

# THE PhD PROGRAM IN ENGLISH UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA- LINCOLN

(March 2021 version, revised October 2024 and December 2024)

The PhD program consists of 90 hours beyond the bachelor's degree. The department accepts up to 36 hours of MA credit as part of the PhD degree. The usual Program of Studies for the PhD is 24-34 hours of coursework beyond the MA, plus 12-30 hours of dissertation credit. The UNL PhD offers an individualized degree in which students develop their programs in consultation with a faculty Supervisory Committee. The Supervisory Committee advises the student on courses to be taken, reading lists and a choice of how to meet the comprehensive exam requirement, how to meet the foreign language requirement, and a dissertation topic.

## 1. Advisers

The chair of the student's Supervisory Committee serves as their main adviser. Prior to the appointment of that committee, the Graduate Chair or another graduate faculty member appointed by the Graduate Chair acts as the student's adviser.

## 2. The Supervisory Committee

The Supervisory Committee advises the student on all aspects of their PhD program. Students should begin to get to know faculty members in their field of study as soon as possible by taking courses from those professors or making appointments with them to talk about their mutual academic interests. The Graduate Chair can help students identify the faculty members in their fields of interest. The Supervisory Committee must be set up and the Program of Studies approved *before a student has completed 45 hours of coursework, including credit from the MA*. This generally means that students who come in with an MA or MFA must set up their Supervisory Committees *before the end of their first year of full-time PhD work*. A direct admit PhD student (a PhD student admitted with a BA only) should find an adviser in their intended field of study as soon as possible; this person may or may not become the chair of their Supervisory Committee.

When a faculty member has agreed to chair a student's Supervisory Committee, they should advise the student about other faculty members the student should ask to join the committee. The Supervisory Committee must consist of at least four Fellows of the Graduate Faculty (The Graduate Chair can provide a list of Graduate Fellows), one of whom serves as chair and one of whom is from another department. Two members of the committee will officially serve as readers of the dissertation, but all members will read and comment on it. When all members of the Supervisory Committee have verbally agreed to serve, the student completes the [Appointment of Supervisory Committee form](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-SupCommittee.pdf) (unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-SupCommittee.pdf) and submits it to the English Graduate Office. The Graduate Chair signs it and then sends it to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

***Once the Appointment of Supervisory Committee form is filed, the Supervisory Committee must meet within three weeks.*** It is important that all the committee members attend this meeting

The student is responsible for contacting all the committee members and setting up the meeting. Before the meeting, the student should download the [Program of Studies form](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Program.pdf) (unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Program.pdf), tentatively fill it out in consultation with the chair of their Supervisory Committee, and send it to the rest of the committee in ample time for their review. At the meeting, the committee discusses, revises, and approves the Program of Studies, including: 1) the transfer of MA or MFA credit if appropriate, 2) additional coursework, 3) number of dissertation hours, 4) plans for meeting the language requirement, and 5) a dissertation area or topic. After the meeting, the student must *type* the Program of Studies as approved by the Committee, have their committee chair sign it, and file it with the Graduate Chair. The Graduate Chair forwards it to Graduate Studies.

At the point that the Program of Studies is approved, the PhD program “clock” begins to tick. The student now has ***eight years in which to complete the PhD***. The Dean of Graduate Studies can approve extensions of the eight-year period only in extraordinary circumstances and only if the dissertation is substantially completed.

### **3. Definition of Satisfactory Progress (Pre-candidacy)**

*For full-time students*, satisfactory progress is defined as the completion of at least 18 hours of coursework or the equivalent in the 12-month period that consists of the fall and spring semesters and may include the previous summer. *For part-time students* (e.g., area secondary or college teachers who are pursuing degrees while they work full-time), satisfactory progress is defined as the completion of at least 12 hours of coursework or the equivalent in the 12-month period, which includes the previous summer.

Dissertation hours do *not* count toward this requirement.

Equivalents include the following:

- Coursework in approved minor, research tool, or collateral fields is counted on an hour-for-hour basis.
- Achieving competency in a language is equivalent to 6 hours of coursework. If a student has satisfied one or more of these requirements prior to beginning their program, they can use the credits in an academic year of their choosing.
- The approval of Field, Focus, and Capstone Oral requirements each count as the equivalent of 6 hours of coursework.
- For students admitted directly to the PhD program after achieving their undergraduate degree, the successful completion of the MA requirement counts as the equivalent of 6 hours of coursework.
- The successful completion of the pre-candidacy requirement for an interdepartmental graduate specialization (e.g., Nineteenth Century Studies, Women’s Studies, Digital Humanities) counts as the equivalent of 4 hours of coursework.

Approval for continuation as a Teaching Assistant depends on adequate progress in the program and adequate teaching. In April of each year, the Graduate Chair reports to the Department Chair on graduate students’ progress in the program, based on the definitions and equivalents above.

In addition, *you must achieve candidacy for the PhD by the end of your fourth year post-MA in the program.* The four-year candidacy rule also includes any time spent holding a fellowship, any other appointment in the Department of English, and leaves of absence. Petitions of the deadline extension for up to one year may be presented to the Graduate Committee, but approval is by no means automatic.

### **XP Grades**

If a faculty member considers a student to have made insufficient progress in ENGL 899 or 999, they may assign the student an XP grade. These grades are primarily meant for students working on preparing for their comprehensive exams. They are usually given by a student's adviser.

After a student receives two XP grades in a row, they are required to meet with the Graduate Chair to discuss their lack of progress. The Graduate Chair may decide to place the student on academic probation at this time.

Upon the student's request, the Graduate Chair can change all XP grades to P grades prior to graduation, so that there will be no record of the XP grade on their transcripts.

