

School of Languages and Cultures Purdue University

Guidelines for the
Master of Arts Degree

Effective Fall 2023

These guidelines are intended to supplement, but not supersede, the applicable regulations in the [Policies and Procedures for Administering Graduate Student Programs](#) of the Graduate School, with which the student should also be familiar. The current guidelines will apply to all graduate students who are admitted to the Master of Arts (MA) degree programs in the School of Languages and Cultures (SLC), and they are intended to give information and provide direction to students and faculty of SLC. Suggestions for amendments to these guidelines may be submitted by the graduate faculty to the SLC Head and Executive Committee for consideration.

1. MA Degree Programs and Graduate Assistantships in Languages and Cultures

SLC administers MA degree programs in the following areas:

- [Comparative Literature](#)
- [French](#)
- [German](#) (program currently on hiatus)
- [Japanese](#)
- [Spanish](#)

Admission to one of these programs comes with a guaranteed four semesters of graduate assistantship funding (generally a half-time position as a teaching assistant, research assistant, or other form of graduate assistant), contingent on continued progress toward the degree and on the successful fulfillment of teaching or other obligations associated with the assistantship. The performance of all graduate students will be reviewed by the relevant faculty each year before assistantships are awarded for the following year. Summer session funding is possible in some cases, but it is not guaranteed.

The SLC course on college-level language teaching ([LC 519](#); also offered under FR / GER / JPNS / SPAN prefixes) is required of all new teaching assistants who are teaching in a language other than English and is usually taken in the first semester of the TAship. The SLC graduate course on literary criticism and bibliographies is required for MA students in Comparative Literature, French, German, and Spanish ([LC 630](#); [FR 630](#); [GER 630](#); [SPAN 630](#)). The 630 course should be taken as soon as possible within the students' course of study since it isn't offered each semester (currently, it is offered every other Fall

semester).

All teaching assistants who are enrolled in SLC MA programs are expected to take at least 15 hours of graduate or dual-level coursework per calendar year toward their degree program. International graduate students should check with [ISS](#) about current regulations for minimum credit hours per semester to maintain their student visa status.

2. Coursework Requirements for the MA

The MA degree will include a minimum of 30 credit hours of graduate-level course work. For the MA Thesis option (see #7 below), a minimum of 24 hours of coursework is expected, with up to 6 credits awarded for thesis research and writing (hours taken under the [698](#) course number). The 30 credit hours of coursework, or 24 credit hours for the thesis option, may consist of the following:

- **Primary Area courses**, which should include as many courses as possible with the prefix designation that is affiliated with the student's area of study (CMPL, FR, GER, JPNS, SPAN); however, cross-listed SLC graduate courses in literature and culture that are taught in English as the language of instruction also count as Primary Area courses, as does the 630 Literary Criticism and Bibliography course;
- **Related Area courses**, which are outside of the Primary Area of literature and culture and usually come from other departments; these may include, for example, courses in programs within the College of Liberal Arts (interdisciplinary programs such as gender studies, or fields that are highly relevant to the study of literature and culture, such as philosophy, history, and anthropology). In some cases, courses from another college could be included in Related Area coursework (such as psychology courses for a student interested in cognitive approaches to literature).

Thesis-option students may have up to 6 credits of coursework in a Related Area (in which case they will generally have, in addition, 6 credits of thesis research and 18 credits of Primary Area coursework). Non-thesis students may have up to 9 credits of coursework in a Related Area (in which case they will have, in addition, 21 credits of Primary Area coursework). All MA students are encouraged to take at least 3 credit hours of Related Area coursework, but this is not required; the Plan of Study may consist entirely of Primary Area coursework.

Not more than one course for which the student earns the grade of "C+", "C", or "C-" may be included on the Plan of Study to count toward the MA degree. No coursework with grades below a "C-" will be allowed to count toward the 30 credits for the MA.

3. Additional Requirements and Expectations for the MA

Students pursuing the MA degree from Purdue's School of Languages and Cultures are expected to demonstrate, at a minimum, the ability to speak the major language

fluently, in a substantially correct form; to read and comprehend texts in the major language; to write the major language in a style completely understandable to a native speaker; and to understand the language as spoken by native speakers. (An exception to this expectation would be Comparative Literature students who are not specializing in one major language and instead are studying texts from a variety of cultures in English translation).

If a student's proficiency level in their major language of study is deemed by faculty in their area as too low to ensure their academic success, the student will be required to complete one or more advanced undergraduate language courses (e.g. 400-level language courses such as 401 and 402). These courses will be listed on the student's transcript, but they will not count as part of the 30-hour minimum required for the MA degree.

