

# RHETORIC AND WRITING GRADUATE PROGRAM

Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures  
Michigan State University



## HANDBOOK

2020-2021

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A **star** indicates particularly important information.



A **document icon** indicates that a related form or a worksheet or guide exists (available for reference in the appendices area of this handbook and online at <http://wrac.msu.edu>).

## SECTION 1.

### Welcome to the Program

The graduate programs in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures (WRAC) were founded in 2002 as an independent Rhetoric and Writing (RW) Program in the College of Arts and Letters (CAL). We mark our formal beginnings in Fall 2003, when our first five RW PhD students and seven Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing (DRPW) MA students began their studies at MSU. Since that time, the program—and our national reputation—has quickly grown.

In 2004, the English department's Critical Studies in the Teaching of English (CSTE) program joined us and became the Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy (CSLP) MA and PhD concentration. In 2010 we joined the WRAC department. Today, the graduate programs include two MA degree programs—CSLP and DRPW—and the PhD in Rhetoric and Writing.

**As a community of about 50 diverse graduate students and nearly 20 diverse and interdisciplinary graduate program faculty, we work together to create knowledge that will contribute to Michigan State University's mission, change our discipline, and transform the world in which we live.**

Our programs aim to provide a creative and energetic environment for research and teaching in rhetoric and writing. We offer a broad array of curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular, and community engagement opportunities, and a nationally renowned faculty who enjoy working with students as they become our colleagues and peers.

We have strong interdisciplinary ties to other programs and research centers at MSU, especially to African American and African Studies; American Indian Studies; Asian Pacific American Studies; Chicano/Latina Studies; Cultural Heritage Informatics; Digital Humanities; the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum; MATRIX (The Center for Humane Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences Online); the MSU Museum; the Native American Institute; the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities (RCAH); the Center for Gender in a Global Context (GenCen); the Writing Center; and the HUB for Innovation in Learning and Technology.

Our programs offer students a unique academic space to explore scholarly, intellectual, and pedagogical pathways in/outside the traditionally understood provenance of rhetoric and composition studies. Because encouraging these kinds of risks requires a strong supportive network of colleagues and mentors, we work hard to provide an intellectual community that seeks out and welcomes all individuals and that openly makes space for the broadest possible spectrum of diversity across categories of age, life experience, gender, abilities, race, ethnicity, class, religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, and geographic identification.

We are excited about the possibilities that arise from each cohort's arrival in the program. We know that each of you has something important to contribute to our intellectual community and to the future of our discipline.

As you can probably tell, after more than 15 years, our programs are thriving. Collectives, research clusters, and writing groups are constantly being formed to promote collaborative scholarship among students and between faculty and students. These collaborations have resulted in dozens of conference presentations (and other speaking engagements), workshops, grant proposals, articles, book chapters, and books.

Many members of our community have graduated and moved on to public-, private- and university employment; to work with nonprofits and with industry; and to other graduate programs. As we look forward to our future as a program, we remain invested in building and maintaining a visionary, innovative space for knowledge-making—a process of reflection and revision that always includes graduate student input and innovation.

## What We Expect of You

A **willingness and eagerness to *learn***. The capacity and ability to engage the processes of learning: Doing the readings, wrestling with difficult concepts, bringing your questions to class with you to share and discuss, supporting others as they negotiate difficult concepts, etc.

**Kindness, generosity, and care.** We *make* community every day in our interactions with one another. The professional relationships you make and networks you build in the RW program will last the rest of your career. We believe kindness, generosity, and care are hallmarks of collegiality.

An **appreciation of the diversity of and in our programs.** Again, we work hard to provide an intellectual community that seeks out and welcomes all individuals and that openly makes space for the broadest possible spectrum of diversity across categories of age, life experience, gender, abilities, race, ethnicity, class, religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, and geographic identification.

## What You Can Expect of Us

Rigorous, challenging, and supportive experiences in your coursework, your assistantships, and across your professional development.

Thoughtful, attentive listening—to concerns, questions, issues, and needs.

Active support in helping you find the resources and support that you need within the program, the college, and the university.

Engaged professionalization support, from understanding rhetoric and composition studies, to finding your scholarly foothold, to sharing your work with the field and beyond.

And, per the Guidelines for Graduate Mentoring and Advising from the MSU Grad School (<https://grad.msu.edu/msu-guidelines-graduate-student-mentoring-advising>), the RW program will:

- create explicit expectations and transparent policies consistent with MSU policies (e.g., maintaining an updated, online Graduate Handbook that follows the Graduate School Handbook Template and academic unit requirements for degree completion);
- enable graduate students to make timely progress in their degree programs by ensuring that required courses and examinations are scheduled in a timely manner;
- provide opportunities for networking and expanding career and professional development (e.g., organizing speaker series, colloquia, and other formal and informal events);
- ensure opportunities for graduate students to become familiar with the various forms of scholarship in the field whether it be with their disciplinary research, teaching or outreach;
- sharing responsibility with guidance committees and faculty advisors for fostering the professional and career development of graduate students (e.g., providing venues for honing professional writing and presentation skills, grants writing, publishing);
- ensure that regular progress checks are provided for students (including annual written evaluations)
- provide education in research ethics and integrity
- recognize and reward excellence in mentoring—by faculty and by graduate student colleagues—and identify opportunities for professional development so that faculty and students can improve their mentoring skills and abilities; and
- connect faculty to a broader community of support by sharing information about MSU and Graduate School resources that can support them in mentoring graduate student.



## SECTION 2.

### What's New in this Edition

The only significant revision to this version of the handbook is the inclusion of the Graduate School mentoring and advising recommendations in Section 1.

A few important reminders include:

1. All graduate students are required to complete the **Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)** program, which requires *all* graduate students to achieve specific research-related training and milestones annually and upon degree completion. That training and those milestones are described in section 7.6 of this handbook and in Appendices C and R; know, too, that students will begin work on these requirements in WRA 885 (PhD students) and WRA 886 (MA students).
2. PhD students are required to use the electronic **GradPlan** system. GradPlan initiation should happen toward the end of your first year, and GradPlan completion is required *before* your degree can be conferred. More details can be found in Appendix S.
3. The **appendices** to this handbook provide important program forms and helpful worksheets and guides.



Forms, worksheets, and guides are referenced in the body of the handbook with a document icon.

These forms are for reference only! Word and PDF versions of the forms are available on the WRAC web site (<http://wrac.msu.edu>).

4. For discussion and detail about expectations, mandatory reporting, and a context of care in the program. See, especially, the welcome section of the handbook, and also sections 7.5 Mandatory Reporting, Discrimination, and Harassment and section 8.5 Conflicts and Grievances.
5. Most MSU faculty are on “academic-year” contracts, meaning that we are under contract and receive paychecks from August 16–May 16. Many of us are available to meet and to support your work during the summer, but we do ask that, if possible, you arrange your milestones to avoid the month of July entirely. Faculty also have limited availability generally from June 15–31 and August 1–15.
6. Each graduate program at MSU is distinct, and most have their own cultures, policies, procedures, and expectations. Although we invite students to connect, network, work with, and perhaps invite outside-department faculty onto their advisory/guidance committees, **we require MA and PhD students in the Rhetoric and Writing graduate program to identify advisory/guidance committee chairs from the Rhetoric and Writing program.** This is described in section 8.3.



## SECTION 3.

# MA in Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy (CSLP)

### 3.1 Program Overview

The Master of Arts degree program in Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy is designed for two audiences: 1) individuals who wish to continue to doctoral work in rhetoric and writing, and 2) individuals who wish to teach or to do literacy work in community organizations, including community colleges.

The goal of the program is to prepare teachers and researchers in the field of composition and rhetoric or in community literacy. The program emphasizes the teaching and learning of language and literacy in multiple contexts and multiple modes (including print, digital, and visual), as well as research in these areas. Central to the program's emphasis is the critical examination of diversity as it impacts the teaching of rhetoric, writing, and literacy; the democratization of the classroom; the role of language and schooling in society at large; and the politics of language, literacy, and culture.

The program is available with two concentration areas:

- The **Rhetoric and Writing** concentration is specifically designed for individuals who want to prepare for advanced graduate study (i.e., doctoral work) in writing and rhetoric studies.
- The **Community Teaching and Literacy** concentration is specifically designed for individuals who wish to teach or to do literacy work in community organizations, including community colleges.

### 3.2 Thesis, Portfolio, and Exam Options

Students may complete the MA in CSLP with either Plan A (with thesis) or Plan B (without thesis; portfolio or exam). A total of 31 credits are required for the degree under either plan. The student's program of study must be approved by the program director.



Each student is required to determine their path of program completion during their first annual review meeting (see section 6.15). All three completion options require planning: Students pursuing a thesis will prepare a prospectus (see section 3.6.3.). Students pursuing a portfolio will prepare a proposal or plan (see section 3.7.1); students pursuing the exam option will prepare a plan (see section 3.7.2).



See Appendix O for a helpful ideal MA timeline you can use to map milestones and plan your work in the program.

### 3.3 Course Requirements

#### Requirements for Both Plan A and Plan B:

##### Core coursework (7 credits):

- WRA 878 Composition Studies: Issues, Theory, and Research (3 cr)
- WRA 888 Methods in the Teaching of College-Level Writing (3 cr)
- WRA 886 Master's Research Colloquium (1 cr)

##### Requirements for Rhetoric and Writing Concentration (18–21 credits):

###### Theory or History. *One of the following courses (3 cr):*

- WRA 805 Rhetoric History and Theory
- WRA 882 Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric

###### Methodology. *One of the following courses (3 cr):*

- WRA 870 Research Methodologies in Rhetoric and Composition
- WRA 872 Methods of Research in Rhetoric and Writing

###### Electives. *Select from the following (12–15 cr; each course is 3 credits unless indicated otherwise):*

- WRA 805 Rhetoric History and Theory
- WRA 882 Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric
- AL 881 Teaching with Technology
- WRA 860 Multimodal Composing Theory and Practice
- WRA 853 Workshop in Rhetoric and Writing
- WRA 891 Special topics
- WRA 848 Cultural Rhetorics
- WRA 877 Community Literacy
- WRA 992 Seminar in Literacy Studies
- Approved Courses in TE, AL, ENG, or LLT (limit: 6 cr)

##### Requirements for Community Teaching and Literacy Concentration (18–21 credits):

###### Community Literacy. *One of the following courses (3 cr):*

- WRA 877 Community Literacy
- WRA 992 Seminar in Literacy Studies



**Methodology.** One of the following courses (3 cr):

WRA 870 Research Methodologies in Rhetoric and Composition

WRA 872 Methods of Research in Rhetoric and Writing

**Electives.** Select from the following (12–15 cr; each course is 3 credits unless indicated otherwise):

WRA 860 Multimodal Composing Theory and Practice

WRA 841 Professional Writing Theory and Research

WRA 415 Digital Rhetorics

WRA 453 Grant and Proposal Writing

WRA 805 Rhetoric History and Theory

WRA 882 Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric

WRA 889 Writing Center Theory and Practice

WRA 891 Special topics

WRA 980 Special topics

WRA 893 Internship

Approved Courses in TE, AL, ENG, or LLT (Limit: 6 credits)

#### **Additional Requirements for Plan A**

Thesis prospectus. WRA 899 Master's Thesis (4–6 credits). Pass an oral certifying examination in defense of the thesis and on the course work (see section 3.6).

#### **Additional Requirements for Plan B**

Complete an additional 3 credits of coursework from the list of electives above in consultation with the student's advisory committee. Present a final portfolio (see 3.7.1) or pass an examination (see section 3.7.2).

### **3.4 Advising**

#### **3.4.1 Initial Advising**

In their first year in the MA program, all CSLP MA students will be advised by the CSLP advisor until they choose an advisory committee in the spring semester of their first year.

#### **3.4.2 MA Advisory Committee**

By the second semester of MA study (typically, by March 15 of the spring semester), all CSLP MA students must form an advisory committee.

The advisory committee consists of three faculty affiliated with the WRAC graduate program, two of whom must be instructors in the CSLP program. One of these faculty members should be designated as chair. The Advisory Committee is formalized by filing the Report of the Graduate Committee (RoGC) with the WRAC graduate director.



See Appendix A for the MA Report of the Guidance Committee (RoGC) form.

The advisory committee does the following:

- makes recommendations regarding the student's course of study, including required coursework;
- files the student's Annual Progress Report, Part B (the student is responsible for Part A);
- reviews the student's professional portfolio at the end of each year of study;
- provides a written formative evaluation of the student's work and progress each year; and
- serves as the thesis committee for Plan A students, guiding and evaluating the student's thesis project; or
- serves as the committee of the certifying portfolio or exam for Plan B students.

The student may make changes in their advisory committee at any time and for any reason via a committee change form filed with the WRAC graduate director.



See Appendix D for the committee makeup change form.

Once the student submits a Report of the Graduate Committee (which lists the advisory committee chair and members), the chair of the student's advisory committee becomes the student's advisor.

Students should consult regularly with their advisors—meaning at a minimum of two or three times per year (or more often if circumstances warrant). Students who fail to form an advisory committee by the end of their first year are considered to not be making satisfactory progress. (See section 6, Academic Performance Standards and Annual Review.)

### 3.5 Year-end Report of Accomplishments and Annual Review

Each year, every CSLP MA student must complete a year-end report that focuses on the accomplishments of the previous calendar year. In late December of each year, the WRAC graduate director sends out the form link for Part A of that year's report.

Student responses to Part A are due in mid-January. Every student **must** complete the report survey to be considered in good standing and to be eligible for summer and travel funding.



See section 6.15 Annual Review for detailed discussion of the purpose and process of the annual review.



During the student's first annual review, at the end of the first year in the program, the meeting should also address whether the student is going to pursue Plan A (thesis) or Plan B for degree completion. More information about each option is included below.

This portfolio can serve both as the annual review portfolio and as the basis for the certifying exam portfolio, depending on the student's year in the program.

## 3.6 MA Plan A Thesis

### 3.6.1 Overview

Those Master's students electing Plan A:

- inform their advisory committee chair of that intention no later than the semester prior to writing the thesis;
- prepare a short prospectus (3–5 double-spaced pages, or the equivalent, plus a short bibliography) for the thesis project, in consultation with their chair;
- present the prospectus to the entire advisory committee during the semester before the student plans to finish the thesis, for the committee's approval;
- complete at least 4 credits of AL 899 Master's Thesis Research, usually taken at the end of the MA coursework while writing the thesis;
- complete a thesis (typically 50–100 pages), which (a) is a substantial piece of research or scholarship, (b) shows specific knowledge within the field, (c) shows understanding of the field, and (d) is of publishable quality;
- schedule an oral presentation and defense of that thesis before the advisory committee, which must pass it as a final certifying exam; and
- file the thesis (the thesis must be prepared in accordance with the specifications provided by the Graduate School; see section 8.13 for more information).



During this process (ideally early in this process), the student may decide to replace one or more of the members of the advisory committee so as to suit the planned thesis topic.