## **4. Coursework**

A direct admit PhD student (a PhD student admitted with a BA only) takes 60-70 hours of recommended coursework; a student with an MA or MFA takes 24-34 hours. The coursework is recommended and approved by the Supervisory Committee or the Graduate Chair in the case of a student without a committee. The adviser or committee considers the student's area(s) of interest and career goals in advising on and requiring coursework. Direct admit PhD students usually complete their coursework in three to four years; students with an MA or MFA usually complete theirs in two to three years.

### **Independent Studies and Internships**

PhD students may take up to six credit hours of independent directed readings beyond the six allowed as part of the MA program. A graduate student is allowed up to six credits of independent study or internship credit.

Before planning an independent study or internship, consider the following:

- A graduate student *cannot* take an independent study or internship in an area of coursework in which the English Department already offers courses.
- The professor supervising the course *must* be an expert in the area proposed.
- The proposed independent coursework must be crucial to the student's development according to the professor supervising the course and the student's adviser.
- Independent studies and internships need to be approved by the Graduate Chair.

Once approved by the aforementioned faculty, students must file the appropriate form with the Graduate Chair and Graduate Program Assistant. For independent directed readings, they must file the [Independent Study form](http://unl.edu/english/grad/independentstudy.pdf) (unl.edu/english/grad/independentstudy.pdf). If they are planning an internship, they must file the [Internship form](http://unl.edu/english/grad/internship_teaching.pdf) (unl.edu/english/grad/internship\_teaching.pdf).

To take additional independent studies (exceeding six credit hours), a student must make a request in writing to the Graduate Committee. This letter should include 1) a listing of the independent reading courses taken so far, with the subjects, instructors, and credit hours, 2) a description of the additional hours requested, with the subject, instructor, and credit hours, 3) a rationale for why the additional hours are important to the student's program, and 4) the signature of the student's adviser indicating approval of the request.

### **Required Professionalization Classes**

All PhD students are required to take the following two one-credit professionalization courses: 1) ENGL 893, which assists students in navigating the comprehensive exams process and making a successful transition to the dissertation stage, and 2) ENGL 993, which assists students in seeking employment following the completion of their degree. Any student wishing to be exempted from either or both of these required courses may discuss the matter with their adviser; the adviser may then send a letter to the Graduate Chair requesting exemption, which will be granted upon receipt.

### **Academic Residency**

**Students must follow the residency requirements of Graduate Studies, which are published in the *Graduate Studies Bulletin*. The basic rule requires students to take 27 hours of coursework in a consecutive 18-month period.** For full details, consult the [Graduate Studies Bulletin](http://catalog.unl.edu/graduate-professional/) (catalog.unl.edu/graduate-professional/).

## **5. Specializations and Certificates**

Students are not required to declare a specialization, but we offer English specializations in Creative Writing, Composition and Rhetoric, and Literary and Cultural Studies. We also offer interdisciplinary specializations in Ethnic Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Great Plains Studies, and Nineteenth Century Studies. Additionally, we offer certificate programs in Digital Humanities and the Teaching of Writing.

To formalize your specialization, please follow the process outlined on the English Graduate Specialization pages:

- ***Composition and Rhetoric*** ([unl.edu/english/composition-and-rhetoric/graduate-specialization](http://unl.edu/english/composition-and-rhetoric/graduate-specialization))
- ***Literary and Cultural Studies*** ([unl.edu/english/literary-and-cultural-studies/graduate-specialization](http://unl.edu/english/literary-and-cultural-studies/graduate-specialization))

Students can also specialize in interdisciplinary programs and earn certificates:

- ***Ethnic Studies*** ([ethnicstudies.unl.edu/current-graduate](http://ethnicstudies.unl.edu/current-graduate))
- ***Women's and Gender Studies*** ([unl.edu/wgs/graduate-specialization-and-graduate-minor-requirements](http://unl.edu/wgs/graduate-specialization-and-graduate-minor-requirements))
- ***Great Plains Studies*** ([unl.edu/plains/academics/graduate.shtml](http://unl.edu/plains/academics/graduate.shtml))
- ***Nineteenth Century Studies*** ([unl.edu/19thcentury/graduate](http://unl.edu/19thcentury/graduate))
- ***Digital Humanities Certificate*** ([unl.edu/gradstudies/academics/programs/DIGH-GCER](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/academics/programs/DIGH-GCER))
- ***Teaching of Writing Certificate*** ([unl.edu/gradstudies/academics/programs/TWRT-GCER](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/academics/programs/TWRT-GCER))

## 6. Language Requirement

Our department believes strongly that our graduate students should *experience* the world through another language, learn what it means to *struggle* with language acquisition (if they haven't already), cultivate a nuanced understanding of what it means to teach students for whom English is not their first language, and, as our Mission Statement suggests, *re-frame how we look at the world* through language. We believe strongly that our capacities for imaginative reasoning and our abilities to create imaginative possibilities are developed through our experiences with and through language, which both reflects and shapes our literary, aesthetic, cultural, and linguistic realities. In an increasingly global university and world, we believe it is extremely important for scholars and teachers to resist monolingualism and have significant learning experiences with other languages prior to and/or during their graduate education.

Because the English Department values both the philosophical principle *and* the practical application of learning other languages, students can meet the language requirement in multiple ways. The student's Supervisory Committee will help them determine which of the following pathways is most appropriate both philosophically *and* practically to their area of study and/or dissertation project.

