In order to ensure knowledge of a broad historical range of literatures in English, all doctoral students are required to take at least one graduate English course in any four of the following historical periods:

- Literature and culture before 1500
- Literature and culture 1500-1660
- Literature and culture 1660-1800
- Literature and culture 1800-1900
- Literature and culture 1900 to present

Courses may be in British, American, or other Anglophone literatures, depending on the student’s individual needs and interests. However, each student must enroll in at least one course in American literature and one course in British literature after 1660. Students must receive a grade of B+ or higher in courses that satisfy a distribution requirement. Graduate courses taken at other universities may count towards fulfillment of the requirement; the maximum number of graduate transfer credits is 18. When it is unclear which historical period a course falls into, or if transfer courses will count towards the requirement, students should consult the DGS for advice. Students must complete the distribution requirement before being eligible to take the Comprehensive Exam.