### 3.6.2 WRA 899 Master's Thesis Research

Plan A requires students to complete 4 credits of WRA 899. According to university policy, students may enroll in this course for



1–6 credits at a time (for up to 15 credits). We encourage students to take these all at once, but they may be spread out over more than one semester.

### 3.6.3 Master's Thesis Preparation and Process

#### Stage 1. Preparation and Planning

Preparation will vary depending on the scope of the thesis topic; initial discussion of the focus may involve advisory committee members, but especially the chair. Discussion could include samples of coursework or informal ideas.

Planning should involve:

- deciding the semester(s) in which to enroll for WRA 899 credits;
- any additional courses that may be relevant to the thesis topic;
- an outline;
- a schedule for drafting, consultation with the chair, and time for feedback; and
- discussion with colleagues.

Students who are producing a thesis in a format other than traditional print should:

- Compose a written project synopsis, which can resemble a thesis chapter or take a different shape. The project synopsis should address some or all of the following issues: theoretical framework for the project; methodology; rationale for making the project in its particular medium; argument for the need of this project in our field; and a discussion of other projects in the field that it complements/competes with.
- Create a plan for preservation of the artifact they produce. In considering how their thesis project can be preserved for future viewings, interactions or uses, students may want to create a written preservation rationale.

#### Stage 2. Research and Drafting

While doing research and drafting the project, students work primarily with their chair. It's crucial to stay in regular contact with the chair, providing intermittent progress reports, asking questions, and meeting for discussion as needed or scheduled. It's also crucial to discuss with the chair how to handle revisions and relevant types of feedback.

#### Stage 3. Completion

The student works with the advisory committee chair to draft and revise sections of the project. The chair approves the sections for



release to the other committee members for review and feedback. This helps to make the best use of everyone's time and energy.

#### **Stage 4. Oral Defense**

Once a final version of the thesis has been approved, the student schedules the oral exam. The exam will focus not only on the thesis, but also on the student's coursework. The candidate may prepare questions for the oral exam in collaboration with the chair. Typically the candidate makes a brief presentation of the thesis to the committee before the questioning.

As a conversation between peers meant to further the candidate's work and thinking, the defense should remain a small event that allows for the kind of interaction between the candidate and guidance committee members that provides the most value to the candidate as they continue their educational and professional trajectories.

Having more than a few non-committee members at a defense can be intimidating to both the candidate and guidance committee members and can substantially shift the tone of the defense from one of intellectual support and guidance to sheer performance, making it impossible for a candidate to have a productive, useful defense meeting with their committee where everyone's attention is on helping the candidate move forward with the project—the last such group meeting that the program provides.

Because a public performance/showing/sharing could serve a different—and differently helpful—purpose than the defense, if a candidate desires a public performance/showing/sharing/installation of their thesis work, it must be held separate the defense meeting. Consistent with the purpose of this policy, candidates who decide to host a separate, more public event are not required to invite guidance committee members to the event nor are guidance committee members required to attend this public event.

## **3.7 MA Plan B Options**

### **3.7.1 Portfolio**

The purpose of the certifying portfolio is to enable CSLP MA candidates to present a portfolio of materials articulating and illustrating a coherent understanding of the major issues in Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy, integrating a range of topics from composition studies to reading theories to language/literacy considerations and other related disciplinary and/or professional issues.

#### **Program Philosophy about Portfolios**

In this program, we view portfolios as important for helping students develop professional knowledge and expertise about their core field





and areas of specialization. Portfolios are designed to help students review, assimilate, synthesize, and reflect on their knowledge and learning at a more advanced, professional level of understanding than individual courses typically achieve. Portfolios show the student's ability to reflect on and synthesize knowledge gained; to develop new knowledge and expertise; and to present knowledge and to advance an argument within the field at large, not simply for an individual instructor

The MA Plan B portfolio is based on the required coursework for the MA in CSLP, plus other significant elective coursework the student has taken to complete their program of study. The portfolio may also contain, as appropriate and illustrative, materials, artifacts, and commentary based on non-course activities and professional development (e.g., conference presentations given, workshop materials developed).

The portfolio will be reviewed and either approved or denied by the student's advisory committee. The portfolio consists of two parts:

1. A portfolio that contains five representative essays or projects created during the student's time in the CSLP program. One essay/piece should come from **either** WRA 878 **or** WRA 888 or WRA 992.
2. From the five pieces of work selected for the portfolio and in the context of their overall experiences in the program, students will write a reflective essay (8-10 double-spaced pages) demonstrating an integrated and coherent understanding of and reflection on issues, questions, and/or concerns related to the field and the expertise developed in the CSLP program.

### Schedule

1. Ideally, the student identifies the portfolio as their certifying completion of the MA program by the end of their first academic year in the program, and with their committee during their annual review meeting.
2. By the start of the following fall semester, the student should have worked with their committee chair to develop a plan for portfolio development, including moments for sharing the draft essay for feedback prior to turning in the portfolio, which is usually completed during the student's final semester in the program.
3. The student will submit their certifying portfolio 2 weeks before a pre-arranged final meeting/defense with their advisory committee.



## Evaluation

The candidate's certifying portfolio will be evaluated by the candidate's advisory committee prior to the pre-arranged final meeting/defense. At this meeting, the student will provide some opening comments about the portfolio and their work; the committee will pose questions and engage the student in a discussion about the portfolio and its contents; and the committee will offer feedback and address any questions the student has.

### 3.7.2 Exam

The purpose of the certifying portfolio is to enable CSLP MA candidates to present a portfolio of materials articulating and illustrating a coherent understanding of the major issues in Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy.

The purpose of the certifying exam is to enable CSLP MA candidates to present a set of essays that articulate a coherent understanding of the major issues in Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy, integrating topics from composition studies to reading theories to language/literacy considerations and other related disciplinary and/or professional issues.

### Program Philosophy about Exams

In this program, we view exams as important for helping students develop professional knowledge and expertise about their core field and areas of specialization. Exams are designed to help students review, assimilate, synthesize, and reflect on their knowledge and learning at a more advanced, professional level of understanding than individual courses typically achieve. Exams show the student's ability to reflect on and synthesize knowledge gained; to develop new knowledge and expertise; and to present knowledge and to advance an argument within the field at large, not simply for an individual instructor.

The MA Plan B exam is based on the required coursework for the MA in CSLP, plus other significant elective coursework the student has taken to complete their program of study. The exam product is two essays.

### Schedule

1. Ideally, the student identifies the exam as their certifying completion of the MA program by the end of their first academic year in the program, and with their committee during their annual review meeting.
2. During fall semester of the student's second year, the student develops, in coordination with their advisory chair



and committee, a list of 4–6 topics, issues, or questions arising from the MA core coursework on which to be examined. The topics should show that the student is making connections across and between the core courses.

3. Two months in advance of taking the exam, the student schedules the examination with the advisory committee.
4. Using the final, revised list of topics, issues, or questions, the advisory committee identifies three questions and sends them to the student.
5. Upon receiving the questions, the student selects two of the three options to which to respond. The responses should be limited to 10 double-spaced pages (or the equivalent) per response, including full bibliographical references. The student may consult notes, electronic materials, print readings (e.g., journals, books, etc.) in preparing their responses. The student may not consult directly with other people, nor seek personal help in preparing the exam responses.
6. One week (7 calendar days) after receiving the exam questions, the student submits their response to their guidance committee chair and to the graduate program secretary.

### **Evaluation**

The candidate's certifying exam will be evaluated by the candidate's advisory committee, with results reported within 2 weeks after submission. A committee meeting or formal defense is not necessary for an exam, but the student may request a meeting with their committee to address questions, discuss the exam essays, etc. See section 6.12 for details on exam assessment.

## **3.8 Transfer Credits**

Up to 9 credits may be transferred to the MA program from other accredited institutions, with the approval of the WRAC graduate director. Students who have taken coursework in the program through Lifelong Education may transfer up to 9 credits, with the approval of the director, once they are accepted into the regular degree program.



### **3.9 Petitioning for Course Waiver or Substitution**

It is possible to waive one of the course requirements or to substitute a different course for one of the requirements in the MA CSLP program.

It might not be necessary to take a course required by the program if a student has already taken comparable coursework. For example, a cross-listed undergraduate/graduate course in composition studies completed as part of a bachelor's degree might allow the WRA 878

requirement to be waived. When a requirement is waived, there is no credit transfer for the course; in other words, it is a course waiver, not a credit transfer. The student must still complete the required number of credits for the degree, usually by taking a 3-credit elective in place of the required MSU course.

To request a waiver, a memo must be submitted to the director of the graduate program, detailing the request and explaining the rationale for the waiver or substitution. The petition must include copies of the syllabus and reading lists for the course(s). The director will review the request with the graduate committee.

### **3.10 Time Limit for Program**

Completion of the MA must occur within 6 years of entering the program. The clock starts ticking the semester of the first class that is counted toward the degree.



## SECTION 4.

# MA in Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing (DRPW)

### 4.1 Program Overview

The MA in Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing (DRPW) serves both as a professional degree for students interested in a technical/professional writing career track and as a preparatory degree for PhD-level work in rhetoric, writing, communication studies, media studies, or technical communication. Designed for completion in a minimum of 2 years, this program provides students with a theoretically grounded yet practical experience in technical/professional writing, with a special focus on designing writing for digital environments.

### 4.2 Thesis, Portfolio, and Exam

Students may complete the MA in DRPW with either Plan A (with thesis) or Plan B (without thesis; portfolio or exam). A total of 31 credits are required for the degree under either plan. The student's program of study must be approved by the program director.

Each student is required to determine their path of program completion during their first annual review meeting (see section 6.15). All three completion options require planning: Students pursuing a thesis will prepare a prospectus (see section 4.6). Students pursuing a portfolio will prepare a proposal or plan; students pursuing the exam option will prepare a plan (see section 4.7).



See Appendix O for a helpful ideal MA timeline you can use to map milestones and plan your work in the program.

### 4.3 Course Requirements

#### Requirements for Both Plan A and Plan B

##### Core Coursework (13 credits):

WRA 415 Digital Rhetoric

WRA 420 Content Management for Professional Writers

WRA 841 Professional Writing Theory and Research

WRA 882 Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric



With the approval of the director and the major advisor, WRA 805 or another theory course may be substituted.

WRA 886 Master's Research Colloquium

**Two of the following courses (6 credits):**

WRA 410 Advanced Web Authoring

WRA 852 Portfolio Workshop or WRA 890 Independent Study

WRA 893B Internship in Professional Writing

**A minimum of 6 additional credits from the following list** (each course is 3 credits unless indicated otherwise):

WRA 410 Advanced Web Authoring

WRA 425 Multimedia Writing

WRA 453 Grant and Proposal Writing

WRA 482 Information and Interaction Design

WRA 848 Cultural Rhetorics

WRA 853 Workshop in Rhetoric and Writing

WRA 860 Multimodal Composing Theory and Practice

WRA 872 Methods of Research in Rhetoric and Writing

WRA 877 Community Literacy

WRA 878 Composition Studies: Issues, Theory, and Research

AL 881 Teaching with Technology

WRA 882 Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric

WRA 889 Writing Center Theory and Practice

WRA 893B Internship in Professional Writing

WRA 898 Master's Research (1–3 cr)

WRA 992 Seminar in Literacy Studies

ENG 991A Topics in English Language Studies

LIN 437 Semantics and Pragmatics or LIN 837 Advanced Studies in Semantics and Pragmatics

LIN 471 Sociolinguistics or LIN 871 Advanced Studies in Sociolinguistics



Completion of WRA 410, WRA 852 or portfolio-focused independent study, and WRA 893B may **not** count towards both requirements 2 and 3.

**Additional Requirements for Plan A**

Thesis prospectus. WRA 899 Master's Thesis Research (4–6 credits). Pass a final oral certifying exam on the thesis and coursework.

**Additional Requirements for Plan B (6 credits)**

Complete an additional 6 credits of coursework from the list of electives above in consultation with the student's advisory committee. Present a final certifying portfolio or pass an examination (see section 4.7).



## 4.4 Advising

### 4.4.1 Initial Advising

In the first year in the MA program, all DRPW MA students will be advised by the DRPW advisor until they establish an advisory committee.

### 4.4.2 MA Advisory Committee

By the second semester of MA study (typically, by March 15 of the spring semester), all DRPW MA students must form an advisory committee.

The advisory committee consists of three faculty affiliated with the WRAC graduate program, two of whom must be instructors in the DRPW program. One of these faculty members should be designated as chair. The Advisory Committee is formalized by filing the Report of the Advisory Committee with the WRAC graduate director.



See Appendix A for the MA Report of the Guidance Committee (RoGC) form.

The advisory committee does the following:

- makes recommendations regarding the student's course of study, including required coursework,
- files the student's Annual Progress Report, Part B (the student is responsible for Part A);
- reviews the student's professional portfolio at the end of each year of study,
- provides a written formative evaluation of the student's work and progress each year, and
- serves as the thesis committee for Plan A students, guiding and evaluating the student's thesis project, or
- serves as the review committee for the certifying portfolio or exam for Plan B students.

The student may make changes in their advisory committee via a committee change form filed with the WRAC graduate director.



See Appendix D for the committee makeup change form.

Once the student submits a Report of the Advisory Committee (which lists the advisory committee chair and committee members), the chair of the student's advisory committee becomes the student's advisor. Students should consult regularly with their



advisors—meaning at a minimum of two or three times per year (or more often if circumstances warrant). Students who fail to form an advisory committee by the end of their first year are considered as not making satisfactory progress (see section 6).

## 4.5 Year-end Report of Accomplishments and Annual Review

Each year, every DRPW MA student must complete a year-end report that focuses on the accomplishments of the previous calendar year. In late December of each year, the WRAC graduate director sends out the form link for Part A of that year's report.

Student responses to Part A are due in mid-January. Every student **must** complete the report survey to be considered in good standing and to be eligible for summer and travel funding.

See section 6.15 Annual Review for detailed discussion of the purpose and process of the annual review.



During the student's first annual review, at the end of the first year in the program, the meeting should also address whether the student is going to pursue Plan A (thesis) or Plan B for degree completion. More information about each option is included below, in sections 4.6 and 4.7.

This portfolio can serve both as the annual review portfolio and as the basis for the certifying exam portfolio, depending on the student's year in the program.

## 4.6 MA Plan A Thesis

### 4.6.1 Overview

Those Master's students electing Plan A:

- inform their advisory committee chair of that intention during the semester prior to writing the thesis;
- prepare a short prospectus (3–5 double-spaced pages, or the equivalent, plus a short bibliography) for the thesis project, in consultation with their chair;
- present the prospectus to the entire advisory committee during the semester before the student plans to finish the thesis, for the committee's approval;
- complete 4 credits of WRA 899 Master's Thesis Research, usually taken at the end of the MA coursework while writing the thesis;
- complete a thesis (typically 50–100 pages), which (a) is a substantial piece of research or scholarship, (b) shows





specific knowledge within the field, (c) shows understanding of the field, and (d) is of publishable quality;

- schedule an oral presentation and defense of that thesis before the advisory committee, which must pass it as a final certifying exam.
- file the thesis (see section 8.14 for more information).