Students may fulfill the language requirement by doing any *one* of the following:

- having lived in a country where the language is used and speaking and reading it there for a substantial period of time
- having passed or passing a *graduate* seminar *in* the language with at least a grade of "B"
- having taken or taking at least two semesters of undergraduate coursework in the language with at least a grade of "B"
- having taken or taking one semester of undergraduate coursework *and* one graduate course in Teaching English as a Second Language with at least a grade of "B," such as TEAC 813P: Teaching English as an International Language, 813A: Second Language Acquisition, 813J: Intercultural Communication, 813M: Teaching Multilingual Learners, and/or 813E: Special Topics in Teaching English as a Second Language
- having completed or completing a major translation project designed in consultation with one's committee and evaluated by an agreed upon scholar with fluency in the language (e.g., a translation project might include a successful translation of one or more short stories, a gathering of poems, or a critical essay)
- completing a language exam, the conditions of which are decided by the student's committee (and a qualified expert in the language if the student does not have such an expert serving on their committee already)
- having taken or taking one graduate course or two undergraduate courses in translation with at least a grade of "B." These courses can be arranged through [CourseShare](#) and may have uneven or limited availability. Students can contact the Modern Languages Department to find out if there is a translation course available through CourseShare ([btaa.org/resources-for/faculty/courseshare/department-resources](http://btaa.org/resources-for/faculty/courseshare/department-resources)).

If a student wants to undertake work that they and their committee believe *should* meet the language requirement but does not appear on this list, the student must submit a formal proposal, signed by all their committee members, to the Graduate Chair. This proposal

would then be evaluated by the Graduate Committee (e.g., counting a digital language for this requirement would require formal approval from both the student's committee and the Graduate Committee). Proposals should be one-page and address: 1) how the work described should be interpreted as fulfilling the spirit and intention of the language requirement, and 2) how the work is equivalent to one or more of the options listed above.

Students for whom English is a second language and not their native language (e.g., international students) can use English to fulfill the language requirement. The student's Supervisory Committee has the responsibility and authority to determine what constitutes fulfillment of the language requirement within the guidelines listed above and to inform the English Graduate Office in writing when the student has met the language requirements or when the student plans to submit a proposal for work that does *not* appear in the guidelines.

## 7. Comprehensive Exams

### General Description

Students take comprehensive exams after they have completed all coursework and generally after they have completed the language requirement. The comprehensive exams are normally taken in the student's third or fourth year and consist of three parts: two written exercises, which are based on their Field and Focus Reading Lists, and one Capstone Oral given by their Supervisory Committee. The comprehensive exams are supposed to feed into the dissertation and prepare the student to begin work on it, while ensuring that the student will be able to teach survey and specialized courses at a number of educational institutions. The Field Reading List should, therefore, reflect a general knowledge of the area in which the student will likely be seeking employment and contain primary texts that they will likely be expected to know, as well as critical material central to the field. The Focus Reading List should be based on the student's special interests and contain texts, both primary and critical, relevant to that focus.

### Field and Focus Reading Lists

The student's Supervisory Committee should advise the student on identifying Field and Focus areas and discuss options before the student plans the comprehensive exams. The areas should be related to the kind of job the student wants to obtain after graduation. The Field area is generally broader and may be a category that *might* be used in the MLA Job List or one that is of general familiarity to the profession (e.g., "20th Century American and Canadian Literature," "Renaissance Literature," "Contemporary Fiction/Poetry," or "Composition Pedagogies"). Students should work closely with their committees to determine exactly how broad the Field List should be, given their career goals and trajectory. The Focus area should be a more specialized area leaning toward the subject of the student's dissertation (e.g., "20th Century Canadian Women's Literature," "Shakespeare," "Contemporary Poetry and Embodiment," or "Feminist Rhetorics"). Creative Writing students design lists in literature, composition and rhetoric, and/or literary theory that complement the creative work they do in their dissertations. In all areas of study, students are advised to consider the literary, cultural, and/or political conversations in which their own work aims to take part.

After a student has identified their Field and Focus areas, they construct *a reading list for each area* comprised of 30-40 *substantial* items, including both primary and critical

works. The student works on each reading list with two faculty members who also agree to assess the written exam or portfolio. These faculty members will probably, but not necessarily, be members of the student's Supervisory Committee. The student can work with different faculty members for each of the reading lists.

Once the faculty readers have approved each list, **both lists** are submitted to the Graduate Committee for approval. The student should send: 1) a cover letter explaining the intellectual rationale for the "Field" and "Focus" designations, 2) both reading lists, with Field and Focus areas clearly specified and complete bibliographic information (using MLA formatting style) on each item, 3) how and when the student plans to meet the comprehensive exam requirement for each list (Written Exam or Portfolio Option), and 4) the names of the readers with a place for each of them to sign indicating approval of the lists and agreement to assess the comprehensive. If the committee chair is not a reader for either of the exams, they should sign as well, showing agreement with the student's plans. *Once approved by the Graduate Committee, these lists will be archived on the department's online space; that way, they can serve as models for future students.*

The Graduate Committee is tasked with evaluating students' reading lists. The Graduate Committee will return the lists with one of three decisions: "approve," "approve pending revisions," or "deny." Regardless of whether or not the members of the Graduate Committee are specialists in your particular Field or Focus area, they are still charged with passing your lists and signaling the beginning of your portfolio and/or exam work for comps. The Graduate Committee's role is to be one of the first of many groups you will encounter in academia who may be evaluating your work from *outside* your sub-area. This is often the case, for example, on hiring committees. In this specific instance, the goal is to deepen your project and your analysis of the texts you consider.

