange for testing for students with proficiency but without coursework in any language (for instance, those who have lived in another country for an extended period of time). In these cases, one option is to take the Twelve-Point Exam from the NYU School of Professional Studies, and achieve a score of at least ten.

Overall, the department recommends students pursue advanced proficiency in one language, a language that will enrich their work. All of our students, regardless of specialty, will gain by making meaningful and extended connections between their own work and a non-English speaking culture.
Doctoral Committee

By the end of the first year, doctoral students must meet with their advisors to organize a doctoral committee. Students meet with this committee to plan course work and define their primary and secondary fields of study. This meeting satisfies the graduate school requirement for a PhD qualifying examination.

Comprehensive Examination

After the coursework and foreign language requirement have been completed, the student takes the PhD comprehensive examination. This exam consists of a written section (the Preparatory Essay) and a two-and-a-half hour oral exam. Guidelines for the PhD comprehensive examination are as follows:

1. Committee and Reading List

Students will choose a faculty committee consisting of a chair, two additional department members, and an external member from another department. In consultation with her or his committee, the student will specify reading lists made up of one major field, one minor field, and one field in criticism and theory.

The major field list should reflect the student's area of professional specialization (poetry, 16th-century British literature, 20th-century American fiction, rhetoric and composition, folklore) and should take account of both the student's interests and job market categories. If a candidate chooses a major field that is a single genre (or has an otherwise delimited focus), then the candidate's committee may mandate that the area should extend over at least three centuries.

The minor field list might be a related field (for instance, a student with a major list in African American literature might have a minor list in nineteenth-century American fiction, or one studying Romanticism might have a minor list in transatlantic colonial literature), a secondary field (film or linguistics if the student is studying a literary field; a literary field if the student is studying rhetoric or folklore), a genre or sub-genre (creative non-fiction, the sonnet, etc.), or an area of thematic focus (Transcendentalism, nature poetry, etc.).

The criticism and theory list will vary depending on the topics of the major and minor lists. In cases where the major and minor lists consist primarily of literary works, the criticism and theory list must include sections covering the major works of criticism and/or theory in those fields. The remainder of the criticism and theory list, up to its entirety in cases where both the major and minor list include substantial secondary reading, can be organized around a major subfield of criticism or theory (poetics, psychoanalysis, the history of the novel) or a particular theme (Theories of the Middle Class; The Role of Religion in Contemporary Fiction; Medieval Conceptions of Gender).

All three lists together should comprise approximately 100 -120 book length works or the equivalent in scholarly articles or works in other media (as decided in consultation with the committee), with the major list roughly equivalent in size to the combined minor and criticism/theory lists. Where linguistics constitutes one of the fields, the relevant committee member or members will assign, in addition to reading materials, other materials intended to ensure competence in carrying out analyses in phonology, phonetics, syntax, and other areas appropriate to the student's background and interests.

During the semester in which the student begins drafting her or his reading lists (ideally the second semester of PhD study), the faculty chair will convene a meeting with the entire committee, during which the student will present and defend her or his program of study and draft reading lists. This meeting is known as the Qualifying Examination. During this meeting the committee members will sign the D-1 form; after the meeting the student will prepare the D-2 form for program of study and have it signed by the committee members.

2. Preparatory Essay/Written Comprehensive Exam

During the time a student is preparing for her or his exam, he or she will write a Preparatory Essay of at least twenty-five pages. These essays must not be more than fifty pages. This Preparatory Essay constitutes the written portion of the comprehensive exam, and is designed to give the student the opportunity to demonstrate broad knowledge of her or his fields, deep interest in specific topics relevant to those fields, and initial plans for the dissertation (or, in the case of creative writers, the critical introduction).

This is a highly individualized process, designed to encourage students to shape this process to serve their research needs.