During this process (ideally early in this process), the student may decide to replace one or more of the members of the advisory committee so as to suit the planned thesis topic. The student primarily works with the chair to draft, develop, and revise the thesis project.

#### 4.6.2 WRA 899 Master's Thesis Research

Plan A requires students to complete 4 credits of WRA 899. According to university policy, students may enroll in this course for 1–6 credits at a time (for up to 15 credits). We encourage students to take these all at once, but they may be spread out over more than one semester.

#### 4.6.3 Master's Thesis Preparation and Process

##### Stage 1. Preparation and Planning

Preparation will vary depending on the scope of the thesis topic; initial discussion of the focus may involve advisory committee members, but especially the chair. Discussion could include samples of coursework or informal ideas. Planning should involve:

- deciding the semester(s) in which to enroll for WRA 899 credits;
- any additional courses that may be relevant to the thesis topic;
- an outline;
- a schedule for drafting, consultation with the chair, and time for feedback; and
- discussion with colleagues.

Students who are producing a thesis in a format other than traditional print should:

- Compose a written project synopsis, which can resemble a thesis chapter or take a different shape. The project synopsis should address some or all of the following issues: theoretical framework for the project; methodology; rationale for making the project in its particular medium; argument for the need of this project in our field; and a discussion of other projects in the field that it complements/competes with.



- Create a plan for preservation of the artifact they produce. In considering how their thesis project can be preserved for future viewings, interactions or uses, students may want to create a written preservation rationale.

### **Stage 2. Research and Drafting**

While doing research and drafting the project, students work primarily with their chair. It's crucial to stay in regular contact with the chair, providing intermittent progress reports, asking questions, and meeting for discussion as needed or scheduled. It's also crucial to discuss with the chair how to handle revisions and relevant types of feedback.

### **Stage 3. Completion**

The student works with the advisory committee chair to draft and revise sections of the project. The chair approves the sections for release to the other committee members for review and feedback. This helps to make the best use of everyone's time and energy.

### **Stage 4. Oral Defense**

When a final version of the thesis has been approved, the student schedules the oral exam/defense. The exam will focus not only on the thesis, but also on the student's coursework. The candidate may prepare questions for the oral exam in collaboration with the chair. Typically the candidate makes a brief presentation of the thesis to the committee before the questioning.

As a conversation between peers meant to further the candidate's work and thinking, the defense should remain a small event that allows for the kind of interaction between the candidate and guidance committee members that provides the most value to the candidate as they continue their educational and professional trajectories.

Having more than a few non-committee members at a defense can be intimidating to both the candidate and guidance committee members and can substantially shift the tone of the defense from one of intellectual support and guidance to sheer performance, making it impossible for a candidate to have a productive, useful defense meeting with their committee where everyone's attention is on helping the candidate move forward with the project—the last such group meeting that the program provides.

Because a public performance/showing/-sharing could serve a different—and differently helpful—purpose than the defense, if a candidate desires a public performance/showing/sharing/installation of their thesis work, it must be held separate the defense meeting. Consistent with the purpose of this policy, candidates who decide to host a separate, more public event are not required to invite guidance committee members to the event nor are guidance committee members required to attend this public event.



## 4.7 MA Plan B Options

### 4.7.1 Portfolio

The purpose of the certifying portfolio is to enable DRPW MA candidates to present a portfolio of materials that articulating and illustrating a coherent understanding of the major issues in Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing, integrating a range of topics from technical and professional writing studies and related subfields.

#### Program Philosophy about Portfolios

In this program, we view portfolios as important for helping students develop professional knowledge and expertise about their core field and areas of specialization. Portfolios are designed to help students review, assimilate, synthesize, and reflect on their knowledge and learning at a more advanced, professional level of understanding than individual courses typically achieve. Portfolios show the student's ability to reflect on and synthesize knowledge gained; to develop new knowledge and expertise; and to present knowledge and to advance an argument within the field at large, not simply for an individual instructor.

The MA Plan B portfolio is based on the required coursework for the MA in DRPW, plus other significant elective coursework the student has taken to complete their program of study. The portfolio may also contain, as appropriate and illustrative, materials, artifacts, and commentary based on non-course activities and professional development (e.g., conference presentations given, workshop materials developed).

The portfolio will be reviewed and either approved or denied by the student's advisory committee. The portfolio consists of two parts:

1. A portfolio that contains five representative essays or projects created during the student's time in the DRPW program. One essay/piece should come from **either** WRA 415 **or** WRA 420; one essay/piece should come from WRA 841.
2. From the five pieces of work selected for the portfolio and in the context of their overall experiences in the program, students will write a reflective essay (8–10 double-spaced pages) demonstrating an integrated and coherent understanding of and reflection on issues, questions, and/or concerns related to the field and the expertise developed in the DRPW program.

#### Schedule

1. Ideally, the student identifies the portfolio as their certifying completion of the MA program by the end of their first



academic year in the program, and with their committee during their annual review meeting.

2. By the start of the following fall semester, the student should have worked with their committee chair to develop a plan for portfolio development, including moments for sharing the draft essay for feedback prior to turning in the portfolio, which is usually completed during the student's final semester in the program.
3. The student will submit their certifying portfolio 2 weeks before a pre-arranged final meeting/defense with their advisory committee.

### **Evaluation**

The candidate's certifying portfolio will be evaluated by the candidate's advisory committee prior to the pre-arranged final meeting/defense. At this meeting, the student will provide some opening comments about the portfolio and their work; the committee will pose questions and engage the student in a discussion about the portfolio and its contents; and the committee will offer feedback and address any questions the student has. See section 6.12 for details on portfolio assessment.

#### **4.7.2 Exam**

The purpose of the certifying exam is to enable DRPW MA candidates to present a set of essays that articulate a coherent understanding of the major issues in Digital Rhetoric and Professional writing, addressing topics from technical and professional writing studies and related subfields.

#### **Program Philosophy about Exams**

In this program we view exams as important for helping students develop professional knowledge and expertise about their core field and areas of specialization. Exams are designed to help students review, assimilate, synthesize, and reflect on their knowledge and learning at a more advanced, professional level of understanding than individual courses typically achieve. Exams show the student's ability to reflect on and synthesize knowledge gained; to develop new knowledge and expertise; and to present knowledge and to advance an argument within the field at large, not simply for an individual instructor.

The MA Plan B exam is based on the required coursework for the MA in DRPW, plus other significant elective coursework the student has taken to complete their program of study. The exam product is two essays.



### Schedule

1. Ideally, the student identifies the exam as their certifying completion of the MA program by the end of their first academic year in the program, and with their committee during their annual review meeting.
2. During fall semester of the student's second year, the student develops, in coordination with their advisory chair and committee, a list of 4–6 topics, issues, or questions arising from the MA core coursework on which to be examined. The topics should show that the student is making connections across and between the core courses.
3. Two months in advance of taking the exam, the student schedules the examination with the advisory committee.
4. Using the final, revised list of topics, issues, or questions, the advisory committee identifies three questions and sends them to the student.
5. Upon receiving the questions, the student selects two of the three options to which to respond. The responses should be limited to 10 double-spaced pages (or the equivalent) per response, including full bibliographical references. The student may consult notes, electronic materials, print readings (e.g., journals, books, etc.) in preparing their responses. The student may not consult directly with other people, nor seek personal help in preparing the exam responses.
6. One week (7 calendar days) after receiving the exam questions, the student submits their response to their committee chair and to the graduate program secretary.

### Evaluation

The candidate's exam will be evaluated by the candidate's advisory committee, with results reported within 2 weeks after submission. A committee meeting or formal defense is not necessary for an exam, but the student may request a meeting with their committee to address questions, discuss the exam contents, etc. See section 6.12 for details on exam assessment.

## 4.8 Transfer Credits

Up to nine credits may be transferred to the MA program from other accredited institutions, with the approval of the WRAC graduate director. Students who have taken coursework in the program through Lifelong Education may transfer up to nine credits, with the approval of the director, once they are accepted into the regular degree program.



## 4.9 Petitioning for Course Waiver or Substitution

It is possible to petition to waive one of the course requirements or to substitute a different course for one of the requirements in the MA DRPW program.

It might not be necessary to take a course required by the program if a student has already taken comparable coursework. For example, a cross-listed undergraduate/graduate course in web authoring, completed as part of a bachelor's degree, might suffice to waive the WRA 410 requirement. When a requirement is waived, there is no credit transfer for the course; in other words, it is a course waiver, not a credit transfer. The student must still complete the required number of credits for the degree, usually by taking a 3-credit elective in place of the required MSU course.

To request a waiver, a memo must be submitted to the director of the graduate program, detailing the request and explaining the rationale for the waiver or substitution. The petition must include copies of the syllabus and reading lists for the course(s). The director will review the request with the graduate committee.

## 4.10 Time Limit for Program

Completion of the MA must occur within 6 years of entering the program. The clock starts ticking the semester of the first class that is counted toward the degree.



## SECTION 5.

# PhD in Rhetoric and Writing

### 5.1 Program Overview

The PhD in Rhetoric and Writing prepares students to study rhetoric and writing as situated, historical practices and to research, develop, and administer a variety of academic, workplace, civic, government, nonprofit, publishing, and digital writing projects. Designed for completion in 4 or 5 years, the degree promotes the critical skills necessary for students to be productive scholars and researchers in rhetoric and writing, and prepares students for faculty and administrative positions in college writing programs.



See Appendix N for a helpful ideal PhD timeline you can use to map milestones and plan your work in the program.

The PhD in Rhetoric and Writing offers a strong common core of courses to build disciplinary knowledge and understanding across the concentration areas.

### 5.2 Core Course Requirements

The PhD consists of a minimum of 27 credits of graduate course work beyond the MA degree, plus a minimum of 24 credits of WRA 999, dissertation research (no more than 36 credits of WRA 999 will be accepted).

Students who enter the PhD program already having taken some of the required core courses as part of their MA program may petition the director to waive their requirement in the doctoral program. No more than 6 credits of 400-level course work will count toward the degree.



Doctoral students who have passed their comprehensive exams (core, concentration, dissertation prospectus) only need to register for one credit to be considered full-time students.

#### All of the following core courses (18 credits):

WRA 805 Rhetoric Theory and History

WRA 870 Research Methodologies in Rhetoric and Writing

WRA 878 Composition Studies: Issues, Theory, and Research

WRA 882 Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric

WRA 885 Research Colloquium

WRA 853 Workshop in Rhetoric and Writing



## 5.3 Concentration Course Requirements

### 5.3.1 Overview

The purpose of the concentration requirement is for PhD students to develop a specialized area of study complementary to their rhetoric and writing degree. A concentration consists of at least nine credits of course work (typically, three courses) in a specialized area at the graduate level.

Every PhD student is required to develop one concentration; however, our experience has shown us that most students do work that crosses and/or combines “official” concentrations. We encourage that creativity and embrace the innovations to our discipline that comes from it.

The following concentrations are currently available to PhD students:

- Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy
- Cultural Rhetorics
- Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing
- self-designed or dual concentration (with guidance committee **and** graduate committee approval)

### 5.3.2 Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy Concentration

The Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy (CSLP) concentration puts coursework in language and literacy, teaching and learning with technology, and research methodology at its center. Each student in CSLP creates a curricular experience that builds from the Rhetoric and Writing core in its requirements, and allows students to carefully choose elective courses relevant to her/his professional goals.



Exception to the Rhetoric and Writing core with the permission of the graduate program director and major advisor: CSLP students may make the following substitutions: TE 835 (Theory and Research on the Teaching of Writing) for WRA 878 (Composition Studies).

**Required for concentration (9 credits):**

#### 1. AL 881 Teaching with Technology



CEP 953 Teachers and Technology, CEP 952 Technology for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, or CEP 916 Technology and K-12 Education may be substituted with the approval of the director and the student’s guidance committee.

#### 2. One course in language, literacy, and culture:

WRA 877 Community Literacy

WRA 992 Seminar in Literacy Studies





**3. One additional course in research methodology:**

CEP 931 Qualitative Methods in Educational Research  
 CEP 932 Quantitative Methods in Educational Research I  
 CEP 955 Research Design and Methods for Learning,  
 Technology, and Culture  
 CEP 930 Educational Inquiry  
 WRA 872 Methods of Research in Rhetoric and Writing  
 ANP 833 Ethnographic Analysis

**Elective for concentration (3–6 credits):**

One or two courses in Reading, Linguistics, Literacy Development, Sociocultural Diversity, Educational Technology, Educational History or Policy, or Teacher Learning (AL, CEP, EAP, TE, ENG, LIN, LLT, or ANP), as approved by the director and the student's guidance committee. For a current listing of possible courses, contact the CSLP advisor.

**5.3.3 Cultural Rhetorics Concentration**

Those working in the field of Cultural Rhetorics understand rhetoric as rooted in cultural practices and cultures as persistently rhetorical. The Cultural Rhetorics concentration is distinctive both in its emphasis on located practices and in its methodological flexibility. It asks students to gain an understanding of at least two kinds of knowledge-making practices (theory, methodology, history, etc.)—those dominant in the discipline of rhetoric and writing and those rooted in specific cultural communities. These specific cultural foci arise from the student's interest and from consultation and discussion with their guidance committee.

While this concentration includes Rhetoric and Writing seminars in areas such as American Indian rhetorics, queer rhetorics, African American rhetorics, Chicano/Latina rhetorics, Asian/Asian American rhetorics, working class rhetorics, etc., it also includes appropriate coursework taken in other inter/disciplinary programs (American Indian Studies, African and African American Studies, Gender Studies, Chicano/Latina Studies, English, History, Anthropology, etc.).

**Required for concentration (3 credits):**

WRA 848 Cultural Rhetorics

**Electives for concentration (6 credits):**

With the advice and approval of their guidance committee, students should assemble at least 6 credit hours in courses appropriate for the Cultural Rhetorics concentration. It is generally expected that students will take advantage of courses offered by Rhetoric and Writing faculty before they search outside of the program and/or college for appropriate concentration coursework.



### 5.3.4 Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing Concentration

The concentration in Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing (DRPW) is intended for students who want to teach and do research in rhetoric and technology, computers and composition, digital media arts and writing, visual rhetoric, technical communication, or professional writing. Students electing this concentration should make sure to develop the advanced technological skills necessary to succeed in this area. (Some students will have these skills entering the program; others may need to take additional coursework to develop those skills.)

#### Required for concentration (6 credits):

WRA 415 Digital Rhetoric

WRA 841 Professional Writing Theory and Research

#### Electives for concentration; one of the following (3 credits):

WRA 410 Advanced Web Authoring

WRA 420 Content Management for Professional Writers

WRA 453 Grant and Proposal Writing

WRA 482 Information and Interaction Design

WRA 860 Multimodal Composing Theory and Practice

WRA 877 Community Literacy

WRA 893B Internship in Professional Writing

AL 881 Teaching with Technology

An STA graphic design course (in consultation with STA instructor)



A relevant graduate course may be substituted with approval of student's guidance committee.

### 5.3.5 Self-Designed Concentration

In consultation with their guidance committee, a student must petition the Rhetoric and Writing Graduate Advisory Committee for approval to complete a self-designed concentration. The letter of petition should provide the committee with a list of courses to be taken (minimum of 9 credits), and a rationale for the concentration.