The Graduate Committee will evaluate reading lists by looking for evidence that:

- The lists reflect the project's commitment to diverse voices, perspectives, and/or identities in connection to the central questions and arguments that it aims to raise.
- The rationale for the lists is fully articulated, and the cover letter discusses why specific groups of texts were included or excluded from the lists, why the lists are organized the way they are, and why the lists are of significance to the student's goals and investments as a writer and scholar. The cover letter (containing rationales for the lists and detailed discussion of the list formation) should be approximately two to three pages long single-spaced.

**For comprehensives to be taken in the fall, the reading lists and accompanying material must be handed in to the Graduate Chair by the last Graduate Committee meeting of the preceding spring. For comprehensives to be taken in the spring or summer, the reading lists and accompanying material must be handed in to the Graduate Chair by the last Graduate Committee meeting of the preceding fall. (Reading Lists can always be submitted to the Graduate Chair at any time!)**

When scheduling their exams, students should consider the fact that faculty members are not on duty in the summer and are thus not obligated to be available for exams during that time period. Please check with your committee members well in advance for their availability and willingness to administer exams during the summer months.

## **Format**

Students may choose to be assessed on their Field and Focus Reading Lists by any of the following formats, *as long as the readers approve it. Unless the student is completing a Combined Portfolio over both lists, one exam or portfolio over each list is required.*

**Written Exam Option:** The student is responsible for setting up a testing time with the Graduate Program Assistant. The English Graduate Office schedules summer exams on a case-by-case basis (see the statement above regarding summer exams). Students sign up to take the exam *at least one week before* they plan to take it; they also resubmit their reading lists and the names of their readers at that time. This can be done by visiting the English Graduate Office or emailing the Graduate Program Assistant with the date of the exam, the readers' names, and the reading list to be tested. Students take the exam by computer. The faculty readers construct the 3 ½ hour exam based on the student's reading list, but the student may submit study questions to the faculty as soon as the list is approved; the faculty can use these questions or variations of them if they feel it is appropriate to do so. The readers assess the exam and judge it a "pass," "no pass," or "revise and resubmit." In the case of an unresolvable disagreement between the readers, the Graduate Chair will select a third reader. If one or more of the readers judge(s) that the student fails or should be asked to revise, they will provide specific comments as to what the student needs to do to meet PhD comprehensive exam standards. If a student fails twice, that student must petition the Graduate Committee in writing for permission to revise and submit it a third time or to take the exam in a different format. Approval is not guaranteed.

**Portfolio Option:** Students sign up for the Portfolio Option in the English Graduate Office or by emailing the Graduate Program Assistant *at least one week before* they plan to turn in the portfolio. Students must get the agreement of their faculty readers to ensure that they can meet the student's elected portfolio submission date. The student compiles the portfolio with the guidance of the two readers, based on the student's approved reading list. The portfolio should be 50-60 pages in length, maximum. The portfolio must include: 1) a cover letter describing the major ideas, themes, and issues represented in the portfolio and giving an overview of its contents, 2) a 20-page scholarly essay, which is a focused essay with a thesis that brings together major texts from the reading list, both critical and primary, 3) an annotated bibliography of all items on the reading list *not* covered by the essay, 4) a statement of teaching goals, 5) sample course syllabi based on the reading list, with assignments and class activities, and 6) professional writing that is informed by material on the reading list but that has not been used to satisfy course requirements (this may include conference papers; published, accepted, or circulating articles or creative writing; grant proposals; and other materials demonstrating a knowledge of the area). The readers guide the student in writing and revising the essay and other parts of the portfolio; the student should consult with them early and often. *On the agreed-upon date, the student submits the portfolio to the English Graduate Office.* The English Graduate Office distributes the portfolio to the faculty readers.

The faculty readers assess the portfolio and judge it a "pass," "no pass," or "revise and resubmit." In the case of an unresolvable disagreement between the readers, the Graduate Chair will select a third reader. The English Graduate Office gives the faculty members'

assessment and comments to the student. If the student fails or is asked to revise, they will do so with specific comments from the reader(s) as to what needs to be done to meet the PhD comprehensive examination standards. If a student fails a portfolio twice, they must petition the Graduate Committee in writing for permission to revise and submit it a third time or to take the exam in a different format. Approval is not guaranteed.

**Combined Portfolio:** In some cases, the Supervisory Committee and faculty readers may decide that one large portfolio covering the two reading lists is appropriate, should the Field and Focus lists dovetail to a manageable extent. In that case, the student writes a 40-60 page scholarly paper over both lists and submits all other materials required for the Portfolio Option. As with the Portfolio Option, the student must get the agreement of two faculty members to be readers for the Combined Portfolio.

### **The Capstone Oral Exam**

*Whichever format is selected for the written comprehensive exams (Exam or Portfolio Option), a capstone oral exam follows completion.*

The Supervisory Committee, with or without the committee member from another department, administers the Capstone Oral, but the committee can add other examiners with the student's approval. If other faculty members were involved in compiling the student's reading lists and reading the comprehensives, the Supervisory Committee and the student might want them to take part in the Capstone Oral as well.

The Capstone Oral should take place as soon as possible after the student completes the written exam requirements (the Field and Focus exams or portfolios). The student contacts all the faculty members involved and arranges a meeting time and place (see the statement above about summer exams). Then the student informs the English Graduate Office about who is on the examining committee, as well as the time and place of the Capstone Oral. The Graduate Program Assistant sends the faculty members copies of the reading lists and formal notification of the meeting. If any of them wish to review the student's written comprehensives, they can obtain copies from the English Graduate Office.

The Capstone Oral normally lasts one hour. Its purpose is to give students the opportunity to articulate connections between texts and issues central to their written Field and Focus exams or portfolios. As the examining committee explores topics from the written examinations via critical and interpretative questions, the student can articulate and expand on aspects of their thinking on the Field and Focus areas. This helps orient the student's work on the comprehensives toward their dissertation, teaching goals, and research projects. The Capstone Oral can also serve as an opportunity for the Supervisory Committee and the student to discuss the student's dissertation plans.

