

# COMMENCING STUDY

---

The Iowa doctoral program emphasizes individual initiative, careful choice, and creativity. With the exception of Introduction to Graduate Study, no specific course or sequence of courses is required. Instead, all students are encouraged to design a program that combines the breadth required to teach survey courses with the focus that enables them to make significant scholarly contributions to their areas of specialization, even before the completion of the degree. In planning your course of study, it is important to remember that in the past decade economic constraints have led many colleges and universities to seek broadly trained, critically informed job candidates prepared to teach and publish in diverse fields of study. The Iowa Ph.D. Program's distribution, seminar, and foreign language requirements are intended to equip students for a lifetime of literary study. They are also designed to prepare students for future careers, whether they choose to work in academia or in a nonacademic setting.

In an initial conference set up by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), you will fill out a "Course Record" form that identifies the historical and critical areas in which you have completed academic work, as well as your preparation in foreign languages and any previous graduate courses that will transfer. (The maximum number of transfer credits accepted from other institutions is 18 semester hours [s.h.]). You will be encouraged to sample advanced course work in most historical areas, in criticism, and in theory before committing to a specific field of concentration. There are three goals of this initial conference: to identify areas in which substantial course work has been completed and areas which still need exploration, to review your preparation in foreign languages, and to make tentative long-term plans in terms of your specific professional goals. This initial conference should also prepare the DGS to be of help to you through your first semesters at Iowa.

A key to a student's success in the program is the relationships they develop with professors and mentors. Just as students have different habits of mind, intellectual passions, and career aspirations, faculty have different styles of mentoring, advising, and teaching. Your goal should be to find a mentor (or mentors) who is a good match for the way you like to think, write, and learn. The English Department works to facilitate those relationships by giving students a chance to meet and interact with the faculty outside of the classroom in the many social events, lectures, and colloquia that take place throughout the year. When you are ready to identify an area as your field of concentration, it will be time to ask a faculty member in that area to serve as your interim adviser. This adviser will help you plan the rest of your course work, prepare for Admission to Candidacy, and begin preparation for your Comprehensive Examination. Although the timing varies, most students are ready to ask a faculty member to serve as their interim adviser sometime between the end of the second semester and the middle of the fourth semester of doctoral study. Availability of individual faculty members depends on research interests, teaching schedules, and current advising load, but you are most likely to find a successful match with a professor from whom you have taken at least one course. After a faculty member has agreed to serve as your adviser, you should register this commitment with the Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC). Because academic interests and career goals shift for students and faculty alike, this commitment is an "interim" one: the faculty member who helps you make the professional choices that shape the middle years of doctoral study may or may not continue to guide you through your dissertation. The "Course Record" form in your file will help you make course choices in relation to your professional objectives and will help the Director of Graduate Studies understand your progress toward the degree. As you approach the Comprehensive Examination, introductory graduate survey courses will yield to more advanced work in your field of concentration and, in at least three cases, to seminars.

Each student needs to create a coherent individual plan of study. There is no department blueprint, though it is imperative that you design a course of study which can feasibly be completed within your funded years. While students who have had broad undergraduate and/or MA training in the literatures of various periods and in criticism and theory will be ready to begin to develop their field of concentration early, students who have had little training in literature and literary theory should sample a broad selection of courses before they commit to a particular field of concentration. In the first year of course work, students are advised to select courses both to fill gaps in their training and to develop their major interests.

### ENGL:6000-Level

Reading courses at this level provide broad coverage of a period, movement, theme, foundational figure, or other component of the discipline. Some offerings satisfy historical distribution requirements; others introduce students to a related body of primary texts, criticism, and/or theory serving as groundwork for more specialized study at the ENGL:7000-level. Writing assignments are varied, limited in scope (adding up to about 3000-5000 words), and may include annotated bibliographies, short conference papers, book reviews, project proposals, etc.

### ENGL:7000-Level

Courses at this level are designated as “seminars” and offer the most specialized work available in the curriculum. Whether they address periods, topics, authors, genres, issues, or theories, seminars always engage the most important and recent developments in a field of study. It is useful for students to have taken lower-level work in the same or a related area, if possible. Enrollment is limited and students participate actively through oral presentations and other ways of sharing new expertise. To prepare students to make original contributions of their own, seminars provide training and experience in the skills needed for scholarly research and writing. Course work culminates in a 25-30-page paper (7500-9000 words) aimed at publication and potentially leading toward the dissertation.

### Independent Studies

Ph.D. students should not enroll in independent studies prior to beginning preparation for the Comprehensive Exam except during the summer term; any exceptions during the regular academic year must be preapproved by the DGS on a case-by-case basis.

### ENGL:3000- & 4000-Level

In most cases, Ph.D. students should not enroll in ENGL:3000-4999 courses, which rarely offer the same level of training or group interaction as is found in graduate English courses. But in certain situations, a Ph.D. student may have legitimate reasons to enroll in a ENGL:3000-4999 course. For example, the student may want to work with a faculty member with whom he or she would otherwise be unable to study or to work in an area that is not covered in the graduate curriculum. In those situations, the student must receive the professor’s express permission to take the course for graduate credit, and the student and professor must agree to a modified set of course assignments that will make the course suitable for graduate-level study. The student must also complete a form (see Graduate Webforms at <https://english.uiowa.edu/graduate-programs/graduate-webforms>) to receive approval for the course.