The rationale should address how the proposed concentration will assist the student's intellectual work and professional development in the field of rhetoric and writing.



Although 9 credits are required for the self-designed concentration, most self-designed concentrations will require more than the minimum number of credits.



Some examples of self-designed concentrations include Community Literacies and Nonfiction Writing. Below are samples of the coursework one might use to construct such a concentration:

### 5.3.6 Dual Concentration

Students who develop two concentrations are only required to take a concentration exam in one of the two areas; however, students must declare this exam area on their Report of the Guidance Committee, filed before they prepare their concentration exam. It is the responsibility of the student and of the guidance committee chair to ensure that the guidance committee broadly represents both concentrations, especially the concentration in which the student will be examined.

## 5.4 PhD Language Requirement

The College of Arts and Letters requires that all PhD students complete all requirements. In Rhetoric and Writing, we believe multiple literacies are important for researchers, scholars, and professionals. Learning a second language is also useful for teachers working with increasingly linguistically diverse students in K–college classrooms. Furthermore, for teachers at every level, the experience of language/literacy acquisition as a metadiscourse activity is useful in understanding the complexities of bilingualism of second language learning and use, and of the rhetoricity of literacy practices.

### Process

Once their guidance committee is formed, a student should talk to their committee about their plans for completing the language requirement.

If meeting that requirement requires completing coursework, the language courses must be listed on the Report of the Guidance Committee.

If the student wishes to meet the language/literacy requirement with language/literacy coursework or experiences completed previous to degree work in the RW PhD Program, or through non-course experiences planned for completion while a student is enrolled in the RW PhD Program, the student will need to gain approval from their guidance committee via a brief petition for those to meet the language requirement. This approval is documented through a brief note from the guidance committee chair to the WRAC graduate director. This petition should consist of a short (one-page) note or email making the request and providing a rationale for why the experiences should count toward satisfying the language requirement. Supporting documentation (e.g., course descriptions or syllabi), evidence, or testimony may be included. This petition should be submitted to the guidance committee as early as possible in the degree work. Once approved, the petition and a note of approval from the chair of the guidance committee should be sent to the director of the graduate school.



### Language Options

Candidates must complete the language requirement through one of the following options:

- Demonstrate second-year proficiency in a non-English language, indigenous American language, or American Sign Language.
- Complete two courses in language variation.
- Complete two courses in African American vernacular English and rhetoric.
- Complete two courses in teaching English to speakers of other languages.
- With approval of guidance committee and as appropriate to the student's research interests, complete two courses (or the equivalent) in other language/literature areas.



The courses above, when used to fulfill the language requirement, cannot replicate courses taken to fulfill core or concentration requirements for the degree (however, they may be taken and applied as electives).

## 5.5 Advising

In their first year in the doctoral program, all PhD students will be advised by the WRAC graduate director until they establish a guidance committee by March 15.

During their second semester in the program, all doctoral students must form a guidance committee. After the student submits her/his Report of the Guidance Committee (RoGC; which lists the guidance committee director and members), the student's chair of the guidance committee becomes their major advisor.



See Appendix B for the PhD Report of the Guidance Committee (RoGC) form.

Students should consult regularly with their chair—two or three times per year at a minimum during coursework, and more often once they are engaged in exams and dissertation research and writing.

Students who fail to form a guidance committee by the end of their first year are considered to be not making satisfactory progress (see section 6.5).

## 5.6 PhD Guidance Committee

The guidance committee consists of four MSU faculty, one of whom should be designated as chair; the chair *must* be a graduate faculty member in the



Rhetoric and Writing program. The student's guidance committee must be approved by the WRAC graduate director. The student may make changes in her/his guidance committee at any time and for any reason with the approval of the WRAC graduate director.



See Appendix D for the committee makeup change form.

The guidance committee does the following:

- consults with the student about their work and progress throughout their time in the program;
- makes recommendations regarding the student's course of study, including needed coursework;
- reviews the student's annual review portfolio each year, with the chair responsible for filing Part B of the annual progress report;
- serves as the PhD comprehensive exam committee, developing the questions for the core exam; the prompt for the concentration exam; and evaluating the student's responses to the core, concentration, and pre-dissertation exams;
- guides the student throughout the dissertation research process;
- offers comments and responds to dissertation drafts; and
- sits as the dissertation defense examination committee, certifying the student's work on both the dissertation and the defense exam.

### Guidance Committee Selection

By March 15 of the first year of coursework, students are expected to select a guidance committee. When choosing this committee, students select the committee that will supervise their remaining coursework and will oversee their comprehensive examinations.

Although students should select some faculty with whom they think they might want to work during the dissertation, students should also remember that the constitution of the committee can, and sometimes should, change as they approach their concentration examination.



A workshop offering advice about committee selection is offered each year by the program.

Because the PhD concentration exam is intended to move a student closer to a dissertation topic and to funnel exam work toward the dissertation prospectus, once students have successfully completed the PhD core examination, they should meet with the chair of their guidance committee to discuss the specifics of the concentration exam, both in terms of the schedule for taking that exam and in terms of possible dissertation topics.

This is also a good time for students to make adjustments in the guidance committee members or chair—with an eye toward selecting committee members who will oversee the concentration exam, approve the dissertation



prospectus, supervise the dissertation process, and help prepare for the dissertation defense.

After the student is ABD, the student's guidance committee becomes, in effect, a dissertation committee. At this time, the student may decide to add a fifth member to the committee (which may be a faculty member at another university).

## 5.7 Year-end Report of Accomplishments and Annual Review

Each year, every PhD student must complete a year-end report that focuses on the accomplishments of the previous calendar year. In late December of each year, the WRAC graduate director sends out the form link for Part A of that year's report.

Student responses to Part A are due in mid-January. Every student **must** complete the report survey to be considered in good standing and to be eligible for summer and travel funding. See section 6.15 for a detailed discussion of the purpose and process of the annual review.

## 5.8 PhD Exams

### 5.8.1 Requirements and Philosophy

PhD students must pass two comprehensive written examinations—one in the Rhetoric and Writing core, the other in the student's selected concentration—and a third, the pre-dissertation prospectus exam.

Students must complete their exams in this order: core, concentration, prospectus defense. Students should discuss exam scheduling with their guidance committee during their year 1 annual review meeting, then discuss specific planning and scheduling with their chair. The committee should have ample time to assist and advise the student for successful completion of each exam.

PhD students must also successfully complete an oral defense of the dissertation prospectus and pass an oral examination in defense of the dissertation. **Students must be enrolled for at least one credit in any semester in which they complete an examination or a defense.**

In this program we view exams as important for helping students develop professional knowledge and expertise about their core field and areas of specialization. Exams are designed to:

- help students review, assimilate, synthesize, and reflect on their knowledge and learning at a more advanced, professional level of understanding than individual courses typically achieve;



- show the student's ability to reflect on and synthesize knowledge gained;
- to develop new knowledge and expertise; and
- and to present knowledge and to advance an argument within the field at large, not simply for an individual instructor.

Exams are also opportunities for reflection and integration that move students forward as scholars and teachers. In short, we use exams to promote each student's professional development. Given our view of exams, it should not be surprising to learn that portfolio work constitutes a significant portion (50%) of the PhD core and concentration exams.



After completion of each exam (core, concentration, and dissertation prospectus, the student's committee chair is responsible for updating Appendix F, the PhD Record of Exams form, and submitting it to the graduate secretary.

Upon successful completion of all three PhD exams, a doctoral student is considered to be a candidate for the degree and is ABD (all but dissertation). For ABD students, full-time status is defined as being enrolled in a minimum of 1 credit hour.

### 5.8.2 Core Exam

The core exam is based on the core courses in the PhD program. Thus, the core exam should be taken as soon as possible after the student has completed the core course requirements in the program; ideally, at the end of year 2. The core exam consists of two parts.

#### Part 1. Portfolio and Reflective Essay (50%)

For the PhD core exam, the student should submit a portfolio of work that draws from the PhD core courses. This portfolio should provide samples of the student's learning in those core courses, typically 3–5 pieces. It must also include a reflective essay that shows the student synthesizing knowledge gained across the core courses.

The student must submit a copy of the portfolio to both the chair of the guidance committee and to the graduate secretary before they receive the questions for the take-home exam.

#### Part 2. Take-Home Exam (50%)

(15 pages each, double-spaced, not including works cited)

The take-home portion of the core examination consists of two essays in response to questions that engage and focus on the student's experiences in the core courses. The essay questions will be cooperatively developed by the student and her/his guidance committee.



The process works as follows:

- Several months before taking the exam, the student should discuss the schedule for the core examination with the guidance committee. The ideal time for this discussion is during the student's annual review at the end of their first year. Finalizing dates for the exam should happen as a part of discussions with the committee chair throughout a student's second year.
- Early in the semester prior to the scheduled date for the exam, the student develops a list of 6-8 questions or prompts arising from their PhD core coursework, in the areas of history/theory, research/methodology, and pedagogy. The questions must show that the student is making connections across and between the core courses.

This list will likely be revised and refined to a smaller list of, e.g., 4-6 questions, as the committee discussed the list with the student and the questions are refined.



Students—and faculty—are encouraged to review existing past core exam questions and prompts (available on request from the grad director).

- Once the chair and the student have revised the questions to the chair's satisfaction, they submit this list to the guidance committee, leaving plenty of time for finalizing the questions well in advance of the exam date. (For example, this might happen no later than March 15 for an exam scheduled in May.)
- The guidance committee provides comments and a list of 4-6 finalized, appropriate, and answerable exam questions are established. The student should then gather syllabi and readings and prepare outlines for answering these questions in advance of their exam (consulting with their chair as appropriate).
- On the agreed-upon date, the student submits their portfolio and, upon receipt, the guidance committee chair sends **three** of the questions (selected by the entire committee) to the student. This begins the clock for the week-long exam.
- The student selects **two** of the three questions, and has one week to prepare responses, each limited to 15 double-spaced pages. Full bibliographical references should be included but do not count towards the 15-page limit per question.
- The student may consult notes, electronic materials, print readings (journals, books, etc.), in preparing their responses. The student may also consult directly with the chair of their committee, and with other committee members, to ask questions and determine scope for their responses.





PhD students may consult with their advisory committee chairs and/or committee members during the week-long process of writing the core exam. However, this ability does not and should not preclude students from prepping thoroughly for the exam and getting questions answered before they begin the core exam.

- One week (7 calendar days) after receiving the exam questions, the student submits their response to their guidance committee chair and to the graduate program secretary.
- Within 2 weeks of receiving the student's exam responses, the guidance committee must submit a written assessment of the exams to the student and to the graduate secretary.
- The guidance committee chair completes and signs the appropriate section of the Examination Record form (Appendix I).

See section 6.13 for details on how the PhD core exam is assessed.

### 5.8.3 Concentration Exam

The concentration exam is based on coursework the student has taken in one of the specialized areas described above (in section 5.3).

Thus, the concentration exam should be taken as soon as possible after the student has completed the core exam, and the required 9 credit hours of concentration coursework. The concentration exam is developed and evaluated by the student's guidance committee. The exam itself consists of two parts:

#### 1. Portfolio and Reflective Essay (50%)

For the PhD concentration exam, the student submits a portfolio of work that pertains to the concentration. This portfolio should provide samples of the student's learning in the concentration courses, typically, 3–5 products (course papers, syllabi and instructional materials, electronic material, conference presentations, any outside work that pertains to the student's development in the concentration, etc.). It must also include a reflective essay that shows the student synthesizing knowledge gained across the concentration courses and that narrates the products included in the portfolio.

#### 2. Review Essay and Annotated Bibliography (50%)

The second half of the concentration exam consists of two parts: a review essay (25 double-spaced pages, maximum, not including works cited) and an annotated bibliography (40–70 sources) addressing the topic, issue, or question that has been designated as the focus of the review essay.



The review essay should:

- review, and evaluate research/scholarship related to a question or issue of significance to the discipline, and of interest to the student, related to the concentration; the essay should make an argument based on the student's use and understanding of the sources contained in the annotated bibliography; the essay should NOT merely summarize or survey those texts;
- function as an argument for the relevance of selected literature in understanding the chosen concentration area as an area. The review essay is not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of research and scholarship in the selected area, nor of all the texts on the annotated bibliography; instead, the essay should use a selection of those texts in a meaningful way;
- be limited to 25 double-spaced pages or the equivalent, not including the Works Cited or the annotated bibliography; any essay that is over, or substantially under, the 25-page limit will not be accepted for purposes of the exam; and
- draw research and scholarship primarily from the annotated bibliography.

The annotated bibliography should:

- be a list of 40–70 sources;
- be vetted by the guidance committee;
- include short (1–2 paragraph) annotations that describe and suggest the relevance of each entry to the guiding question/topic for the literature review; and
- be organized in a rhetorically meaningful way, suggesting possible themes or issues to be mapped out or taken up in the review essay.

The process for completing the concentration exam is as follows:

- In consultation with her/his guidance committee, the student develops a guiding topic, issue, or question on a focus topic within the concentration area.
- This process of consultation is informal but contains some important components:
  1. The guidance committee has a chance to consult with the student regarding the scope of the guiding topic, issue, or question in order to insure it is narrow enough to be completed within the limits of the concentration exam requirements.



2. The guidance committee has a chance to respond to a draft of the student's list of sources to be annotated for the exam.
3. The committee chair reviews the student's proposed a timeline for the exam submission, generally within 12–15 weeks after the guiding topic, issue, or question has been approved by the guidance committee.
4. The student may pose questions to, share draft material, or otherwise work with their committee chair and committee at any time during the concentration exam preparation.



Participating in a writing group is *strongly recommended* for students working on their concentration exams.

- When the review essay and annotated bibliography are completed, the student submits both parts of the concentration exam (portfolio, literature review essay, and annotated bibliography) to the guidance committee chair and to the graduate secretary.
- Two weeks after the exam is submitted, the guidance committee submits to the student a written evaluation of the exam.
- The guidance committee chair completes and signs the appropriate section of the Examination Record form (Appendix F).

See section 6.13 for details on how the PhD concentration exam is assessed.

#### 5.8.4 Dissertation Prospectus Exam

The dissertation prospectus exam consists of an oral defense of the written dissertation prospectus with members of the guidance committee. The goal of the prospectus is to produce a working plan for the dissertation, not to mire the student down in needless planning that takes time away from actual dissertation research and production.

The student should complete the dissertation prospectus exam as soon as possible after completing the core and concentration exams; in most cases, the prospectus exam should take place no later than six months after completing the concentration exam, preferably within three months.