After the Capstone Oral, the chair of the Supervisory Committee completes a consensus report, the "Capstone Oral Examination Report," which deems the examination results as a "pass," "no pass," or "conditional pass," and submits it to the English Graduate Office.

Students who receive a "conditional pass" must do further work to pass the Capstone Oral, the nature and extent of which should be clearly delineated in the Examination Report. Any

examination committee member may write a dissenting report to the Graduate Chair as well. The Graduate Chair informs the student in writing of the results of the exam, including a copy of the Examination Report. If an exam, portfolio, or capstone oral is not passed, the student will receive written notice, copied to the Graduate Dean, by the Graduate Chair. It will list the options, if any, for retaking the comprehensive. No comprehensive may be taken in the same semester as the unsuccessful attempt.

## 8. Candidacy

Candidacy is awarded on completion of all required coursework, successful completion of all the comprehensive examinations, fulfillment of the language requirement, and approval of the dissertation topic. A student who comes into the program with an MA normally achieves candidacy by their fourth year. A student who enters with a BA normally achieves candidacy by their fifth year.

**Procedure:** As soon as the student passes the Capstone Oral, they should fill out the [Application for Admission to Candidacy](#) and have everyone on their Supervisory Committee, *including the committee member from another department*, sign it ([unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Candidacy.pdf](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Candidacy.pdf)). This form is usually signed immediately following the Capstone Oral. The student should submit the signed form to the Graduate Chair, who will send it to Graduate Studies. The Application for Admission to Candidacy must be filed *at least seven months prior to the final oral examination for the dissertation*.

After achieving candidacy, students must register for *at least one credit hour* during each fall and spring semester until they receive the degree. Once a student becomes a doctoral candidate, they may request Certification of Full-Time Graduate Status, meaning that they can enroll in only one credit hour but still be counted as full-time. Students should make the request before the start of the semester. The Graduate Studies pages offer more details regarding eligibility and the online form ([research.unl.edu/gradstudies/fulltime/](http://research.unl.edu/gradstudies/fulltime/)). Funded students always need to remain registered for nine credits in order to receive their stipends and benefits.

Faculty advisers may choose to assign students XP grades to indicate lack of academic progress during candidacy, as per the process laid out in Section 3 above.

## 9. Dissertation

**Scholarly Dissertation:** A dissertation is a substantial scholarly work. Usually by the time that students are putting together their reading lists and taking comprehensive exams or writing portfolios, they have developed an idea or focus for their dissertation. When the student is ready to begin research for their dissertation, they should meet with their committee chair and decide on a process. Many chairs and Supervisory Committees require a formal prospectus, which consists of: 1) a statement of the thesis of the dissertation, 2) a review of relevant scholarship, 3) a proposed outline of the chapters and what they will contain, and 4) a substantial bibliography. The Graduate Committee recommends that such a prospectus be produced and circulated to all members of the Supervisory Committee for their approval and suggestions; sometimes a committee

meeting is helpful at this point. Since a student's focus might have changed substantially from the time when they filed their Program of Studies, it is important that all the committee members have a written proposal from the student at this point. It is also possible that with a change of topic, the student might want to change committee members. If the chair remains, but other committee members change, then the student should fill out a [Change of Committee form](#) and have their committee chair and the Graduate Chair sign it ([unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-SupCommitteeChange.pdf](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-SupCommitteeChange.pdf)). If the committee chair is changing, then both the new and the old committee chairs will need to sign the form, in addition to the Graduate Chair. The English Graduate Office will forward the signed form to Graduate Studies.

At the time that all the committee members approve the prospectus or the plan for the dissertation, the student and their adviser should lay out a timeline and process for finishing the dissertation. Some advisers like to see and approve drafts of chapters before the student sends them to other committee members. In other cases, the student gives drafts of chapters to all committee members at once for feedback. Some chairs want to see the dissertation chapter by chapter; others want to see a draft of the entire manuscript. In any case, what is essential is that the process by which each committee will work is clear to everyone involved. The student also needs to write an abstract of the dissertation, not exceeding 350 words in length, which should include the working title of the dissertation and must be approved by the committee.

**Creative Dissertation:** The dissertation is based on the student's own book-length creative work completed in consultation with their Supervisory Committee during the student's time in the graduate program. The creative work, when completed, is submitted to the committee but does not serve as the dissertation. The dissertation consists of: 1) a critical introduction that is in response to, and in support of, the creative activity, 2) a description of the project overall, and 3) a sample of the creative work.

#### **For Both Scholarly and Creative Dissertations:**

**Application for Degree:** Early in the semester in which they plan to graduate, students must apply for the degree in MyRed. If this application is not filed, a diploma will not be ordered, and the student's graduation will be postponed. The due date for this form is listed on the [Doctoral Degree Milestones](#) page (set it for the intended graduation month) (<https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/academics/degrees/doctoral>). Instructions are on the UNL site (<https://registrar.unl.edu/student/commencement/application/instructions/>).

**Deadline for the Dissertation:** In every case, the student must give the final draft of the dissertation to all committee members *at least one month before the deadline for approval of the manuscript*. In the case of the designated readers, this means at least six weeks before the dissertation is due in the Office of Graduate Studies (see below).

**Application for Final Oral Exam:** The [Application for Final Oral Exam](#) ([unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-FinalOral.pdf](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-FinalOral.pdf)) must be sent to Graduate Studies *at least two weeks before* the final oral examination. The English Graduate Office keeps a copy and forwards the form to Graduate Studies. Please email a draft of the dissertation to the Doctoral Programs Coordinator in Graduate Studies for format review.