For the MA, the student must also demonstrate proficiency (at least reading knowledge) in one additional language other than English and the student's major language of study. The student, in consultation with their committee, will determine which language would be most appropriate for the student's program, which may include the student's native language(s), if that language is neither English nor the major language of study.

This language requirement may be met in any of the following ways:

- a. by examination in the language;
- b. by completing the language course 202 or higher in the language with a minimum grade of B (3.0);
- c. by completing the equivalent of 202 or higher in the language with a minimum grade of B (3.0) at another institution within five years of beginning the SLC graduate program.

This additional language requirement must be satisfied before the final MA examination may be scheduled.

4. The Major Professor and the Advisory Committee

The major professor must be chosen by the fifth week of the student's second semester of study. This will be the student's primary advisor for the MA degree and should be a member of SLC's graduate faculty. The major professor and the candidate should consult regularly regarding the candidate's progress toward the degree. The candidate may be advised to withdraw from the program if progress is not satisfactory. Students are expected to maintain a GPA of at least 3.0 on courses listed on the Plan of Study.

The student's Advisory Committee must also be constituted during the second semester and includes at least two other faculty members in addition to the major professor. The Advisory Committee members may be from outside of SLC if their research expertise is relevant. The committee will be established in conformity with the procedures outlined in the [Policies and Procedures](#):

The student and the major professor are responsible for the selection of an advisory committee. The duties of that committee are to assist the student in the preparation of the plan of study and to offer advice during the period of graduate work, including research and thesis preparation when these are required components of the student's degree program.

The committee consists of the major professor and at least two other members of the graduate faculty (with the exception of non-thesis MA degree programs that have approval for a one-member advisory committee. Please refer to [Section VII. A. 2. a.](#)). Committees must be approved by the head of the graduate program, the college dean (if requested by the college), and the dean of the Graduate School. Because it is crucial for advisory committee members to bring independent thought and decision-making to their advisory committee roles, the Graduate School strongly recommends that major professors, graduate students, and other individuals involved in the advisory committee selection process strive to avoid appointments where there may be potential conflicts of interest. Advisory committee appointments of spouses/partners, partners in business, or those with financial conflicts of interest connected to the graduate student, for example, should be carefully reviewed and alternatives considered. Members of the committee need not be faculty with whom the student has taken coursework, however, at least 51% of the committee members must have regular graduate faculty certification. The request to the dean of the Graduate School for appointment of the advisory committee is made on the same form and at the same time as the request for approval of the student's plan of study. (See [Section VII-B.](#)) The dean of the Graduate School may appoint additional members if it seems advisable. ([Policies and Procedures](#), Sec. VII.A.2.)

The student, in conjunction with their major professor and the rest of their Advisory Committee, is responsible for ensuring that the student meets all the requirements on schedule and that they pursue a rational program of studies.

5. The Plan of Study

The student's Advisory Committee including their major professor must approve coursework designated as Related Area before it can be used on the Plan of Study as counting toward the MA degree. Appeals to these decisions by students should be addressed directly to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and the SLC Head.

Not later than the fifth week of the second semester of graduate work, the student must begin drafting a Plan of Study to be submitted for approval by the major professor and the members of the student's Advisory Committee. The final Plan of Study is to be

approved by the student's Advisory Committee, the DGS, and the SLC Head prior to the end of the tenth week of the second semester of coursework.

Guidelines for students who are interested in transferring credit to the Plan of Study:

- Transfer courses must be regular status, graduate-level courses taken for graduate credit at an accredited institution of higher learning.
- In SLC, a maximum of 6 credit hours will be considered for transfer.
- Coursework transferred must have a grade of "B-" (2.7/4.0) or higher.
- Credit must have been earned within the last five years.
- Transferred courses must fit into a cohesive Plan of Study and be approved by members of the Advisory Committee.

Additional details about the process of transferring courses can be discussed with the SLC Graduate Studies Coordinator.

6. The Reading Lists and Final Examination

Note: *students should see SLC's Graduate Studies Coordinator or the relevant language-specific Graduate Advisor during their first semester of study to receive the most up-to-date information about reading lists and examination procedures specific to their areas.*

All candidates for the MA, also thesis-option students, are expected to read the works included on the reading lists given to them by their program. The MA examination, consisting of written and oral components, will be based upon the broad educational experience of the candidates, with allowance and opportunity for them to draw on the reading lists, outside readings, and general background gained in courses.

The examination will be written and graded by the members of the student's Examining Committee (this might or might not consist of the same faculty from the Advisory Committee). The method of grading will be uniform within each language department. No student will be advanced to the oral examination unless the written part has been judged satisfactory by the Examining Committee. In most cases, the oral examination will be administered within two weeks of the written examination.