The written prospectus should:

- be 10–15 double-spaced pages, not including a bibliography of key works;
- address a significant question or issue in the discipline of rhetoric and writing, and include a written rationale for how the project will contribute to the specific field and/or interdisciplinary area in which it is written;
- include a workplan and a detailed timeline for completion of the dissertation;
- include sections that elaborate on the dissertation's theoretical and methodological frame, as well as forms and methods of data collection and interpretation;
- for print-based dissertations, include a table of contents and a brief description of each chapter; for non-print dissertations, students should consult with their committee regarding how to best portray the sequence of their work in the prospectus;
- include a rationale for making the project in a particular form or medium (traditional alphabetic print, video, multimedia, mixed media, performance, installation, software, website, etc.) as well as its genre (if applicable);
- include a process for communicating with and getting guidance from the Committee chair and members—this includes details like submitting chapters or drafts of other media for from the guidance committee chair and members; and
- be distributed to the guidance committee at least 2 weeks in advance of the oral defense of the prospectus.

During the oral defense of the prospectus, the guidance committee:

- asks questions, poses solutions, and gives feedback to the student concerning the focus and scope of the dissertation;
- provides comments about the proposed work schedule and the timetable for communications during the dissertation writing process;
- sets goals for revision of the project's scope and production;
- informs the student at the end of the oral defense whether they have passed the pre-dissertation exam; and
- signs the student's complete Examination Record form (Appendix F), which the chair submits the form to the graduate secretary.

During the process of the prospectus exam preparation, defense and follow-up, a number of issues should be clarified.

1. There should be a clear and do-able timeline for completion of the dissertation project.
2. The process for completing the dissertation should be discussed. Items to be discussed from this process should



include plans for interacting with various committee members, as well as details like how often the student will meet with the chair, how the student is expected to interact with other committee members (via the chair or directly), expected response times for committee members to respond to drafts, etc.

3. Any necessary revisions to the plans for the project (theoretical frame for the project, methods and methodologies, rationales for making the project in a particular form or medium, timelines, processes, etc.) should be made in writing and agreed to by the committee in their written form.

## 5.9 Dissertation

### 5.9.1 Overview

At MSU, each doctoral student is expected to engage in “original research upon which a dissertation which makes a significant contribution to knowledge is to be prepared and published.” The Graduate School further requires that each program define what constitutes an acceptable dissertation for their doctoral students.

The RW program places responsibility for this decision with the student’s guidance committee and requires that decisions about the form, format, and media in which the dissertation is produced be finalized as part of the process of preparing the dissertation prospectus for the dissertation prospectus exam. These decisions should always be the result of informed conversations between the student and her/his committee, taking into consideration the form of production that will best suit the student’s intellectual goals. **All** expectations for the dissertation project should be documented carefully and in full detail as part of the prospectus defense process.

The dissertation:

- is typically a 100–200 page (double-spaced) print work or its equivalent in non-print medium;
- demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the field and discipline;
- creates new knowledge within that field;
- has the potential for significant impact on the discipline (e.g., addresses questions of importance, develops new avenues of thought, challenges predominant assumptions); and
- is produced at a level of quality appropriate for the public, either through traditional publication or through digital, performance, or other installation venues (this includes digital spaces where software or database projects would be available for viewing).



### Production Guidelines for Non-print Dissertations

Students who are producing a dissertation a format other than traditional print should:

Compose a written project synopsis, which can resemble a dissertation chapter or take a different shape. The project synopsis can/should address some or all of the following issues: theoretical framework for the project; methodology; rationale for making the project in its particular medium; argument for the need of this project in our field; and a discussion of other projects in their field that it complements/competes with. For students who expect to go on the academic job market, the project synopsis can be sent alongside the dissertation artifact as a writing sample.

Create a plan for preservation of the artifact they produce. In considering how their dissertation project can be preserved for future viewings, interactions or uses, the student may want to create a written preservation rationale.

#### 5.9.2 Stage 1: Preparation and Planning

We do not expect students to arrive at our program with a fully formed dissertation focus. Instead, we encourage students to take advantage of the many learning experiences available to them during their time in the program to craft a dissertation project about which they are passionate and to which they are committed. This takes time. And it is best accomplished through intellectual exploration and collaboration with faculty chosen to guide the larger process of dissertating and finishing the PhD. Staying in contact with guidance committees about reading and thinking processes also insures that students will have informed (instead of surprised) readers of their exams and good support for their dissertation work.



The role of the dissertation prospectus is, as outlined above, to engage members of your committee as a support network for producing a plan to accomplish your goals. Assembling a committee of faculty who can both support your work **and** help you accommodate the inevitable shifts that will occur during your research and production of the dissertation itself is critical to a student's success—finishing on time, defending, and the job search.

As we say above, we believe spending time on the dissertation—researching and writing—is more valuable than perfecting the prospectus or over-performing in the exams.



### 5.9.3 Stage 2: Research and Drafting

During the research and drafting phase of the project, the candidate works primarily with her/his guidance committee chair, adjusting their plan for communication and interaction as is necessary for the candidate to successfully complete this phase of their degree.

Candidates should expect to meet with the chair at least once per month, but preferably every other week, in order to discuss findings, to go over rough drafts, to build chapter outlines or map out process ideas for non-print dissertations, or to address questions or problems that come up during this phase of the project. It is certainly possible to consult other members of the committee as needed, but that consultation process should be worked out with the chair first.

Likewise, candidates should leave their prospectus defense with clear guidelines about the processes through which they'll gain feedback on draft portions of the dissertation from their various committee members. Because this part of the process can work in many different ways, the chair and the student should work out a process that works best for the project and that also makes best use of committee members' time and energy. In most cases, the chair and committee members should expect to take no more than 2 weeks to respond to a candidate's draft.



The exception is when drafts are circulated during summer months. It is the general policy of the program that faculty are not available June 15 through August 15; while there are exceptions to this policy in June and August, the month of July is inviolable. Candidates and their chairs should plan accordingly.

One of the most critical components during this phase of the project is finding a writing and/or feedback group of peers or colleagues who are **not** members of your guidance committee. Our most successful students find that working with their own writing/feedback group, as well as scheduling consultations at the Writing Center, help them produce drafts that the committee members can respond to more effectively.

Because there is drafting and revision in every form/medium that a dissertation project can take, we encourage students to view these writing/feedback groups as central to the processes of scholarship and production regardless of their dissertation's medium.



### Dissertation Credits and Completion Fellowships

PhD students must achieve 24 WRA 999 dissertation credits to complete their degrees (but can take no more than 36 and have them paid for and count toward their degree completion).

PhD students should plan to start taking WRA 999 credits after they complete coursework—while they are taking the core exam, concentration exam, and working on the dissertation.

Plan carefully so that you reach the 24-credit requirement. Know, too, that you will be expected to apply for a Dissertation Completion Fellowship (DCF) for your final year in the program.

*All* of the PhD students who have applied for a DCF in the past two years have received one. The DCF only pays for one credit of WRA 999 during the semester in which you take the fellowship, so plan your WRA 999 credits accordingly!

#### 5.9.4 Stage 3: Defending the Dissertation

During the semester in which the candidate plans to complete the dissertation, they should schedule a dissertation defense with the guidance committee. It is the responsibility of the candidate's chair to ascertain that all committee members agree that the dissertation is ready to be defended. If a committee member believes there are problems with the dissertation that are so significant that it will cause the candidate to fail the defense, the chair must work with the candidate until they produce a defensible draft of the project.

Once a defensible draft of the project is being produced, it is the candidate's responsibility to schedule the defense (a 2-hour block of time) at least one month in advance, and to deliver copies of the completed dissertation project to each committee member no later than 2 weeks before the scheduled defense date.



The candidate **must** be enrolled in at least one credit hour in the semester in which they defend the dissertation. This is a policy of the university and it **cannot** be waived.

As a conversation between peers meant to further the candidate's work and thinking, the defense should remain a small event that allows for the kind of interaction between the candidate and guidance committee members that provides the most value to the candidate as they continue their educational and professional trajectories.

Having more than a few non-committee members at a defense can be intimidating to both the candidate and guidance committee members and can substantially shift the tone of the defense from one of





intellectual support and guidance to sheer performance, making it impossible for a candidate to have a productive, useful defense meeting with their committee where everyone's attention is on helping the candidate move forward with the project—the last such group meeting that the program provides. Since a public performance/showing/-sharing could serve a different—and differently helpful—purpose than the defense, if a candidate desires a public performance/showing/sharing/installation of their dissertation work, it must be held separate the defense meeting. Consistent with the purpose of this policy, candidates who decide to host a separate, more public event are not required to invite guidance committee members to the event nor are guidance committee members required to attend this public event.

If the process of drafting and response from committee members has been successful, by the time of the dissertation defense, the candidate should have already encountered the tough questions the committee has. If there has been a serious, critical dialogue through the dissertation process, a candidate will be more than adequately prepared for the dissertation “defense.”

The dissertation defense is structured as follows:

1. The candidate begins by delivering a short presentation about the dissertation (10–15 minutes maximum). This presentation should not be a summary of the project, but should address other issues and/or questions raised by the project itself, by the candidate's engagement in the project, or that are anticipated in making the project available for public consumption and discussion.
2. Each committee member then raises questions and makes suggestions about the dissertation, allowing the candidate an opportunity to respond. Some chairs prefer to allocate a certain amount of response time to each committee member; others prefer that the response period operate like a conversation and simply makes certain that all committee members have an opportunity to engage the candidate. Discussion of the dissertation usually lasts about an hour.
3. When all the questions have been discussed and addressed, the dissertation committee chair asks the candidate to leave the room to allow time for the committee to deliberate about the dissertation and the defense.

The committee discusses three questions in particular:

- a. Are the dissertation project and the defense/presentation of it acceptable?
- b. What revisions or amendments are necessary?
- c. How should the candidate think about preparing the project for future public consumption and discussion?



Typically this deliberation takes 15 minutes. (According to the policies of the Graduate School, the decision of the committee must be agreed upon by at least three-fourths of the committee members with not more than one dissenting vote among the MSU faculty on the committee.)



It is up to the candidate and her/his chair whether guests will be invited to attend the defense. If guests are present, they should leave the room with the candidate so the guidance committee's deliberations are private.

4. When the committee has concluded its deliberations, the committee chair invites the candidate back into the room to hear the decision, to discuss any needed revisions, and to get advice about future public circulation of the project.
5. All official university forms are signed by each member of the committee.
6. File the dissertation (see section 8.14 for more information concerning dissertation formatting and filing.).

## 5.10 Transfer Credits

Some credits may be transferred to the PhD program from other accredited institutions, with the approval of the WRAC graduate director. Students who have taken coursework in the program through Lifelong Education may transfer up to ten credits, with the approval of the director, after they are accepted into the regular degree program.

## 5.11 Petitioning for Course Waiver or Substitution

It is possible to petition to waive one of the course requirements or to substitute a different course for one of the requirements. Students who have already taken comparable coursework in an MA program may not need to retake a similar course at the PhD level. For example, WRA 878 Composition Studies—part of the core requirement—could be waived if an equivalent course was completed as part of MA degree work.

A waived requirement does not result in credit for the course. It is a course waiver, not a credit transfer. The student must still complete the entire number of course credits required for the degree.

To request a waiver, the student and guidance committee chair must:

1. write a memo to the director of the graduate program, making the request and explaining the rationale for the waiver or substitution, and



2. provide copies of the syllabus and reading lists for the course(s) comparable to one of the degree course requirements.

The director will consult RWGC, the Rhetoric and Writing Advisory Committee, to review the request and the instructor for the course in question, if possible.

## 5.12 Time Limit for Program

Completion of the PhD must occur within 8 years of entering the program. Completion of all comprehensive exams (core, concentration, pre-dissertation defense) must occur within 5 years of entering the program. The clock starts ticking the semester of the first class that is counted toward the degree.

## 5.13 Career Services and Job Placement

The graduate program runs a hands-on semester-long job placement workshop each fall. **Participation in this workshop is mandatory for job-seeking Rhetoric and Writing doctoral candidates.**

The Graduate School provides a variety of career services specifically designed for doctoral students. A listing of workshops and other career counseling activities can be found at <http://grad.msu.edu/careerservices/>.

Additionally, MSU has partnered with the online credentials management service Interfolio, Inc. to manage distribution of credentials files during the job search.

## **SECTION 6.**

# **Academic Performance Standards and Annual Review**

Graduate students should take extreme care to make sure that they meet the minimum academic standards required by the Graduate School, by the College of Arts & Letters, and by the WRAC graduate programs. Failure to meet these minimum academic standards has a range of consequences, ranging from loss of travel support, to loss of teaching or research assistantship, to dismissal from the program. Below are listed the standards for the Graduate School, the College, and the WRAC graduate programs—and then the overarching standards for maintaining good academic standing.

### **6.1 Graduate School Standards**

A 3.00 cumulative grade-point average in the degree program is the minimum university standard, but colleges, departments, or schools may establish a higher minimum standard; however, attainment of the minimum grade-point average is in itself an insufficient indicator of potential for success in other aspects of the program and in the field.

The guidance committee and academic unit are jointly responsible for evaluating the student's competency (as indicated by, e.g., grades in core and other courses, research performance, and development of professional skills) and rate of progress (as indicated by, e.g., the number of courses for which grades have been assigned or deferred).

Written evaluations shall be communicated to the graduate student at least once a year, and a copy of such evaluations shall be placed in the graduate student's file. A student whose performance does not meet the standards of quality will not be permitted to continue to enroll in the degree program, and appropriate action will be taken by the department or college.

### **6.2 Graduate Assistants in the College of Arts and Letters**

A graduate assistant in the College of Arts and Letters must:

- maintain a cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.25; and
- accumulate deferred grades (identified by the DF-Deferred marker) in no more than 8 credits of coursework (excluding 899 and 999 credits).

If, at the end of a semester, a graduate assistant fails to meet one or both of the requirements specified above, the graduate assistant shall receive a warning and be allowed to hold the graduate assistantship for one additional semester. If at the end of the additional semester, the graduate

assistant has failed to meet one or both of the requirements specified above, the graduate assistantship shall be withdrawn.

### **6.3 WRAC MA Program Standards**

Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.5 in all graduate courses. A student may accumulate no more than 6 credits with a grade below 3.0 in courses taken for the purpose of satisfying the degree requirements.

### **6.4 WRAC PhD Program Standards**

Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.50 in all graduate courses. A student may count toward the degree only those courses in which the student has received a grade of 3.0 or higher. A student may accumulate no more than 6 credits with a grade below 3.0 in courses taken for the purpose of satisfying the degree requirements.

A student who fails the comprehensive examinations, the pre-dissertation prospectus examination, or the final oral examination in defense of the dissertation may repeat that examination only once, during the following semester.

### **6.5 Maintaining Good Academic Standing**

For students to remain in good academic standing, they must make satisfactory progress toward their degree completion. There are time limits for both MA and PhD programs.

### **6.6 Time Limits for the MA Degree**

The time limit for the completion of the requirements for the Master's degree is 6 calendar years from the date of enrollment in the first course included for degree certification.

### **6.7 Time Limits for the PhD Degree**

All three of the comprehensive examinations must be passed within 5 years and all remaining requirements for the degree must be completed within 8 years from the time a student begins the first class at Michigan State University that appears on her/his doctoral program of study.

Application for extensions of the 8-year period of time toward degree must be submitted by the department for approval by the dean of the College of Arts & Letters and the dean of the Graduate School. Upon approval of the extension, doctoral comprehensive examinations must be passed again.