Two Supervisory Committee members other than the chair are designated as readers of the dissertation. They must have seen and approved a draft of the dissertation and the abstract before signing the Application for Final Oral Exam. An oral defense cannot be scheduled if neither reader approves the dissertation. However, if one reader does not approve, the oral exam may proceed if the majority of the committee agrees.

The oral exam is waived only in unusual circumstances and with the approval of the Graduate Dean prior to the time the oral exam would be held. To request a waiver, the chair of the student's Supervisory Committee must provide a statement as to why the waiver is needed, which is sent to the Graduate Dean for approval or denial.

The Application for Final Oral Exam must be filed with Graduate Studies at least two weeks before the date that the final dissertation is due in that office. The oral exam is one to two hours in length. According to Graduate Studies rules, the chair of the Supervisory Committee and at least two other committee members must participate. The committee conducts the oral exam, giving the student the opportunity to talk about their dissertation, including the research process, theoretical and academic issues raised by the dissertation, and the way in which the dissertation fits into the student's future plans. The Supervisory Committee reports the results of the oral exam by signing the [Report of Completion](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Completion.pdf) ([unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Completion.pdf](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Completion.pdf)). If one examiner records a dissenting vote, the student is still approved for the degree. If more than one examiner dissents, the student cannot receive the degree at that time. In that case, the committee must file a report with Graduate Studies indicating what the student must do before taking another examination.

**Filing the Dissertation:** The [Guidelines for Preparation and Submission of an Electronic Dissertation](#) has complete information on the final preparation of the dissertation. Once the dissertation has been approved and the Oral Exam has taken place, the student should follow the instructions linked on the [Doctoral Degree Milestones](#) page. The [Report of Completion](#) ([unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Completion.pdf](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Doctoral-Completion.pdf)) should be presented to the examining committee, including the outside committee member, for the required signatures, preferably during the final oral.

**We encourage all students to refer to the [Graduate Catalog](#) available online on the [Doctoral Degree Milestones](#) page. Many of the policies described here are explained in more detail in the *Graduate Catalog*.**

**The English Graduate Office is here for you. Please consult the Graduate Chair and Graduate Program Assistant early and often during your time in the program. We can answer your questions or find out who can.**

## Financial Aid

**Department Assistantships:** Each year the Department of English awards several teaching assistantships to incoming PhD students. The deadline for admission and assistantship consideration for the following academic year (August-May) is listed on the department website. There are no additional materials required to apply for departmental assistantships. Simply check the circle on the admissions application.

**Students who are admitted directly into the PhD program with a BA** are eligible for up to six years of funding. The funding for the first year will normally be a Research Assistantship, but at the discretion of the Graduate Committee and in consultation with the Composition Coordinators, unusually well-prepared BA students might be given a Teaching Assistantship their first year. The second and succeeding years of funding will be in the form of a Teaching Assistantship.

**Students who enter the PhD program with an MA or MFA** are eligible for up to five years of funding as Teaching Assistants. Teaching Assistants normally teach two classes every fall semester, which is considered half-time university employment (i.e., 18 hours per week), and two courses every spring semester, with the exception of the first year when they teach one course in the spring. All new TAs are required to take a weeklong teaching workshop the week before classes start and a course in Composition Theory and Practice (ENGL 957) during the fall semester in which they start teaching.

**All assistantships include tuition remission, basic health insurance, and a stipend, but they do not include books or student fees. Students on assistantship must be registered as full-time students (defined as nine credit hours or as one credit hour once one has achieved candidacy and filed the Certification of Full-Time Status).** Students on assistantship must check with the English Graduate Office about the maximum number of hours they can take each semester and in the summer.

With few exceptions, Graduate Teaching Assistants must maintain a Nebraska address during the academic year and be available for in-person teaching consistent with the [Chancellor's Faculty Residency Policy](#) (effective May 2008), which affirms that UNL is a “*community of scholars*” that expects “faculty to be present on campus in order to hold open office hours, to teach and advise students, to be engaged with their colleagues, and to be active participants in the activities of their departments, their college and the campus.” While Graduate Students are not faculty, as a department we nevertheless have the same expectations of GTAs as UNL has of faculty. Any exceptions to this basic expectation must be discussed with and approved by the department chair *prior* to actions that would be in violation of this policy. Violation of this policy might result in a student losing their teaching assistantship.

**Department Fellowships:** The English Department awards several fellowships, including the Pulos Fellowship (for students in 19<sup>th</sup> century studies), the Card Fellowship (for students in Composition and Rhetoric), the McPhee Fellowship, and the Louise VanSickle Award (for a creative writing student). Contact the Graduate Chair for information about these fellowships.

**Other Assistantships:** English graduate students can sometimes obtain assistantships that provide tuition remission and a stipend in Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, Graduate Studies, Student Involvement, and *Great Plains Quarterly*. When the English Graduate Office receives notices of these and other job opportunities, we post and distribute them via the Graduate Listserv, but students should be proactive in seeking out assistantships and other employment.

**Other Fellowships:** Graduate Studies has a variety of fellowships for which graduate students can apply after their first year of graduate study at UNL. These fellowships can be found [here](#). The applications for them, available under “Nominate” on that webpage, are typically due in February or March. To apply, you will need letters of recommendation from faculty as well as a thorough description of your graduate program, your progress in it, and the work you intend to undertake the year of the fellowship. We encourage you to start work on fellowship applications early. Each year, English students are successful in winning some of these graduate fellowships. For more information, go to [Graduate Fellowships for Current Students](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/funding/fellowships) (unl.edu/gradstudies/funding/fellowships). If you have questions about one of the fellowships, you can contact them at [graduate@unl.edu](mailto:graduate@unl.edu) or 402-472-2875.