Students may take the MA examination no more than three times; permission to repeat the examination is not guaranteed, but may be granted by the student's major professor and Advisory Committee. A repeated examination may not occur within the same registration period, per the Graduate School's Policies and Procedures (see [Section VII. F. 2.](#)), and a new electronic *Request for Appointment of Examining Committee* (G.S. Form 8) must be submitted. Whether the candidate is successful or not, the *Report of Master's Examining Committee* (G.S. Form 7) must be completed, signed, and submitted online.

Additional important notes regarding the MA final examination:

- If needed, a change to the Plan of Study must be completed and fully approved at least one week prior to the start of the term in which the final examination will be taken.
- Students must declare graduation candidacy in the semester in which the final examination is taken, unless the thesis won't be deposited until the following semester.

7. The Thesis Option

The candidate for the MA with the thesis option must complete the thesis, a substantial piece of original scholarship, and have the formatting approved before scheduling written and oral exams (refer to the website for the [Thesis and Dissertation Office](#) for template and specific guidelines). It is expected that most of the research for the thesis will be conducted in residence at Purdue's West Lafayette campus. To request permission for conducting off-campus research, see the [Graduate School's Form 19](#). The DGS and the SLC Head make the final determination of whether off-campus research is permitted. This is approved only in extenuating circumstances and to the extent that it doesn't conflict with university regulations.

Regarding the 6 credit hours of 698 research for the thesis options:

A graduate student also is expected to earn S grades for research registration. Two consecutive sessions of U grades for research registration mandate that the department take formal action and inform the student, in writing, and the Graduate School with regard to discontinuation or conditions for continuation of the student's graduate study. ([Policies and Procedures](#) Section VI.A.)

As mentioned above, MA programs in SLC also require a written and oral examination, which will cover the reading lists and other general background knowledge for the respective programs (such as characteristics of the main literary periods and genres). The final oral examination for a thesis-option student will be, at least in part, a defense of the student's MA thesis.

According to the [Policies and Procedures](#), for the thesis-option MA degree, "The final examining committee must be composed of at least three members of the graduate faculty and may or may not be identical to the advisory committee. Members of the committee need not be faculty with whom the student has taken coursework, however, at least 51% of the committee members must have regular graduate faculty certification" (Section VII. D.).

Additional important notes about the MA thesis option:

- Students must pay a **thesis deposit fee** (\$90 at the time of this writing),

which cannot be waived. Candidates can pay the deposit fee through their myPurdue accounts. The thesis fee should appear in a candidate's student account 2-3 days after their successful deposit.

- Students are responsible for being familiar with all [deposit requirements](#) of the Graduate School.
- The thesis document must conform with the regulations outlined in "[A Manual for the Preparation of Graduate Theses](#)."

8. Exceptional Cases and Extensions

These SLC guidelines are intended to help MA degree students work with their major professors and Advisory Committees to design effective Plans of Study which will contribute to their academic and professional growth. Exceptions to these guidelines occasionally may be granted in individual cases with extenuating circumstances. It is incumbent on the student and their major professor to justify requests for exceptions, including extensions to length of degree program, via a memorandum addressed to the DGS and to the SLC Head, preferably prior to the filing of the Plan of Study. Note that an extension granted to the length of a degree program does **not** guarantee an extension of funding.

Students are advised that regulations in the [Policies and Procedures for Administering Graduate Student Programs](#) of the Graduate School cannot be overruled by the SLC administration.

9. Admission to Doctoral Study Upon Completion of the MA Degree

Continuation to doctoral study beyond the MA level is not automatic. Students wishing to seek admission to a PhD program in SLC must write a letter of request to the DGS, copying their major professor and the Graduate Studies Coordinator, with a brief rationale explaining the motivations for seeking the PhD degree. Such requests should be submitted after successful completion of the comprehensive written and oral examinations for the MA degree, and the student will find out whether they have been admitted to a PhD program in SLC by the end of that same semester.

NOTE: It is the student's responsibility to comply with all SLC and Graduate School guidelines and deadlines. Please note that any relevant changes in university guidelines will supersede the information presented in this document.

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Glossary of Terms

Advisory Committee

This consists of two faculty members in addition to the major professor and should be constituted in the second semester of graduate study. The Advisory Committee determines whether courses may be used on the Plan of Study as Related Area coursework.

Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)

The DGS works with the SLC Head and the Graduate Studies Coordinator to administer the SLC graduate programs. This can include advising students on problems and concerns that arise, informing them about relevant professional development opportunities and scholarships or fellowships, and consulting with the Head on decisions about requests for funding or time-to-degree extensions.