## 6.8 Satisfactory Progress Toward Degree

In addition to these time limits, students are expected to make “satisfactory progress” toward completion of their degree—that is, complete required coursework and exams, and complete the dissertation/thesis (if applicable) according to the general timelines established by the program. If a student falls too far behind the expected timeline for completion of a degree, the guidance committee should warn the student about this problem. Failure to make satisfactory progress could result in loss of teaching or research assistantships (which typically require satisfactory progress toward degree as a condition of employment).

### PhD Candidates (ABD)

Good academic standing for doctoral students is assessed during the Annual Review process. We expect doctoral students to complete their degree in 4 or 5 years, depending in part on their funding arrangements and the nature of their dissertation research.

As part of the PhD pre-dissertation prospectus exam, it is expected that doctoral students will present a work schedule that will be approved by their guidance committee during the oral portion of that exam defense. This schedule will, at the very least, match research goals and dissertation production to specific milestones and dates.

Once doctoral students attain candidacy (after having successfully defended a dissertation prospectus) they should continue to make satisfactory progress toward completion of the degree. To make “satisfactory progress,” candidates must meet the following minimum standards:

- maintain regular contact with the chair of their doctoral guidance committee and provide regular updates to the other committee members;
- meet research and material-production deadlines as outlined in the timeline or file the appropriate amendments to the timeline with the guidance committee via the chair;
- meet all requirements associated with their graduate assistantship (e.g., graduate teaching assistants must meet with mentor groups); and
- meet a minimum standard of delivering at least one chapter per calendar year that is reviewed and approved by the guidance committee.

## 6.9 Restoring Academic Good Standing

If, at the end of a semester, a graduate student fails to meet the GPA requirement, or accumulates an excessive number of DF and I grades, or in any other way fails to meet the standards for progress and for academic good standing in the program (as determined by the graduate director or

by the student's committee), the student shall receive written warning that details the options for restoring good academic standing. Students may respond to this warning in writing to the chair of the committee and/or the graduate director. The student must remedy the problem within one semester following the one in which the problem occurred. (For example, if the student's GPA falls below a 3.5 in spring, the student has until the end of the following fall semester to bring their GPA to the appropriate level).

## 6.10 Pass-Fail Courses, Independent Studies, and Internships

### Pass-Fail Courses

Courses that are being counted toward fulfilling the degree requirements may not be taken on a pass-fail basis (or credit-no credit basis) unless the courses are only offered on this basis.

### Independent Study Courses

Students may take an independent study course to explore a specialized topic for which there is no current MSU course. Independent study courses should not be used as substitutes for existing courses. The student needs to find a faculty member willing to sponsor the course, and the course material and number must be graduate level. Guidelines for independent study courses can be found online at the Registrar's site. The independent study must be formalized using the university form, available for reference in the appendices and available online at [wrac.msu.edu](http://wrac.msu.edu)

The request must be approved by the sponsoring faculty member, the student's academic advisor, the graduate director, and the associate dean of CAL.



See Appendix H for the university-required independent study form. The independent study request must specify number of credit hours, what work will be completed for the independent study, how it will be evaluated and graded, how often the student and sponsoring faculty member will meet, etc. Students should save a copy of the form for their own records, and must file a copy of the request form with the graduate secretary in order to be enrolled in WRA 890 credit.

### Internships

Frequently, graduate students enroll in internships as part of their plan of study. These can be both more traditional workplace internships to help MA students gain experience in the kinds of places they may someday find employment or special teaching internships to provide PhD students with teaching experiences they might otherwise not have access to during their program of study.

For both kinds of internships, a contract must be signed. The contract details the kind of work that the student will be engaged in during the internship and how this work will be evaluated. Additionally, the contract designates a work supervisor or project manager (who provides an evaluation of the student's performance in the internship to the faculty advisor) *and* a faculty advisor (who is responsible for recording the final grade based on the work supervisor's evaluation).



See Appendix I for the program teaching internship form/contract; see Appendix J for the program professional/community internship form/contract.

The contract *must be* signed by the student, the work supervisor, the faculty advisor, and the WRAC graduate director before the internship course can be created.

## 6.11 Grades of Deferred (DF) and Incomplete (I)

Graduate students may not accumulate more than 8 credits total of DF and I (excluding 899 and 999 credits) and remain in good academic standing in the program. In general, the program discourages students and faculty from using the DF grade. The DF should only be used under extraordinary personal circumstances that prevent a student from completing course requirements. If a student simply needs extra time to complete a course, the grade of I should be used. See the university rules for use of the I ([https://reg.msu.edu/read/pdf/I\\_Agreement.pdf](https://reg.msu.edu/read/pdf/I_Agreement.pdf)).

Additionally, when a student takes a DF, the required coursework must be completed and a grade reported within six 6 months (with the option of a single 6-month extension). If the required work is not completed within the time limit, the DF will become U-Unfinished and will be changed to DF/U under the numerical and Pass-No Grade (P-N) grading systems, and the DF/NC under the Credit-No Credit (CR-NC) system. This rule does not apply to graduate thesis or dissertation work.

## 6.12 MA Plan B Assessment

### 6.12.1 Assessment of the MA Plan B Portfolio

The MA certifying portfolio will be assessed Pass, Revise and Resubmit, Fail. A student who receives a revise and resubmit or who fails the portfolio has the opportunity to revise and resubmit once during the following semester. The advisory committee must provide the student with their evaluation of the portfolio within 2 weeks of receiving it. Students are responsible for submitting the portfolio to their advisory committee in an accessible format.



**Pass**

To receive a pass, the portfolio should:

- show in-depth knowledge of the given topics or issues, as well as familiarity with the readings being discussed;
- show that the student understands the relevant topics deeply and is acquainted with how the field approaches the topics;
- show that the student has the ability to assess the relevant topics or issues critically, to evaluate and compare approaches, to synthesize diverse views, and/or to contribute to the field's understanding of the topics or issues;
- be appropriate for its audience and its purpose; and
- be well-organized, well-designed, and clear across navigation, layout, and other aspects.

**Revise and Resubmit**

A student's guidance committee may choose to ask her/him to revise and resubmit any portion of the portfolio that they feel does not live up to the standards for passing the portfolio but that also does not fail the portfolio completely.

A student who receives a revise and resubmit for the MA portfolio has the opportunity to revise and resubmit once. In such cases, the advisory committee decides which portions of the portfolio must be revised and reports that decision to the graduate director. The revision must be completed by the end of the following semester; if the revision continues beyond the semester in which the student presented the portfolio, the student will need to enroll in one credit for the additional semester. There are no appeals in this process.

**Fail**

A fail indicates that a portion of the portfolio is significantly flawed in the previously stated standards for passing.

A student who fails the MA portfolio has the opportunity to revise and resubmit once. In such cases, the advisory committee decides which portions of the portfolio must be revised and reports that decision to the graduate director. The revision must be completed by the end of the following semester; if the revision continues beyond the semester in which the student presented the portfolio, the student will need to enroll in one credit for the additional semester. There are no appeals in this process.

### 6.12.2 Assessment of the MA Plan B Exam

The MA exam will be graded on this scale: Pass, Revise and Resubmit, Fail. A student who fails any part of the exam has the opportunity to retake the exam once during the following semester. The advisory committee must provide the student with their evaluation of the exam within 2 weeks of receiving it. Students are responsible for submitting the exam to their advisory committee in an accessible format.

#### Pass

To receive a pass, the exam should:

- show in-depth knowledge of the given topic or issue, as well as familiarity with the readings being discussed;
- show that the student understands the topic deeply and is acquainted with how the field approaches the topic (as prompted by the exam questions or topics);
- show that the student has the ability to assess the topic or issue critically, to evaluate and compare approaches, to synthesize diverse views, and/or to contribute to the field's understanding of the topic or issue;
- be appropriate for its audience and its purpose; and
- be well organized, clear and fluent.

#### Revise and Resubmit

A student's guidance committee may choose to ask her/him to revise and resubmit any portion of the exam that they feel does not live up to the standards for passing the exam but that also does not fail the exam completely.

#### Fail

A fail indicates that a portion of the exam is significantly flawed in the previously stated standards for passing.

A student who fails the MA exam has the opportunity to retake the exam once. In such cases, the advisory committee decides which portions of the exam must be retaken and reports that decision to the graduate director. All failed exam components must be retaken by the end of the following semester. The exam must be retaken and completed by the end of the following semester; if the revision continues beyond the semester in which the student wrote the exam, the student will need to enroll in one credit for the additional semester. There are no appeals in this process.

## 6.13 PhD Exam Assessment

All PhD exams (core, concentration, and dissertation prospectus defense) will be graded on the scale of Pass, Revise and Resubmit, or Fail.

For the core and concentration exams, a student must pass all the components of each exam to pass the overall exam. A student who fails any of the comprehensive exams has the opportunity to retake the exam once during the following semester.

The guidance committee must provide the student with their evaluation of each exam within 2 weeks of receiving it. Students are responsible for submitting the exam to their guidance committee in an accessible format.

### Pass

To receive a pass, the exam should:

- show in-depth knowledge of the given topic or issue, as well as familiarity with the readings being discussed;
- show that the student understands the topic deeply and is acquainted with how the field approaches the topic (as prompted by the exam questions or topics);
- show that the student has the ability to assess the topic or issue critically, to evaluate and compare approaches, to synthesize diverse views, and/or to contribute to the field's understanding of the topic or issue; and
- be appropriate for its audience and its purpose; and
- be well organized, clear and fluent.

### Revise and Resubmit

A student's guidance committee may choose to ask her/him to revise and resubmit any portion of the exam that they feel does not live up to the standards for passing the exam but that also does not fail the exam completely.

A student who receives a "revise and resubmit" on an exam must submit a revision of that exam within a very specific time frame after the original exam deadline—no less than 6 weeks and no more than 12 weeks. While the exact deadline for a "revise and resubmit" revision is set by the student's guidance committee, it **must** fall within this 6–12 week time frame.

### Fail

A fail indicates that a portion of the exam is significantly flawed in the previously stated standards for passing.

A student who fails the core, the concentration, or dissertation prospectus defense must take advantage of the opportunity to retake it by the end of the following semester. For instance, if the student fails the exam in spring semester, the student would have until December of the following fall

semester to make up the exam. In such cases, the guidance committee decides which portions of the exam must be retaken and reports that decision to the graduate director. There are no appeals in this process.

## **6.14 Dismissal from the Program**

While we are willing to extend a second chance to students in violation of the program's academic standards and/or the program's ethical expectations (see details above and in section 7 Ethical Expectations), we are obligated by the Graduate School to provide explicit conditions for dismissal of graduate students in our program.

The conditions for dismissal from the Rhetoric and Writing program are as follows:

- a cumulative GPA below 3.5 for two consecutive semesters (as stated previously, students are warned when this occurs the first time and given one additional semester to remedy the problem); or,
- more than 8 credits total of DF or I grades for two consecutive semesters (as stated previously, students are warned the first time this occurs and are given one additional semester to remedy the problem); or,
- violation of the guidelines for appropriate professional conduct outlined in section 7; or,
- a second failure of the core, concentration, or, the pre-dissertation examination, or the oral defense of the dissertation; or,
- failure to re-take a previously failed comprehensive examination, the pre-dissertation examination, or the oral defense of the dissertation examination in the semester following that initial failure; or,
- failure to make satisfactory academic progress as articulated in the criteria suggested for evaluation in the Annual Progress Report section above; or,
- the finding that a student is not making satisfactory progress is made by the student's advisor and/or guidance committee (students are warned after the first semester in which this occurs and are given one additional semester to remedy the problem).

After all the appropriate warnings and second-chance procedures have been exhausted, the student will be informed of their dismissal from the program by the graduate director. At that time the University Registrar will be informed that the student is no longer enrolled in the program.

## **6.15 Annual Review**

The primary purpose of the annual review process is to provide each graduate student with clear feedback on her/his progress in the program, to provide the student with guidance on making satisfactory academic and professional progress, and to help students understand how to prepare for evaluation in their professional lives. For PhD students, this annual review

process is very similar to the annual review that all faculty are expected to do, but which is particularly important for untenured faculty who need to prepare a case for tenure and promotion.



See Appendix P for a helpful student worksheet for prepping and planning for and making the most of your annual review portfolio and meeting; Appendix Q is a faculty worksheet for annual review meetings.

### Process

There are three components to this process:

1. preparation and submission of the annual review portfolio;
2. the annual review meeting itself;
3. the committee chair files the annual progress report form (Part B) with the WRAC graduate director

### The Annual Review Portfolio

The student should be collecting relevant portfolio materials throughout the year in preparation for this part of the annual review process. This portfolio (which can be print, electronic, or a combination) should include samples of the student's work completed during the previous year: representative work done in courses (the student should include good, excellent, and even not-so-good work); professional work done outside courses (e.g., conference presentations, consultations or collaborations with community partners); and teaching material (e.g., course evaluations, syllabi, instructional materials).

Each year, the portfolio should also include a new overview essay that provides evidence of reasoning about and reflection on how the student's program has affected their research, teaching, and professional goals. The student must submit the portfolio to both the guidance committee members and the graduate program secretary. The student should then arrange with the guidance committee chair the exact procedure for the annual review.



Part B of the Annual Progress Report for all students is due by their committee chairs no later than May 1. This means that you *must* plan to submit your portfolio and hold your annual review meeting with your committee no later than April 20.

### The Annual Review Meeting

All members of the guidance committee review the student's Part A, vita, annual portfolio, and essay. The committee provides the student with a written evaluation of the past year's work. The student sets a meeting—either with the chair alone or with the entire guidance committee—to discuss the evaluation of the student's work.

Both the committee chair and the student fill out the Annual Progress Report form and submit that form to the graduate director.

### **Exceptions to the Review Process**

Students should talk with their committee chair about making the exceptions discussed below and the entire committee should be consulted before the exception is granted. Even if an exception is granted, the student must still submit the Year-end Report of Accomplishments (Part A) in January, and their chair is still responsible for submitting Part B by May 1.

MA students actively engaged in the process of preparing an MA thesis, exam, or portfolio do not need to submit a separate portfolio to their guidance committees (most MA students only prepare an annual review portfolio their first year in the program).

PhD students may request to their committee that their core exam portfolio substitute for an annual review portfolio during year 2; they may also request that their concentration exam portfolio substitute for an annual review portfolio during year 3 (depending, of course, on the student's exam timeline).

PhD students who have completed their exams, defended their dissertation prospectus, are ABD, and are engaged in the process dissertation research and writing may submit a brief progress report in lieu of an annual portfolio.

## SECTION 7.

# Ethical Expectations: Integrity in Research and Professional Conduct

When you enter the WRAC graduate program at MSU, you enter an intellectual community in which integrity in professional, research, and creative activities is highly valued. Faculty in the program believe that the best way to insure the integrity of our collective efforts is to create a climate of care and ethical expectations in which graduate students are taught, advised, mentored, and supported in their teaching and research activities.