**Additional Funding Opportunities in the Department:** The department has, or is affiliated with, a number of programs—including the Whitman Archive, *Prairie Schooner*, the Cather Project, the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities (CDRH), and the Nebraska Writing Project—which are occasionally able to offer employment. The decision about which students to hire for these programs is in the hands of the faculty members in charge of these programs. You can contact the Graduate Chair with questions regarding these opportunities.

**Travel Assistance Funds:**

PhD students may claim \$700 reimbursement annually for costs associated with attending scholarly conferences or other professionally relevant events. Students must be attending the conference or event in order to deliver a paper, participate in a roundtable, give a reading, or make another significant presentation of their scholarly or creative work. Contact Brenda West, Accounting Technician, at [bwest@unl.edu](mailto:bwest@unl.edu) prior to traveling in order to obtain the proper paperwork and be apprised of costs that can and cannot be reimbursed.

At the end of the fall and spring semesters, the Graduate Committee accepts applications for additional travel funding. Deadlines and information about application materials are sent out via the Graduate Student Listserv. Joy Currie Awards are awarded based on the importance of the event to the student’s career, and award amounts vary. Contact the Graduate Chair for more information.

**Additional Funding Opportunities:** Contact the Graduate Program Assistant to request a link to a list of fellowships and grants, both in and outside UNL, for which you might be eligible, including the department’s Stuff dissertation fellowship.

## DEPARTMENTAL RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

**Graduate Listserv:** The department regularly communicates with graduate students via its listserv. [ENG-GRAD@unl.edu](mailto:ENG-GRAD@unl.edu)

**English Graduate Student Association:** The English Graduate Student Association (EGSA) includes all graduate students in the English Department. EGSA exists in order to foster a sense of community among all English graduate students, to offer representation to the department through its elected representatives on the EGSA Executive Committee, and to provide a forum for the free exchange of ideas, concerns, and suggestions among graduate students in the department.

**Placement:** A Placement Chair, appointed by the English Department Chair, assists students in preparing resumes, writing job application letters, and submitting writing samples, along with preparing for MLA and other interviews.

**Best Practices Policy on Letters of Recommendation:** When there is reason to believe that something is amiss with the Interfolio file (the service through which letters of recommendations for academic jobs are handled), the accepted department practice is that the student send their committee chair or the Graduate Chair their materials from Interfolio and request advice.

**Departmental Colloquia:** The department is home to a number of discussion groups, reading groups, study groups, and a creative writing reading series. Events are regularly advertised through the Listserv.

## UNIVERSITY RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

**Graduate Studies** is located at 1100 Seaton Hall, and Graduate Studies staff can be reached at [graduate@unl.edu](mailto:graduate@unl.edu). Graduate Studies handles all matters related to graduate programs and student status, including international student status. In addition to emailing, you can contact them at 472-2875 or go to [unl.edu/gradstudies/](http://unl.edu/gradstudies/).

**International Student and Scholar Office (ISSO)** is located at 201 Seaton Hall. This office handles matters related to international students, including visa problems and other questions. You can contact them at 402-472-0324 or [isso@unl.edu](mailto:isso@unl.edu).

**Afrikan People's Union** is a student group that holds regular meetings and sponsors special programs. Learn more at [facebook.com/AfrikanPeoplesUnion/](https://facebook.com/AfrikanPeoplesUnion/).

**Mexican American Student Association** holds regular meetings, does programming, and sponsors educational activities. You can learn more about this student group at [facebook.com/unlmasa1970/](https://facebook.com/unlmasa1970/).

**International Student Organization** is a student group that hosts programs and activities. You can email them at [unl.x.iso@gmail.com](mailto:unl.x.iso@gmail.com).

**University of Nebraska Inter-Tribal Exchange (U.N.I.T.E.)** organizes events and activities, including a powwow. You can learn more about this student group at [facebook.com/groups/156121286696/](https://facebook.com/groups/156121286696/).

**UNL Committee for LGBTQA+ Concerns.** A group of faculty, staff, and students who sponsor programs and discuss issues related to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. For more information, see their website at [involved.unl.edu/lgbtqa](http://involved.unl.edu/lgbtqa).

## **PROCEDURES FOR GRADUATE STUDENT APPEALS**

### **Department of English, University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

#### I. Appeal of course grades.

Appeals must be filed **within six weeks** of the official awarding of the disputed grade. In accord with the general guidelines set down in the [Graduate Studies Catalog-Appeals](#), procedures for graduate student academic appeals are as follows:

- A. First recourse shall always be to the faculty members assigning the grade. If the dispute can be settled informally, no formal appeal is necessary. Students and faculty alike are urged to exercise this option to the fullest.
- B. If a formal appeal becomes necessary, the next recourse is to the student's adviser or Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The student and the adviser decide whether the grounds for appeal are sufficient and whether the dispute is procedural or substantive in nature, or both. The student should present an appeal in writing to the Graduate Committee, along with materials relevant to the case.
  1. If the appeal is procedural, the Graduate Committee shall decide its validity and report its judgment within two weeks of receiving the appeal.
  2. If the appeal is substantive, the Graduate Committee shall form an ad hoc committee consisting of two senior staff evaluators (who are not members of the Graduate Committee) to review the case and make recommendations within two weeks of receiving the case. Final consideration of such recommendations is the responsibility of the Graduate Committee, which shall sustain or deny the appeal within two weeks of receiving the recommendations.

