Graduate Student Mentoring FAQ for the Department of English

What is the iPOS approval process?
The iPOS is a listing of required coursework, exams requirements, and committee designation. Graduate staff advisors help students with their iPOS. Coursework is approved by committee chair or area program director. Staff advisor will send the coursework to the chair or director for approval. Please see this link for more details or ask the graduate staff advisor for the program: Graduate Plan of Study | Department of English (asu.edu)

How do I advise on coursework (required and electives)?
Students should consult with their graduate advisor first to make sure they know the program’s core requirements. Graduate advisors can also help students with the iPOS, which is a listing of core and required coursework as well as electives and research. Once a student chooses a committee chair, that person can make coursework suggestions based on student academic and professional goals as well as approve outside electives or make substitutions for required core classes.

What is the typical timeline for a PhD student progressing through the program (e.g., when to plan exams)?
Our average time to degree for PhD is six years. We are on a five-year model timeline, due to TA funding eligibility being five years. An example of the recommended PhD timeline can be found here: PhD Procedural Requirements and Timeline | Department of English (asu.edu)
Graduate College allows ten years to complete a PhD; six years to complete a master’s. If students go beyond the allotted time, a petition for graduation extension must be submitted to Graduate College in the iPOS.

What are the PhD exams (content, expectations, rubrics, procedures)?
The PhD exam structure is a three-part process. For English Ed, LAL, and WRL, the structure consists of: Part I submission of portfolio (students receive a formal report); Part II oral or written exam; Part III Defense of the dissertation prospectus (Colloquy).
Literature is slightly different. Part I and II are folded together in an essay followed in four weeks by an oral exam (there is no formal report on the essay). Part III - Defense of the dissertation prospectus.

Students who do not pass Part I will not be allowed to continue in the program. Students may retake the exam (Part II) if the first attempt is a fail. For more information, please see this webpage: What can you do with an English degree? Everything. | PhD Exams | Department of English (asu.edu)
For details about how oral and written exams are evaluated, refer to the PhD Exams Handbook: Evaluative Guidelines, Standards, & Criteria.

What is a Master’s in Passing?
A master’s-in-passing (MIP) may be granted to PhD students not already holding a master’s degree. Students can be considered for the MIP when they have completed 30-33 hours of coursework (depending on the program) judged to be equivalent to the MA distribution requirement and have passed Part I of the PhD exam process (portfolio/essay). Once the MIP is approved, the student must submit an iPOS for the master’s program and apply for graduation. PhD students should contact sheila.luna@asu.edu for help with the process. Master’s in Passing | Department of English (asu.edu)

What is an independent study and how do students enroll?
Reading and Conference, Research, Dissertation, Thesis, Applied Project are all independent study omnibus courses. Students must gain approval from their committee chair or professor they are working with on the independent study form in order to register. Students must complete the Independent Study form and obtain the required signature from their professor. Student returns the completed and signed form to the English Department main office RBH 170 or englishadvising@asu.edu for clearance to register.

What is the difference between advising and mentoring?
Each student is assigned a graduate advisor. The graduate advisor appears on their iPOS. Graduate advisors are:

- PhD programs: Sheila Luna
- MFA in Creative Writing: Justin Petropoulos
- Master’s programs (Tempe): Samantha Franze
- MAS in Film and Media Studies and MTESOL online: Kira Assad
- MA English (English Studies) online: Elizabeth Downs

Graduate advisors advise students on program curriculum and exam requirements, explain policy and procedure, monitor student progress, assist with enrollment, LOAs, MCWs, iPOS (approvals and changes), conduct advising workshops, manage recruitment efforts, talk to prospective students, answer questions about funding, and handle the logistical and procedural processes of the graduate programs.

Mentors are typically the student’s committee chair and members. These mentors assist students with long term academic and professional goals, recommend classes, committee members, help students with their research, read and evaluate exams materials and oversee
the dissertations, theses and applied projects. Mentors also help students on the job market by participating in mock interviews and writing letters of recommendation.

First-year Mentors are area-specific faculty assigned to newly admitted PhD students. Not only will the mentor be available during recruitment to answer questions, but students may also meet with their mentors to ask about graduate work and life at ASU. The first-year mentor can assist in providing networking for the new student and may also give information on field-specific opportunities.

What are the main responsibilities of the student’s committee chair?

- assume principal responsibility for advising the student; this includes
  - approving outside electives and approving iPOS coursework in conjunction with graduate advisor
  - establishing appropriate benchmarks with the student to help ensure timely degree completion
- commit to the work: scaffold the process by which the student will become an independent, contributing researcher/writer (to the degree relevant to an MA/MS/MFA or PhD) capable of undertaking work the student finds valuable.
- make explicit and transparent lines of communication between you and the student, as well as the student and committee; this includes:
  - ensuring professional correspondence
  - being accessible to the student; this includes answering emails promptly
  - setting and fulfilling explicit expectations for how and when you will respond to student’s drafts
  - once a full committee is formed, corresponding or meeting with the student and committee members to articulate together how the committee will work: e.g.,
    - if committee members will/won’t read and respond to student’s drafts over breaks
    - the number of weeks by which committee members will provide feedback to the student’s drafts
    - when a committee member might prefer to give oral rather than written feedback
    - What committee members expect from those whom they mentor (e.g., when sharing drafts, some faculty ask students to include cover letters/emails detailing revisions or identifying areas for feedback, as well as the date of a two-week window (for example) for returning feedback
- committee members’ expectations for responding to drafts of essay/portfolio (frequency and turn-around time; whether they will engage substantively with student’s drafts prior to formal submission)
- that the department has a two-week turn-around time for submitting evaluations of portfolio/essay and written exam
- whether the student is to wait for the chair to approve a draft before the student shares it with the other committee members, or to solicit member feedback early and often
- committee members’ preferences for receiving draft of dissertation to review: individual chapters or full draft of dissertation; the extent to which other committee members are willing to engage with the student’s execution of research methods for the dissertation

It is a good idea to put notes from this email exchange or meeting into a relational document, and to circulate it with committee members: “Here’s what we decided....”

