The Department of English offers the degrees of Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy in English and American Literature and Doctor of Philosophy in English and Comparative Literature. Candidates for admission apply to the PhD program; we do not accept students for a terminal AM. The PhD is a six-year program.

The graduate program in English and American literature at Washington University in St. Louis is innovative, approachably sized, and generously funded, with all incoming students receiving full tuition scholarships plus University Fellowships. Our faculty includes Guggenheim Fellows, winners of the National Book Critics Circle Award, and members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. A participant in the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, we exemplify an integrated community of scholars and writers, and are home to one of the top ten MFA programs in the U.S. We sponsor multiple reading groups, regular faculty and student colloquia, and an extensive lecture series. The Hurst Visiting Professorship brings eight or more distinguished creative and critical voices to the department each year. Recent Hurst Professors have included Jerome McGann, Jed Esty, Charles Altieri, Carla Kaplan, Michael Wood, James Longenbach, Peter Coviello, Daniel Vitkus, Rita Felski, and Rita Copeland. They not only present public talks but also lead small workshops open only to graduate students.

Our program is rooted in the materials of literary history, medieval to post-postmodern, and we embrace the importance of interdisciplinarity. We believe that intellectual community is fostered by concrete working relationships between professors and students, and we offer collaborative teaching opportunities with experienced faculty. Graduate students in good standing can expect six years of full funding in all.

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Degree Requirements

PhD in English and American Literature or English and Comparative Literature

The AM/PhD program in English at Washington University in St. Louis is a six-year course of study leading to a doctorate in English and American Literature or English and Comparative Literature. All English graduate students take a minimum of 12 elective 3-credit courses at the 400 or 500 level, along with two compulsory classes: Introduction to Graduate Study, and the Practicum in the Teaching of Composition. Aside from these two classes, there are no specific course requirements, though students must take at least two courses in historical periods before 1780 (not in the same period) and at least two in historical periods after 1780 (again, not in the same period).

For students entering in the fall semester of 2014 and after, at least six of 12 elective courses must be 500-level, graduate-only seminars (four such 500-level seminars must be taken by students who entered in the fall of 2013 or earlier). Students are encouraged to enroll in courses of special interest in other departments or programs whether or not they are cross-listed with the English department, but at least eight of their 12 electives must be home-based English courses, including (save in exceptional cases) at least six of their seminars.

It is assumed that all entering graduate students are aiming for the PhD; the English department does not admit students aiming for a terminal AM degree. The AM is awarded during the course of study when a student has completed 36 credit hours, usually at the end of the second year. To satisfy the Graduate School requirement of demonstrated excellence, candidates for the AM may also be asked to submit a graded seminar essay (or the equivalent) for review by the English Graduate Committee.

Students entering the program with a master’s degree in hand normally follow the standard first-year curriculum. At the end of their third semester, the director of graduate studies (DGS) will review their AM credits taken elsewhere and determine how many credits (normally a limit of 9-12) may be applied toward the PhD at Washington University. Although students receiving transfer credit may be able to complete the PhD in fewer than six years, it is to their advantage to enter the program as first-year students since this ensures them four full semesters of study without teaching responsibilities. If, after three semesters and the review of transfer credit, the DGS determines that the student has fulfilled the course requirements for the PhD, the student may elect not to take classes in semester four and to begin Major Field reading instead; their 6 credits of Major Field preparation in semester four will complete the requirements for the Washington University AM degree.

Students who wish to receive the combined PhD degree in English and Comparative Literature may do so by fulfilling the English department’s requirements for combined degrees. More information on the combined degree may be found on our website (http://english.artsci.wustl.edu/graduate/combined_phd).

During the first seven semesters, credits are earned by taking courses, independent study, and directed reading: more precisely, 13 courses (39 credits) total across years one and two; the Practicum in Teaching (3 credits) in the fall of year three; 6 credits of directed reading in the spring of year three; and 6 credits of directed reading in the fall of year four.