#### II. Appeal of comprehensive examination decisions.

The same procedures shall apply as in I.A and B above, with the following exceptions:

- A. First recourse shall be to the individual readers of the examination.
- B. Substantive appeals shall be referred to an ad hoc committee consisting of three members of the graduate faculty familiar with the materials of the examination, but not the original readers or members of the Graduate Committee. One person shall be appointed by the Graduate Committee, one by the student in consultation with their adviser, and one by the EGSA Executive Committee. The ad hoc committee shall evaluate the disputed examination, without access to the original readers' comments or grades, and make appropriate recommendations to the Graduate Committee within two weeks of receiving the case. The final consideration of these recommendations shall be the responsibility of the Graduate Committee, which shall sustain or deny the appeal within two weeks of receiving the recommendation.

### III. Appeal Procedures in Cases of Termination for a Student in the Program.

Probation or termination recommendations may be made under the following conditions:

a) violations of the “[Student Code of Conduct](#),” b) failure to establish or maintain a supervisory committee, c) failure to satisfy “Scholastic Grade Requirements” listed in the Graduate Bulletin, d) failure in comprehensive examinations or final degree examinations, e) failure to master the methodology and content of one’s field in a manner that is sufficient to complete a successful dissertation.

- A. Termination proceedings begin with the Graduate Chair. After consultation with the student’s adviser and the Department Chair, the Graduate Chair may decide to initiate termination proceedings. The Graduate Chair requests termination from the Dean of Graduate Studies in a letter that must be copied to the student. Final authority for terminating a graduate student’s program rests with the Dean of Graduate Studies. Should the Dean of Graduate Studies grant the department’s termination request, the student will be notified in written form and given 30 days to initiate the appeal of this decision by submitting a written statement. The appeal process begins in the department.
- B. As per the Graduate Bulletin, appeals must be based on one of the following criteria:
  1. New evidence that might alter the original decision.
  2. Evidence that the original decision was based on inaccurate or inadequate data.
  3. Evidence that the Graduate Chair acted capriciously or in an unfair or discriminatory way in reaching the original decision.
- C. At this point, the chair of the English Department Appeals Committee will be notified. This person will henceforth serve as the student’s advocate throughout the appeals process, providing guidance and advice. If they wish, the student may request an alternative advocate. The Department Chair may appoint an alternative instead of the Appeals Committee Chair.
- D. There are two routes for appeal, depending on the grounds for termination:
  1. Route One: This route is followed for terminations based on academic grounds such as academic dishonesty or lack of progress.
    - a. The student, with the support of their advocate, will first appeal the Graduate Chair’s decision to their full supervisory committee for reinstatement in their degree program. If the student has not yet established a full advisory committee, the appeals process will go directly to the next level, and begin with the Graduate Committee. Appeals are made in writing. The Graduate Chair and Department Chair will provide the supervisory committee with a full written rationale for the termination decision. The student will also provide the Supervisory Committee with a written statement of appeal, based on one or more of the grounds for appeal listed above in B.
    - b. The Supervisory Committee decision will be determined by the majority opinion. Dissenting members of the committee may submit a minority report.
    - c. A majority decision to reinstate will move the appeals process to the next level, should the Graduate Chair wish to continue the process. Should the Graduate Chair decline to continue the process they will withdraw

the termination request and notify the Office of Graduate Studies of that decision.

d. A majority decision to uphold the termination will move the appeals process to the next level, should the student wish to continue the process.

e. If the Supervisory Committee decision is deadlocked, the appeal will move to the next level.

f. Once a decision is reached, the Supervisory Committee must provide both the student and the Graduate Chair a written statement with their decision, vote numbers, and rationale. Should the process proceed to the next level, a copy of this document will be provided to the Graduate Committee.

2. Route Two: This route is followed for terminations based on other violations of the Graduate Bulletin and/or Student Code of Conduct.
    - a. The student, with the support of their advocate, will first appeal the Graduate Chair's decision to the Graduate Committee. That process is detailed in the following section.
  3. The second level of appeal is to the full Graduate Committee, including the graduate student representative but excluding the Graduate Chair. Members who feel unable to make an impartial assessment of the case may recuse themselves, and the Chair of the English Department may appoint (a) temporary replacement(s). As with the previous level of appeal, the student, with the support of their advocate, will appeal in writing on the grounds specified in B. The Graduate Chair will provide the Graduate Committee with a full written rationale for the termination decision.
    - a. The Graduate Committee decision will be determined by the majority opinion.
    - b. A decision to reinstate will result in the withdrawal of the Graduate Chair's termination request and notification of the Office of Graduate Studies of that decision.
    - c. A decision to uphold the termination will move the appeals process to the next level, should the student wish to continue the process. At this point, the Graduate Chair will notify the Office of Graduate Studies that the departmental appeals process has concluded.
    - d. In either case, the Graduate Committee must provide both the student and the Graduate Chair a written statement with their decision and rationale. If the committee decides to reinstate, the statement will be placed in the student's file. If the committee decides to uphold the termination, the statement will be forwarded to the Office of Graduate Studies.
  4. The final level of appeal is to the Graduate Council for the campus administratively responsible for the student's graduate program. In most cases, this is the final level of appeal. See the Graduate Catalog/ Graduate Student Program Appeals for more: <https://catalog.unl.edu/graduate-professional/graduate/degrees/termination/termination.pdf>.
- E. In addition to submitting a written statement as specified section D above, the student

and the student's advocate may submit to the Supervisory and/or Graduate Committees additional documentation to support one of the appeals criteria listed in section B.

- F. The appeal will be considered as soon as possible after the written appeal has been submitted, and decisions by all committees will be made in a timely manner.