Students will write and submit two different drafts. They will submit a preliminary draft of the essay to committee members for feedback; this must be done the semester before submitting the final draft and taking the exam. When the student submits the final version to the committee, committee members will evaluate it for range and depth of coverage, specificity of references to the works discussed, theoretical grasp of the material and clarity of organization and style. A student should consider the Preparatory Essay an opportunity to address what he or she has learned in the preparation process, and to indicate what questions most interest him or her about the works on her or his lists. The Preparatory Essay is designed to be flexible, but each essay should include the following, in a form agreed upon by the student and the committee:

- Brief overviews of each of the fields represented by the lists, discussing major issues raised by the three lists, and, where relevant, connections among them; these overviews may preface the body of the essay or be folded into it
- Answers to three or four substantive questions about the fields (or, where relevant, problems in linguistic analysis) that were developed in consultation with the committee, and that are meant to serve as talking points for the oral exams
- A preliminary description of the dissertation or, for creative writers, the critical introduction that demonstrates how it will be informed by the student's reading

In order to pass the written portion of the exam the student must receive no more than one dissenting or abstaining vote on the Preparatory Essay. To submit the final version of the preparatory essay, a student should send the essay to the Graduate Secretary who will distribute the exam to the student's committee. Within a week of receiving a copy of the exam, committee members will submit evaluations discussing strengths and weaknesses of the Preparatory Essay to the Graduate Studies Secretary, who will forward them to the student and also place copies in the student's file.

If the student does not pass, the committee will offer advice on rewriting and resubmitting the Preparatory Essay. If the student does pass, the chair of the exam committee, in conjunction with other members of the committee, will schedule the student's oral examination for no earlier than one week, and no later than one month, following committee members' reports on the Preparatory Essay. The Graduate Secretary
should be informed of the time and place of the oral examination. Students must be enrolled during the term in which they take their oral exam (to be administered only when MU is officially in session). The oral exam must be completed at least seven months before the final defense of the dissertation.

3. Oral Exam

While discussion will be guided by the writing students have done in the Preparatory Essay, the examinee should be prepared for questions on any item on their list, in order to demonstrate a breadth of training beyond that displayed in the essays. Exams are commonly structured in two parts, with discussion of the essay in the first hour and discussion of the lists more broadly in the second.

The oral exam will be scheduled for two and a half hours and will consist of:

- Two hours of questions, with format and time allotted to committee members arranged beforehand by the chair of the student’s committee
- Fifteen minutes during which the committee deliberates about the exam
- Fifteen minutes during which the committee informs the student whether he or she has passed or failed, and discusses the exam with the student

During the fifteen-minute faculty deliberation period the chair of the committee is responsible for taking notes, which will form the basis of a 1-2 page document discussing the exam—things the student did well on, and things he or she might improve. The chair should give a copy of this document to the Graduate Secretary, who will forward it to the student and also place a copy in the student’s file.

In order to pass the student must receive no more than one dissenting or abstaining vote on the oral exam. Students who fail the oral examination will be allowed to retake it, but cannot do so sooner than 12 weeks after, or later than the end of the semester following, the initial examination. If the student passes the oral examination, all members of the committee must sign the D-3 form. The chair of the committee is responsible for submitting the D-3 form to the graduate studies office, and the form must be filed with the graduate school within two weeks after the final completion of the exams. Per graduate school rules, failure to pass two comprehensive examinations automatically prevents candidacy.

Dissertation

As soon as possible after passing the comprehensive examination, a candidate should explore a dissertation topic under the guidance of the student’s advisor. The doctoral dissertation is written under the direction of a member of the doctoral faculty at MU.

Creative Dissertation Option

The PhD candidate may choose to write a creative dissertation, which may take the form of a novel, a novella, a book-length collection of short fiction or a collection of poetry. To exercise this option, the candidate must have taken 9 to 12 hours of creative writing seminars as part of the PhD course work.

In addition to the “creative” part of the dissertation, the candidate will compose a prose introduction (2,500-word minimum), to be written after completion of the creative project, to demonstrate the correspondence between the candidate’s academic studies and the creative project. The overall length required would be comparable with that of other dissertations approved by the department.

Satisfactory Progress

The Department of English expects all candidates to make satisfactory progress toward completing their graduate degrees. The comprehensive exam should be completed within five calendar years after matriculation, and the PhD should be completed within five calendar years after passing the comprehensive exam. No grades of C will be counted toward the completion of the required number of hours for the PhD.