LEARNING OUTCOMES: WRITING STUDIES CONCENTRATION

Learning Outcomes for the Writing Studies Graduate Concentration

1. The completion of an original and in-depth research project (the dissertation) in a specific field of Writing Studies: The dissertation (a book-length manuscript required for the doctoral degree) is the ultimate project of the MA/PhD program. The goal of the dissertation is the culmination of coursework and special fields work (see below), but it also goes beyond these preparatory steps. It demonstrates expertise and is comprised of original research that is meant to contribute to the field of Writing Studies and to be a key source for additional publications (articles, chapters, and perhaps a book). The dissertation is necessary for tenure-track academic jobs, and is also valued by alternative-academic (alt-ac) employers as a sign of independent research skills.

2. Preparation for teaching writing studies at the college level: College-level teaching in English demands breadth across the field of study one is hired in, well beyond the expertise on display in the dissertation (e.g., literate practices in university classes), and it also requires preparation and practice in pedagogy and often writing program administration. The former is built out of the foundation of coursework, but is developed more assiduously in the Special Fields Exam which tasks students with reading scholarship in a field more broadly defined than the dissertation’s focus. The ProSem in the Teaching of Rhetoric and Composition offers Writing Studies graduate students both a resource for teaching and for doing professional development with writing teachers. Graduate students in Writing Studies typically teach in the Rhetoric program plus other programs (e.g., BTW in English, INFO/WRIT 303; the Writers Workshop).

3. Generalist knowledge for the field of English Writing Studies: Graduate coursework is divided into two parts: MA coursework and PhD coursework. While the dissertation and field exam prepares students to be experts in particular fields, the MA coursework introduces students to key and active areas of theory, research, pedagogy and practice in Writing Studies. Given the interdisciplinarity that marks Writing Studies, MA and PhD students typically take classes that reflect different areas of specialization in English and in other Rhetoric and Writing Studies programs on campus (e.g., Communication, Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Policy, Organization and Leadership). The MA students’ preparation to pass from this stage into the PhD program is judged through the application to Stage II of the program, in which the students’ portfolios are reviewed by the Graduate Studies Committee. The foreign language requirement is part of this training as well, and it is expected to be finished by application to Stage II.

4. Professionalization: The department has several modes of preparing students for both the professional demands of academia and for the job market for faculty positions. In coursework, students typically write seminar papers that match the demands of scholarly articles published in journals. On top of this, seminars routinely include practice in preparing and delivering conferences papers and presentations; researching and writing bibliographies of scholarship; doing original archival research; employing ethnographic and other situated research methods; and exploring different genres and media for disciplinary writing. Thus, students enter their dissertation years having had practice in common genres of academic writing. Students also get encouragement and financial support to attend up to two conferences per year. We regularly offer a summer ProSem on the topic of Publication, in which student articles are workshopped with the final assignment to submit them to peer-reviewed journals. This ProSem is taught as a Summer Session I seminar by faculty members who edit important journals. Graduate students in Writing Studies often participate in writing program administration, getting experience in leadership roles in the Rhetoric and/or Professional Writing Programs in English or in the Center for Writing Studies in LAS.

Information listed in this catalog is current as of 03/2020