That climate includes several components:

- a shared understanding of what constitutes appropriate professional conduct, and explicit criteria for dismissal of students who violate those professional standards;
- a shared understanding of what constitutes unethical or dishonest behavior, and explicit criteria for dismissal of students who practice unethical or dishonest behavior while engaged in research, scholarly, and creative activities;
- a shared understanding of what constitutes ethical mentoring and advising, and explicit guidelines and policies for mediating conflicts and handling grievances/appeals between students and mentors, and between students and students.

### 7.1 Appropriate Professional Conduct

As faculty in an academic program, we share some common standards about what constitutes appropriate professional conduct, and it is our responsibility to share these standards with graduate students. Our collective understanding of these professional standards comes from our own practices as professionals in the disciplines and fields that constitute rhetoric and writing, and from our common belief that humans in general should treat each other decently, with respect, care, and generosity.

In general, we believe that appropriate professional conduct includes:

- respect for others' personhood and diversity of personhood, including but not limited to race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, style of dress, manner of speaking, political viewpoint, etc.;
- a shared commitment to basic values such as fairness, equity, honesty, and respect;

- honest and accurate representation of one's identity, credentials, and professional background (e.g., no inflation of status or experiences on one's vita; accurate representation of contributions to committee work or to collaborative projects and publications);
- awareness that appropriate professional conduct does not entail the transfer or appropriation of the work of others without shared decision-making, credit, and benefits—a standard for how to work appropriately within a community and to collaborate professionally;
- acknowledgement of the collaborative and social nature of the scholarly enterprise, which extends beyond use of formal scholarly citations to an acknowledgement of how fellow scholars have helped one to form ideas, review drafts, suggest revisions, etc.;
- respect for one's intellectual ancestors, especially for those who created the discipline within which one works;
- actively and respectfully listening to and engaging with people, their ideas, and how they experience (and represent) cultural and intellectual institutions;
- respect for human subjects involved in research;
- explicit training of graduate students in sound disciplinary practices (including appropriate methodological instruction) in core courses and in the interactions that we have with one another as colleagues.

## 7.2 Unethical or Dishonest Scholarly and Research Practices

Faculty in the WRAC graduate program believe that any of the following constitute unethical and/or dishonest scholarly and/or research practices:

- violation of policies outlined in the current MSU Graduate Programs catalog (<https://reg.msu.edu/academicprograms/>) and in the MSU Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR; <https://grad.msu.edu/gsrr/>);
- violation of policies outlined in the Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities published by the MSU Office of Research Ethics and Standards in the *Research Integrity Newsletter* (Spring 2004, pp. 12–14);
- violations of the provisions of the MSU Human Research Protection (HRP) Manual, available on the Human Research Protection Program website (<https://hrpp.msu.edu/>);
- violation of policies outlined in the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) Handbook;



- violation of ethics and research integrity guidelines developed and published by **professional organizations** such as NCTE, CCCC, AAA, ASA, AHA, STC, as applicable according to stated field of study;

**NCTE:** National Council of Teachers of English

**CCCC:** Conference on College Composition and Communication

**AAA:** American Anthropological Association

**ASA:** American Sociological Association

**AHA:** American Historical Association

**STC:** Society for Technical Communication

- violations of the above that include but are not limited to misrepresentation, falsification, fabrication, and plagiarism;
- violation of the above-mentioned standards of appropriate professional behavior.

### 7.3 Reporting Unethical or Dishonest Scholarly and Research Practices and/or Inappropriate Professional Conduct

To report inappropriate professional conduct, contact the WRAC graduate director. If you are uncomfortable doing so or believe there is a better venue to express concerns, please see the “issues and reporting guide” available on the WRAC web site, which describes potential problematic behaviors and issues and ways in which students can seek institutional support.



See Appendix T for an issues and reporting guide that describes potential problematic situations and ways in which students can seek support.

### 7.4 Consequences of Unethical or Dishonest Scholarly and Research Practices

For dishonest scholarly practices in a course, the instructor will follow the university regulations found in the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR) Handbook. The instructor will also inform the graduate director and the guidance committee.

The student’s guidance committee and the graduate director will determine the severity of any scholarly/research infraction and will meet with the student to help her/him understand the situation and learn from the event; an informal annotation of the event will be kept on file by the student, the guidance committee, and the program director. Severe violations will result in immediate dismissal.

First instances of some practices may be dealt with as a learning moment. Second instances will result in a formal letter of warning placed in the

student's permanent file; this letter will outline the violation, cite it as a second instance of such behavior, and warn that continued inappropriate behavior could result in dismissal from the program. Repeat instances will trigger the dismissal process.

## 7.5 Mandatory Reporting, Discrimination, and Harassment

Faculty are considered mandatory reporters. This means that they are *required* to report incidents of sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexual misconduct, stalking, credible threats of harm to oneself or others, and relationship violence that they learn about or observe in their professional capacity. Professional capacity includes information learned in classroom contexts; at individual meetings; in research contexts; and in spaces outside of the university, including on social media.

Similarly, if you have a teaching assistantship at MSU, in our department or elsewhere, you are considered a mandatory reporter. Workshops are offered through the Graduate School so that TAs can better understand their roles and possible actions as mandatory reporters. If you have a research assistantship through the Writing Center @ MSU, you are also considered a mandatory reporter, and may be considered a mandatory reporter in other research assistant roles as well.

**MSU's Office of Institutional Equity** reviews concerns related to discrimination and harassment based on age, color, gender, gender identity, disability status, height, marital status, national origin, political persuasion, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, and weight under the University's Anti-Discrimination Policy (ADP) and Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (RVSM). OIE staff is available to provide information on the policies, connect MSU community members to resources, investigate complaints, and provide training. More information is available at <https://oie.msu.edu/>

**The University Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct** is available at [https://www.hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/RVSM\\_policy.html](https://www.hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/RVSM_policy.html)

**Restorative Justice @ MSU** provides an alternative source of trainings, information, and resources on issues dealing with harassment, discrimination, and violence. This includes support-based resources for counseling, advocacy, and guides to navigating both MSU and legal systems of reporting. You can access more information at <https://www.deanofstudents.msu.edu/restorative-justice>

Please also see section 8.5.

## 7.6 Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)

MSU's Graduate School has put into place requirements for *all* graduate students requiring responsible research.



The Rhetoric and Writing program requirements are available in Appendix R.

PhD students will begin work to complete their MSU/RW RCR in WRA 885. MA students will begin work to complete their MSU/RW RCR in WRA 886.

There are annual requirements and expectations, and progress *must* be documented and filed with the graduate secretary using the form available on the WRAC web site. Failure to comply with the RCR requirements will affect degree completion.



See Appendix C for the program RCR completion reporting form.

The module-based RCR requirements are completed and tracked through the ABILITY information management system at <http://ora.msu.edu/train/>; students must track their overall progress using the RW form.

## 7.7 Ethical Mentoring

Mentors are faculty members who take a special interest in helping students develop into successful members of the profession by helping them optimize their education experiences, assist their socialization into disciplinary culture, advance their personal growth as professionals, and help them find a job when their degree is finished.

Effective mentoring is characterized by mutual trust, understanding, and respect for students' professional and personal needs. A successful mentor is prepared to deal with population-diversity issues, including those peculiar to ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.

Good mentoring practices include the following (See, also, Section 1 of this handbook):

- careful, patient listening,
- building a relationship with a student beyond the classroom,
- using authority ethically,
- nurturing self-sufficiency,
- establishing focused time for one-on-one mentoring engagement,
- sharing work and professional ethics,
- providing introductions to important scholars in the field,
- offering constructive feedback, and
- providing personalized training and advice about the formation of a professional profile and the formation of a professional ethos in the student's chosen field/discipline.

## SECTION 8.

### Program Policies

#### 8.1 Program Requirements

Students are to meet the committee formation and course requirements specified for the academic year (beginning in the fall) in which they officially enter the program. All students are subject to the university, college, and program policies detailed herein as of August 16, 2010.

#### 8.2 Admissions

All admissions decisions for the Rhetoric and Writing program are made by the Rhetoric and Writing Graduate Committee (RWGC) and are communicated to applicants by the director of Rhetoric and Writing. Once students are admitted, they must decide whether to accept or decline the admissions offer. Once students decide to accept the offer, they are considered to be “enrolled.” When students decide to enroll in the graduate program (usually in April or May), they should contact the WRAC graduate director for advice about registering for classes for the first year of study. Students should register for courses as soon as possible after accepting the admissions offer.

Sometimes students are admitted provisionally to the graduate program. All decisions regarding provisional admittance are made by the Rhetoric and Writing Graduate Committee. For instance, an applicant to the PhD program who has not yet completed the requirements for an MA degree might be admitted provisionally, pending successful completion of the MA by some specified date. Or a student might be required to take additional coursework in order to provide needed background for graduate work. Provisional acceptances always specify some condition that needs to be completed by a given date. It is important that the student meet those criteria by the date specified, or else the student will not be allowed to continue in the program.

#### 8.3 Selecting a Committee Chair

Each graduate program at MSU is distinct, and most have their own cultures, policies, procedures, and expectations.

Although we invite students to connect, network, work with, and perhaps invite outside-department faculty onto their advisory/guidance committees, **we ask that MA and PhD students in the Rhetoric and Writing graduate program identify advisory/guidance committee chairs from the Rhetoric and Writing program.**

## 8.4 If a Committee Chair Leaves MSU

In the rare event that a graduate student's guidance committee chair leaves MSU before that student completes her/his degree, the student will be required to find a new major professor—ideally, another member of the student's committee who is familiar with their project. (In the case of PhD students, the departing faculty member may be retained as a fifth member of the committee.) In such events, all effort will be made to ensure the student's program proceed as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

## 8.5 Conflicts and Grievances



See Appendix T for an issues and reporting guide that describes potential problematic situations and ways in which students can seek support.

If a student has a disagreement or a conflict with an instructor, administrator, or another student, or feels that in some way their academic rights have been violated, they should attempt to resolve that conflict directly with the person(s) involved through informal discussion.



If you have questions, concerns, issues with committee members or committee make-up, or any other conflicts, please initiate a discussion with your committee chair first. If need be, your next point of contact should be the graduate director.

Every graduate program on campus is required to have a formal, written grievance policy for graduate students. **The WRAC Academic Grievance Hearing Procedures for Graduate Students may be found in Appendix A of the WRAC Bylaws.** The College of Arts and Letters policy may be found on the ombudsman's website. Each of these policies stipulates that any point the student may file a formal, written grievance for consideration by a hearing board at the appropriate level. For disputes about a final grade received in a course, students must initiate the process by speaking to the instructor no later than the mid-point of the semester following the one in which the grade was received (excluding summer terms).

If student find themselves in this situation and have exhausted the internal resources for resolving the issue, they may contact the Office of the University Ombudsperson. The Office of the University Ombudsperson provides assistance to students, faculty, and staff in resolving university-related concerns. Such concerns include: student-faculty conflicts; communication problems; concerns about the university climate; and questions about what options are available for handling a problem according to Michigan State University policy. The university Ombudsperson also provides information about available resources and student/faculty rights and responsibilities. The office operates as a confidential, independent, and neutral resource. It does not provide notice to the University—that is, it does not speak or hear for the university.

If applicable, please also see section 7.5 of this handbook, Mandatory Reporting, Discrimination, and Harassment.

## 8.6 Graduate Assistantships

*Graduate assistantship* is a generic term referring to financial support of graduate students that results in a stipend and compensation, and for which performance of defined duties is expected. A variety of graduate assistantships, fellowships, and funding opportunities are available to graduate students in the Rhetoric and Writing program, depending on the student's level of professional and instructional experience.

Typically, PhD students are admitted with the promise of at least a 4-year assistantship or fellowship package. MA students are usually admitted without an assistantship package; however, the program can help MA students locate support for their studies.

Assistantship reappointments are based upon satisfactory academic performance (see section 6.0, Academic Performance Standards, for details), position performance, and availability of funding.

For a list of the assistantship information provided by the Graduate School, see <https://grad.msu.edu/assistantships/>.

### Appointment Responsibilities

According to the Graduate Employees Union contract, the academic year encompasses two appointment periods: August 16–December 31 and January 1–May 15. During each appointment period, a graduate assistant's responsibilities require an average of 10 hours per week for a quarter-time appointment and 20 hours per week for a half-time appointment.

Graduate students with a half-time appointment may, with permission of the grad director, work hourly for no more than 9 hours per week during the academic year.

Anticipated distribution of duties over the weeks of a semester should be communicated to the graduate assistant by the appointing unit at the time of appointment. To the extent that current policies and procedures contain provisions about wages, benefits, or other terms and conditions of employment, they are, for teaching assistants included in the collective bargaining unit, subject to negotiations with the Graduate Employees Union and the American Federation of Teachers.

Summer appointments are determined under a different budget category, are fewer, and are advertised by the department in early spring on the department email lists.

### Assistantship Levels

The following levels of assistantships have been contractually established by the Graduate Employees Union (GEU):

**Graduate Assistants, Level 1.** These graduate students have a bachelor's degree and have less than one year's experience as graduate assistants or as full-support fellows. They teach, do research, or are assigned supervised duties such as reading and grading papers.

**Graduate Assistants, Level 2.** These graduate students have a relevant Master's degree, or equivalent, and/or one year's experience as graduate assistants or as full-support fellows in the appointing department or school, or in a unit considered relevant by the chair of the appointing department or school. They teach, do research, or perform administrative tasks with moderate supervision.

**Graduate Assistants, Level 3.** These graduate students have a relevant Master's degree, or equivalent, and have at least 2 years' experience as graduate assistants (or equivalent experience at the faculty level) in the appointing unit or in a unit considered relevant by the chair of the appointing unit. They teach, do research, or perform administrative tasks with minimum supervision.

Advancement to the rank of Graduate Assistant Level 3 is on a merit basis, with the above prerequisites being considered minimal.

Within the range established for the university, the stipend depends on the qualifications of the individual and on the availability of funds in the appointing unit.

### Graduate Assistantship Eligibility Policy

The College of Arts and Letters mandates that each graduate program in the College will have in practice a policy that limits the total number of semesters of Graduate Assistantship eligibility, and that ties eligibility for assistantships to progress toward the degree.

For MA students in WRAC :

1. Students are eligible for graduate assistantships within the program for a **maximum of four semesters** (not including summer).
2. Students who have exhausted their assistantship eligibility may be given an assistantship if such are available after assistantships have been given to all normally qualified and eligible candidates.
3. A student who is not making satisfactory progress towards the degree is not eligible for an assistantship.
4. Academic-year funding provided by fellowships or other achievement awards will not count towards the number of eligible semesters.

For PhD students in WRAC:

1. Students are eligible for graduate assistantships within the program for a **maximum of six semesters** (not including summer) **prior to passing their comprehensive exams** (core and concentration). Students who do not pass their comprehensive exams at the end of six semesters are not eligible for assistantships within the program again until the semester following successful completion of exams.
2. **Upon successful completion of comprehensive exams** (core and concentration), students are eligible for graduate assistantships within the program for **an additional four semesters**.
3. Students who have exhausted their assistantship eligibility may be given an assistantship if such are available after assistantships have been given to all normally qualified and eligible candidates.
4. Students who are not making satisfactory progress to the degree are not eligible for an assistantship.
5. Academic-year funding provided by fellowships or other achievement awards will not count towards the number of eligible semesters.