Examining Committee

Consists of the major professor and two other relevant graduate faculty; may be the same composition as the Advisory Committee, but it doesn't need to be. Must be established before requesting the MA examination ("final examination").

Final Examination

For the MA degrees in SLC, this consists of written and oral components and is composed and graded by the Examining Committee. For MA thesis-option students, the oral component is often referred to as the "thesis defense." Thesis-option students are also responsible for the readings lists in their respective areas, and the written examination may address those works.

Graduate Advisor (program-specific)

Each SLC graduate program designates a faculty member to serve as the graduate advisor to assist new graduate students before they select a major professor. The SLC orientation week schedule (the week before classes start in the Fall semester) traditionally lists on its first page the faculty who hold these roles for the respective programs.

Graduate Studies Coordinator

An administrative staff team position in SLC; this is our graduate students' primary contact person for questions about degree requirements, procedures, and policies governing our graduate programs.

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

The IDP is a document that encourages graduate students to consider their strengths, potential areas for professional growth, and their career goals (whether for academic or non-academic jobs). The IDP template is given to graduate students during SLC's Orientation Week (the week before Fall semester classes start in August) and should be drafted and discussed with a faculty mentor by halfway through their first semester (week 8). The IDP should be reviewed and revised each year of the student's program of study.

Major Professor

Sometimes referred to as faculty advisor, this is the primary academic contact person for an SLC graduate student during their time in the program. The major professor should be an SLC faculty member in the student's field of study or one that is closely related. Responsibilities of the major professor include advising the student on coursework selections, tracking advisees' progress toward degree, reading carefully and commenting on drafts of the thesis for thesis-option students, and coordinating MA examinations with the Advisory Committee, which they chair or co-chair. The major professor may also be consulted about post-MA career possibilities and professional development opportunities. Students are encouraged to reach out to multiple faculty members for professional development mentoring, rather than relying solely on the major professor.

Plan of Study

The Plan of Study is submitted by the student online via the [Graduate School Database](#) after consultation with the major professor. For the MA degree, 30 credit hours are required for the Plan of Study. Students should begin drafting their Plan by the fifth week of their second semester of study, with the final version submitted and approved online by the tenth week of that semester. Note that certain types of courses are not allowed on the Plan of Study (e.g., Pass / No-Pass courses, audited courses, zero credit courses).

Primary Area Coursework

This includes courses within the student's area of study (CMPL, FR, GER, JPNS, SPAN), as well as cross-listed SLC graduate courses in literature and culture that are taught in English as the language of instruction. See *also*: Related Area Coursework.

Related Area Coursework

Related Area coursework includes courses that are outside of the Primary Area of literature and culture; these are usually offered by other departments. The major professor and the Advisory Committee must approve Related Area courses if they are to count toward the 30 credit hours on the MA Plan of Study. Thesis-option students may have up to 6 credits of coursework in a Related Area; non-thesis students may have up to 9 credits of coursework in a Related Area (although it isn't a requirement to have any Related Coursework on the Plan of Study).

Checklist with Deadlines for MA Degree Students

Task	Completion Deadline
Individual Development Plan (IDP) is drafted and shared with faculty mentor / prospective major professor; this will be reviewed at the beginning of each year	Semester 1, week 8
Major Professor selection is finalized	Semester 2, week 5
Plan of Study drafting begins	Semester 2, week 5
Advisory Committee constituted	Semester 2, week 7
Plan of Study submitted for approval by Advisory Committee	Semester 2, week 10
Language requirement fulfilled and Examining Committee established	Before scheduling MA examination
Declare candidacy for graduation with approval of major professor; register in the appropriate candidacy section using the scheduling assistant	Semester 4, week 1 (see Graduate Studies Coordinator if you are unsure whether to register for CAND 99100 - With Assistantship; CAND 99200 - Degree Only; or CAND 99300 - Examination Only)
Electronic Graduate School Form 8 "Request for Appointment of Examining Committee" submitted by major professor	At least two weeks before MA examination date as agreed on by candidate, major professor, and Examining Committee
Electronic Graduate School Form 7 "Report of Master's Examining Committee" submitted by major professor	After completion of the MA examination
Electronic Thesis Acceptance Form 9 submitted by student (MA Thesis option)	After completion of the MA examination; check with Graduate Studies Coordinator for deposit deadlines before graduation in that semester

Student deposits the thesis and pays the deposit fee (\$90 at the time of this writing)

Refer to the webpage for the [Thesis and Dissertation Office](#) for specific guidelines on submitting the dissertation to HammerRR at least 24 hours in advance of the [Deposit Deadline](#) (usually about a week and a half before commencement each semester).