**Ph.D. students must complete 51 s.h. in graded courses at the 3000-level or above. Of those, at least 30 s.h. must be in English courses at the 5000-level or above prior to coming up for comps. (That leaves the possibility of 21 additional s.h. in graded courses at the 3000-level or above which may be taken in other departments or in English.) After finishing those 51 s.h. in graded courses, students take 9 s.h. of independent study courses with the directors of their Comprehensive Exam areas (see the section on Comprehensive Examinations below). Once they pass their Comprehensive Exams, students must be continuously enrolled in the independent study course ENGL:7999 during the semesters that they are working on their prospectuses and dissertations. Their cumulative hours in ENGL:7999 bring students to the 72 s.h. that the Graduate College requires of all Ph.D. students.**

The field of English is characterized by lively debate that has, in recent years, challenged many of the traditional assumptions of literary studies. What is “literary” about a “literary period”? What is the relationship between definitions of “literariness” and issues of class, gender, race, sexuality, and ethnicity? How can literary critics address writings not traditionally considered “literary”—for example, diaries, sermons, historical and legal documents, slogans, and songs? What principles govern the act of literary interpretation? What constitutes “meaning” in literature? Questions as fundamental as these indicate that graduate studies is not simply a time to master a required body of knowledge but also a time to explore issues under intense professional scrutiny.

A coherent individual course of study can take many forms. The following possibilities are meant to suggest possibilities rather than to limit inquiry:

**Study of a historical period:** The concentration of longest standing at Iowa is the study of the intellectual backgrounds, formal strategies, traditions, and interconnections of writings from a specific period of English and/or American literature.

**Special area study:** It is also possible to concentrate in areas that cross or elude historical periods, such as the study of a genre, a body of literary theory, or the literature(s) of a particular region or ethnicity.

**Cultural studies:** At Iowa, much of what we teach could be called cultural studies. Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary field that combines literary study with sociological analysis. It is based on the assumption that forms of cultural production like arts, ideologies, and institutions must be examined in relation to one another and in relation to social and historical structures. For example, if you are interested in popular culture, media, or in the relations between literature and material production, you may want to work in cultural studies for your course of study.

**Nonfiction studies:** Iowa's special commitment to nonfiction writing (which includes an MFA degree in the writing of nonfiction) also provides opportunities for doctoral study of literary nonfiction. Work in nonfiction for a special area may focus on a wide range of topics and subtopics, such as stylistics, theories of the essay, the twentieth-century American essay, the nature of self-representation in autobiography and memoir, or the politics of confession in contemporary nonfiction.

**Book studies:** At Iowa, students with an interest in book studies have the rare opportunity of working with a number of scholars who have made important contributions to the field. Book studies scholars study the history of the book as a cultural form, how texts are published and marketed, and how they circulate among communities of readers. Many students choose to take courses in the University's Center for the Book, which offers a Graduate Certificate in book arts, studies, and technologies.

**Digital humanities:** The digital humanities are another strength of our program that students may wish to explore as a concentration. Through coursework with faculty who have expertise in the field and support from the University's Digital Scholarship & Publishing Studio, students can pursue a wide range of digital projects in literary and cultural studies.

## **GOOD ACADEMIC STANDING: MAINTAINING SATISFACTORY PROGRESS THROUGH THE PROGRAM**

In order to be in good academic standing, the Graduate College requires that all doctoral students maintain a GPA above a 3.0. In addition, the English Department has its own requirements for the maintenance of satisfactory progress, as follows. In order to maintain satisfactory progress through the program, doctoral students must:

- 1.) Apply for qualification by their fourth semester in the program (see the section below on "Qualification")
- 2.) Take their comprehensive exam within five semesters of reaching 24 s.h. of total graduate credit (see the section below on "Comprehensive Exams")
- 3.) Submit a dissertation prospectus to their committee in the semester after taking their comprehensive exam (see the section below on the "Dissertation")
- 4.) Complete and defend their dissertation within their expected time to degree (6 years for those entering with a BA; 5 years for those entering with an MA or with fellowship support as indicated in the initial offer letter)

## **REVIEWS BY THE GRADUATE STEERING COMMITTEE**

Any student who is not making satisfactory progress will be reviewed by the Graduate Steering Committee in the spring semester. The committee will produce a plan outlining the requirements the student must fulfill to return to good standing in the following academic year. If the student fails to fulfill these requirements, he or she will be reviewed one more time. If, after the second review, the student still has not met the requirements of the Graduate Steering Committee, he or she will be obligated to leave the program. The DGS is always ready to consult with students about their progress through the program, their academic standing at any given time, and the Graduate Steering Committee's review process.

When applying annually for financial aid, students will be required to note their progress; unsatisfactory progress may result in lower standing for financial support or denial of aid.