## 8.7 Outside Work for Pay

Graduate students who hold half-time graduate assistantships (either teaching assistantships or research assistantships) at MSU may not hold full-time employment elsewhere.

At times, students may find it necessary to work additional hours beyond their assistantship assignments. TA and RA assignments typically require 20 hours of work per week. Working too many additional hours beyond the assistantship can interfere with progress toward the degree.

For this reason, we strongly recommend that students limit the number of extra hours they work while they are holding an assistantship so as not to jeopardize their performance in courses or their progress toward the degree. As a general guideline, 4 to 8 additional hours per week over and above assistantship duties is close to the maximum; anything over 10 additional hours per week is not allowed.

## 8.8 WRAC Graduate Program Expectations for Graduate Assistants (GAs)

GAs are subject to the policies and evaluation procedures of the units in which they are appointed. GAs are expected to observe the following norms of professional behavior established by the WRAC graduate committee and enforced by the graduate director:



### **Expectations of TAs in the First-year Writing Program**

TAs are expected to:

- participate in an orientation workshop scheduled during the 2 weeks before fall semester classes begin;
- teach a version of the first-year writing curriculum that aligns with program learning outcomes;
- participate in weekly mentoring meetings in the first year of teaching;
- work with a mentor to design an individualized mentoring program after the first year of teaching;
- attend curriculum and teaching workshops;
- contribute to the knowledge of their colleagues as they gain experience by leading conversations and workshops;
- be observed periodically by mentors and colleagues;
- observe the teaching of their colleagues;
- comply with the provisions of the University Code of Teaching Responsibility (<http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/selected/code-of-teaching-responsibility>);
- submit a teaching portfolio at the end of the year;
- receive a letter of evaluation from the program director or mentor at the end of the year.

### **Expectations of GAs with Assignments Other than FYW**

- The faculty member(s) with whom a graduate assistant is working should clearly specify the assistant's duties and responsibilities at the start of the semester, or at a time sufficiently in advance of the date of expected completion.
- Assistants should be available for work for the number of hours specified from the start of the contract to the end of the semester (the last day of the final exam week).
- Assistants should report to the person(s) to whom they are assigned at the start of contract, usually during the week prior to the beginning of the semester.
- Assistants have the responsibility of reporting to the person(s) to whom they are assigned at least once per week.
- Inability to perform assigned duties should be communicated immediately to the faculty member directly or through the department main office.
- Compliance with the provisions of the University Code of Teaching Responsibilities is necessary.
- The student will receive a written evaluation from the supervising faculty at the end of each semester.

### Violations of These Expectations

Violations of the above expectations and norms will be detailed in written evaluations of the students at the end of each semester. The WRAC graduate director will review these evaluations when making decisions regarding the recommendation of students to assistantship positions. The director may at that time write a warning that indicates the violations of expectations, or may choose not to forward a recommendation for retention in that position.

## 8.9 Fifth-year Graduate Assistantships for PhD Students

Typically, admitted doctoral students receive a graduate assistantship package providing them with 4 years of support. Exceptions to this general rule are University Distinguished Fellowship (UDF) and University Enrichment Fellowship (UEF) packages and Writing Center fellowship packages, which provide 5 years of support.

If a student has not yet completed her/his degree work after 4 years of funding, the program will make every effort to assist that student in securing a graduate assistantship for the fifth year. Funding priority will be given to those who have been doing excellent professional and academic research and teaching, and who are closest to finishing their degree work; however, fifth-year students are only considered after those students in their first through fourth years.



To be considered for fifth-year funding, a student must make a written request to the WRAC graduate director no later than December 1 of their fourth year.

## 8.10 Departmental Resources

WRAC provides the following support for TAs teaching courses in the department: assigned office space, a mailbox, a desk, and a desk chair, and access to a computer and software necessary for teaching.

WRAC TAs have access to copying services to support their teaching assignment. The same is generally true for research assistants who are WRAC graduate program students.

The graduate director also works with WRAC to provide space for those graduate students who hold AAGA Fellowships in the first year of their program, and for University Fellows in the first and final fellowship year of their doctoral program.

## 8.11 Externally Funded Fellowships

Receipt of externally funded fellowships by students who have written their own grant applications and worth at least \$20,000 (direct costs) now makes students eligible for in-state tuition rate. The in-state tuition rate applies only to the semesters during which the student is supported by the fellowship. This policy applies only to grants funded through a competitive process by a U.S. institution, agency, or foundation. Funds obtained through non-competitive processes (e.g., need-based fellowships) or from international sources do not qualify students for in-state tuition rates. For more information, contact the Graduate School.

### Teaching Assignments Other Than First-year Writing

Occasionally, opportunities to teach courses other than first-year writing arise—these usually include teaching in WRAC’s Public and Professional Writing program, the Experience Architecture program, the English department, or teaching the Writing Center undergraduate course. The process for applying for these positions is distributed via the departmental email lists.

Decisions about assigning graduate students to courses other than first-year writing are made jointly by the chair and associate chairs of the department and are based on a number of factors, including current progress toward the degree, previous experience, availability of mentors, etc. If you have questions about this process, please consult the graduate director.

## 8.12 English Language Proficiency for International TAs

International teaching assistants who are not native speakers of English are required to demonstrate that they meet a minimum standard of fluency in spoken English before they can be assigned teaching work that involves oral communication with undergraduate students. TAs may meet this requirement by achieving any one of the following:

1. A score of 50 or higher on the Test of Spoken English (TSE), given by the Educational Testing Service. Any person who signs up and pays a fee to the Educational Testing Service is eligible to take the TSE. The TSE is given regularly on campus and internationally. At their own expense, students may take the TSE as many times as they wish. Test dates, registration procedures, and a TSE practice test are posted on the Educational Testing Service web site (<http://www.ets.org>).
2. A score of 50 or higher on SPEAK, given by the English Language Center (ELC). SPEAK is given free of charge to eligible students at MSU by the ELC. To be eligible to take SPEAK on campus, students must have regular admission and must have proof of TA status. Students who are being considered for a teaching assistantship

must submit a SPEAK request form to the ELC signed by their department or program. Students who do not receive a sufficient score on SPEAK in a given attempt must wait at least 2 months before re-testing. A SPEAK test practice tape and booklet are on reserve at the Audio Visual Library (4th floor west wing, Main Library).

3. A score of 50 or higher on the ITA Oral Interview (ITAOI) after taking English 097 (the ITA Speaking and Listening Class). The ELC gives the ITAOI free of charge to eligible students at MSU. Students have four opportunities to meet the university's requirement on the ITAOI.

#### **Appeal Procedure by Review Board**

If a student obtains a 45 on SPEAK or a 45 on the ITAOI and the student's department feels the test result inaccurately reflects the student's speaking ability, the department may ask a Review Board to independently evaluate the student's spoken English.

This Board will consist of (a) a departmental representative, (b) two ELC representatives, and (c) a representative of the Graduate School. The graduate director of the student's department or program must request the review on the student's behalf. The Review Board may grant interviewees a full or partial waiver to teach. They may also refuse to allow interviewees any waiver.

#### **Assignments for TAs Who Fail to Meet the University English Requirement**

If a TA does not receive the minimum university score on SPEAK or the ITAOI, the student's department has the option of giving the TA a work assignment that does not involve direct oral communication with undergraduates.

### **8.13 Research with Human Subjects**

Students whose research for the PhD dissertation or MA thesis will involve human subjects must submit an IRB (the University Committee on Research in Human Subjects) application to the MSU Human Research Protection Program.

Approval of the research protocol *must* be received before beginning to collect data from subjects. The student's advisor or committee chair will be designated the responsible project investigator on the IRB application, and the student will be designated an additional investigator for the project.

Examples of research involving human subjects include interviews, telephone or email surveys, behavioral or educational testing, and observation of individual or group behavior. Surveys, case studies, ethnographies, usability studies, and observations of human action all require approval by IRB.



All graduate students are required to complete and report Responsible Conduct of Research training; see section 7.6 of this handbook—whether or not they pursue research with human subjects.

## 8.14 Requirements for Formatting and Submitting Dissertations and Theses

A list of requirements for submitting the thesis or dissertation is available on the Graduate School web site (<http://grad.msu.edu/etd/>).

The new publishing agreement for theses/dissertations with ProQuest now provides an Open Access Publishing Option as an alternative to the traditional publishing option available to our students. The Open Access option gives ProQuest the authorization to make the electronic version of the document accessible to all via the Internet, including the selling of the document by commercial retailers and accessibility to the work via search engines. A student selecting the Open Access option will not be eligible to receive royalties. The pros and cons of selecting this new option differ significantly across disciplines. For more information, go to the ProQuest website.

### Filing non-print thesis or dissertation projects

The Graduate School has asked us to follow the following procedure when filing non-print materials to meet the requirements of thesis or dissertation projects.

You may use a non-print (for example, video) file for your document; however, you must have the same set of preliminary pages that would be included in a regular print document, all formatted according to the standard formatting guide requirements. This set includes:

- a title page
- an abstract
- a table of contents—link from this page to your non-print file; this link must always be maintained so that anyone who wants to see your non-print file in the future can do so
- a references/works cited section
- any other preliminary pages (dedication, acknowledgements, preface, etc.)

## 8.15 Requirements for Completing the Degree

Degree candidates must complete an Application for Graduation early in the semester in which they plan to graduate. The online graduate application form is available at <http://www.reg.msu.edu/StuForms/GradApp/GradApp.asp>. For further instructions and information about ceremonies, regalia, etc., see <http://grad.msu.edu/graduation>.

## 8.16 Personal Leave Policy

This policy is designed to address leave from coursework and scholarly obligations required by the program. Graduate students, who also hold teaching assistantships, should consult Article 18 of the GEO Contract for policies governing them as employees of Michigan State University.

### General Guidelines

If a student will miss a class period or two (for any of the allowable reasons referenced below), they should inform their guidance committee chair and all course instructors as promptly as possible so that arrangements for completing missed coursework may be made. Every effort will be made to assist the student in making up missed work, but the final responsibility for completing missed work in a timely fashion rests with the student.

If a student will be missing from the program for more than a week, they should also inform the program director and request a formal leave of absence from the program. In event of such a leave, the student shall have the right to return to the program, within the dates of the current appointment, at such time as they are able to resume the required program of study.

If a leave occurs while a student is taking a comprehensive examination, the student's Guidance Committee chair should consult with the program director about how to best restart that component of the exam process.

### Allowable Reasons for Leave

- **Illness, Injury, or Pregnancy:** In the event that a graduate student is unable to attend courses because of illness, injury, or pregnancy.
- **Religious Observance:** It is university policy to allow graduate students to observe those holidays set aside by their chosen and practiced religious faith.
- **Professional Conferences:** It is the policy of the program to encourage graduate students to attend professional and scholarly conferences.
- **Adoption and Parental Leave:** In the event that a graduate student is unable to attend courses because they adopt a child or become a mother/father by birth.
- **Bereavement:** In the event that a graduate student is unable to attend courses because they experience a death in their immediate family.
- **Jury Duty:** In the event that a graduate student is unable to attend courses because they are assigned jury duty or is subpoenaed to provide court testimony.

- **Military Service:** In the event that a graduate student is unable to attend courses because they are called to do military service.

## **8.17 Research Leaves**

Leaves of absence in order to pursue scholarship and research directly pertaining to a graduate student's thesis or dissertation may be granted in some circumstances. Recommendations for such leaves originate in a request letter from the graduate student and a supporting letter from that student's guidance committee chair. Leaves from the program do not generally extend for more than one year.

## SECTION 9.

### Further Resources

#### 9.1 Additional Financial Support

Program academic-year travel and research support is available to all graduate students through a request process that happens early every fall semester.

Program summer travel and research support is available to PhD students per their admission letter and for MA students to apply for. The request process for summer support happens in spring semester. Students who are provided summer travel and research support are required to complete a brief form reporting on their summer activities.

Additional financial support is available in a variety of forms—some to recruit new students, some to support current students. Support is available for travel and research as well as to provide emergency funding. Graduate students should get in the habit of applying regularly for funding and grants; it is an important (and necessary) professional skill.

There are also a number of competitive fellowships available to students already enrolled in the WRAC graduate program that are provided by the Graduate School, by the College of Arts and Letters, and by other units in the university.

For a full list of available fellowships and funding opportunities from the College of Arts & Letters, see <http://www.cal.msu.edu/currentstudents/graduate/resources>.

For a full list of available fellowships and funding opportunities from the Graduate School, see <http://grad.msu.edu/funding/>.

#### 9.2 Assistantships Beyond WRAC

Teaching and research assistantships are available in a number of areas related to the program: the First-year Writing Program (WRAC); Integrative Studies in Arts and Humanities (IAH); the Writing Center; the English department (ENG); journals that faculty members serve as editors for; the Learning HUB; MATRIX; the Residential College in Arts and Humanities (RCAH), and others that vary from year to year.

Please seek out other graduate students who have served in assistantships outside of WRAC to find out more about processes for indicating interest and applying. The RW grad director is also able to provide information and recommendations.



### 9.3 Assistantships and Stipends

The most typical form of support for graduate students in the WRAC graduate program is a half-time graduate assistantship—either a teaching assistantship or a research assistantship—that is awarded at the time of admission to the program. The teaching load for half-time teaching assistants is 1/1—that is, one course per semester, fall and spring semesters. A half-time assistantship pays a stipend and provides the student with a tuition waiver and health benefits. The exact amount of the stipend depends on the student's level of professional experience.

### 9.4 Stipend Taxes

Graduate assistantship stipends are subject to income taxes with few exceptions. However, stipends are not subject to Social Security (FICA) taxes. The taxability of stipends is subject to review by the Internal Revenue Service. For more information, call the Payroll Office at 517-355-5010.



Tax laws are subject to continuing revision and students should verify their tax liability yearly.

# SECTION 10.

## Appendices

On the following pages, you will find:

### FORMS

- A MA Report of the Advisory Committee (RoGC)
- B PhD Report of the Advisory Committee (RoGC)
- C Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Completion Reporting Form
- D Change in Guidance Committee Form
- E MA Record of the Plan A Thesis and Oral Examination
- F PhD Record of Exams Form
- G PhD Record of Dissertation and Oral Examination Requirements
- H University Independent Study Form
- I Teaching Internship Form/Contract
- J Professional/Community Internship Form/Contract



Forms are **FOR REFERENCE and PLANNING ONLY.**

Do not complete any of these forms on paper/print copy. Word and PDF versions of the forms are available on the WRAC web site: <http://wrac.msu.edu>.

### WORKSHEETS AND GUIDES

- K MA-CSLP Advising Guide
- L MA-DRPW Advising Guide
- M PhD Advising Guide
- N Ideal PhD Timeline
- O Ideal MA Timeline
- P Annual Review Checklist for Students
- Q Annual Review Checklist for Faculty
- R RW Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Requirements
- S GradPlan Guide for PhD Students
- T Issues and Reporting Guide