- take primary responsibility for the development and administration of the appropriate examinations (which includes dissertation work) through completion of the degree:
  - EngEd/LAL and WRL supervisory chairs write a report synthesizing committee members’ evaluations of the portfolio
  - Send reminder emails, if necessary, to committee members to ensure evaluation of the portfolio (EngEd/LAL and WRL) occur expeditiously. The department has set a two-week turn-around time for these evaluations from committee members, and encourages committee chairs to send reminders starting three days prior to the two-week point.
  - writes and gives the final designation for the final report for the portfolio, and submits it to Sheila Luna.
  - (Chair and committee members send evaluations of written exams directly to Sheila Luna per instructions in email distributed for this purpose.)
  - Results of the exam and dissertation prospectus defense should be reported the same day as the exam to Sheila Luna.
  - oversee and approve the applied project/thesis/dissertation proposal, research, and final written applied project/thesis/dissertation, in conjunction with committee members

- assist student with job market and professional development goals, including writing letters recommendation

Note: to make good progress, students should keep in close touch with their committee chair, as well as their graduate advisor.
What are the main responsibilities of the student’s committee members?

- commit to the work: support the committee chair in scaffolding the process by which the student will become an independent, contributing researcher/writer (to the degree relevant to an MA/MS/MFA or PhD) capable of undertaking work the student finds valuable.
- be accessible to the student; this includes answering emails promptly
- once a student forms a full committee, participate in a process (email or meeting) by which the student, chair, other committee member/s and you make explicit and transparent how they will work together. Such matters to consider include the following:
  - whether you will or won’t respond to student’s drafts over breaks
  - how much time you consider reasonable for reading and responding to drafts
  - your rationale for providing oral or written feedback
  - your expectations for engaging substantively with student’s drafts of portfolio (ENG Ed, LAL, WRL)/essay (LIT) prior to formal submission. This includes whether the student is to wait for the chair to approve a draft before the student shares it with the other committee members, or to solicit member feedback early and often
  - your preferences for receiving draft/s of dissertation to review: individual chapters or full draft of dissertation; the extent to which you will engage with the student’s execution of research methods for the dissertation
  - what you expect from those whom you mentor (e.g., when sharing drafts, some faculty ask students to include cover letters/emails detailing revisions or identifying areas for feedback, as well as the date of a two-week window (for example) for returning feedback
- take direction from senior program manager and committee chair for the development and administration of the appropriate examinations, including dissertation/thesis.
- provide feedback in a timely manner on portfolio papers, exams, chapters, etc. so that the student’s time to degree is not compromised. This includes:
  - providing feedback on the student’s bibliography prior to the exam; if you have concerns with the bibliography, these should be addressed prior to the exam.
- submit evaluations of portfolio (ENG Ed, LAL, WRL)/essay (LIT) and written exam (if student chooses this option) within two weeks;
- assist student with job market and professional development goals, including writing letters of recommendation.

Who is eligible to serve on a student’s committee?
Only tenured or tenure-track faculty can serve on a student’s graduate committee. Only
tenured faculty can serve as dissertation chairs. Normally, the department expects at least one committee member to be from the Department of English. The Director of Graduate Studies approves chairs and committee members outside the department on a case-by-case basis. Please check with the graduate program manager about advisor eligibility and limited exceptions, as well as the process for outside committee member approvals.

**What resources does the department have available for me as a mentor?**
The Student Handbook: describes the processes and procedures you’ll need to follow
The exam webpage: describes the PhD exam process, as well as exam criteria
Graduate College policies and procedures
Graduate College Tips for Mentoring: Resources for Mentors | Graduate College (asu.edu)
From the University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School
- How to Get the Mentoring You Want: A Guide for Students
- How to Mentor Graduate Students

Please note: the Senior Program Manager, Director of Graduate Studies and Program Area Directors work together as a team. Please feel free to reach out to any of them with your questions. Please consult Senior Program Manager Sheila Luna, sheila.luna@asu.edu, for general questions, policies and procedures, student progress, enrollments, logistics

Professional Development Webpage (for students, but may provide resource for mentors)

**Is the PhD exam in English a comprehensive exam? If not, what is its scope and purpose?** The PhD in English is not a traditional comprehensive exam. Students are examined on the bibliographies they submit as part of their portfolios. With guidance from their supervisory committee members, students design their bibliographies to support and situate the work of their dissertations.

**May the student’s reading list change from the time the committee approves it at the time of the portfolio? If so, what is the process for vetting these changes with the committee?** Committee members are encouraged to provide feedback on the bibliography prior to or during the portfolio process; revisions can be part of the final portfolio process, as well. The student may also make changes to the reading list but would need to secure agreement with the committee well before the exam so that shared expectations are in place by the time of the exam.

**Does the department distinguish between “second” and “third” readers of a committee?** No, neither the department or the Graduate College makes this distinction.