

# Graduate Student Checklist – Finishing and Getting the Degree

## **I. Requirements for the Degree**

To graduate with the master's degree in English, students must follow the Graduation Outline, which consists of ten (10) 3-unit courses (with various requirements and prerequisites attached), and one 3-unit culminating experience course (*ENGL 6710* or *ENGL 6720*). The English MA therefore = min. 33 units.

Your seminars/courses count toward the degree if you receive a final grade of B (3.0) or better in the course.

You are eligible to graduate if you have an overall 3.25 GPA in the required coursework.

In addition to coursework, students must complete either the English MA comprehensive exam, a thesis, or a culminating project (information for each option can be found below, in Section II).

**If you want to finish the degree in two years, you should:**

- Carefully adhere to the Graduation Outline requirements
  - The Grad Outline can be found on the English Department's Master's Degree page, under **"Getting Through the MA in English Program"**
- Take 5-6 courses in your first year (Fall & Spring semesters)
- Take 4-5 courses in your second year (Fall & Spring semesters)
- Begin work (reading/research) on your culminating experience no later than after your second semester in the program

Be sure to review CSUB's Graduate Studies Policies and Procedures:

<https://catalog.csub.edu/policies-procedures/academic-policies/graduate/division-graduate-studies/>

## **II. Culminating Experience: Comprehensive Examination, Thesis, or Project**

### **General Information**

A culminating experience is EITHER the Comprehensive Examination (*ENGL 6710*) OR a Thesis or Project (*ENGL 6720*) (See below for more specific information on each option).

A committee of professors (usually 3 faculty members) will usher you through your culminating experience and, in the case of theses and projects, will be those who sign off on your Prospectus and attend your Oral Defense. One faculty member will serve as the chair of your committee. You will have the opportunity to choose who serves as your chair, however they are often a professor whose specialization most closely aligns with your area of interest.

### **The Role of the Graduate Committee Chair**

The graduate committee chair is key in assisting you through your culminating experience. The graduate committee chair will assist you in generating research questions, determining the target literature, helping create the project structure, and selecting an appropriate methodology, while maintaining enough distance to ensure that the culminating experience reflects your own individual intellectual effort. When applicable, the graduate committee chair (or graduate program director) can recommend other professors to be on your committee. The graduate committee chair communicates the expectations and processes you will follow. Once a proposal or plan is approved, the chair will have primary responsibility for the supervision of your work. Your chair will also inform you of the style and format required by the department, program, and university for formatting the final thesis or project, but keep in mind that sample theses and projects have been uploaded to our site.

### **Enrolling in English 6710 or 6720**

Being sure to include your Student ID number in the email, contact the Graduate Program Director when you need to enroll in *ENGL 6710* or *6720*, which could be the semester you begin working on your prospectus or at least the semester you plan on finishing up. Since you can enroll in the course before you finish your degree requirements, you do not need to worry about a grade (CR/NC) until the semester you actually finish. At that point, contact the Graduate Program Director and make sure that a grade is entered for the course.

## **The Comprehensive Exam**

For the Comprehensive Examination you must take one essay exam in one of the designated areas below. The exam is composed of two questions – one “breadth” question that tests your general knowledge of your chosen area, and one “depth” question that asks you to delve deeper into critical aspects of that same area (examples might include applying specific critical concepts or considering particular sub-areas within your chosen field).

### **Examination Areas:**

- Medieval Literature
- Renaissance and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Literature
- 18<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature
- 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature
- 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> Century British Literature
- Early American Literature: Beginnings to 1865
- Later American Literature: 1865 – Present
- 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ethnic American Literature
- Composition Theory & Practice

Comprehensive exams will take place in person on one Friday each semester, usually during the second-to-last week of classes. Students will be given a choice of two questions for the “breadth” category, as well as a choice of two questions for the “depth” category (you will not see these questions in advance).

You will have two hours to answer each question (the total examination time is four hours, with a sizable break between questions to rest or grab lunch).

### **Preparing for the Exam:**

Ideally, your chosen examination area is a field in which you have already taken MA coursework. Leading up to the semester in which you intend to take the exam, you should reach out to professors who specialize in your area to discuss how best to prepare. As you read (and especially during the semester of your exam), you should feel comfortable checking in with your professors semi-regularly to discuss your progress and receive specific guidance on the exam itself.

As you prepare for your exam, you should enroll in *ENGL 6710: Comprehensive Examination*. If you finish course work and are not yet ready to take your exam, be sure to enroll in *English 7000* through Extended Education: this allows you to maintain continuous enrollment at CSUB and gives you library privileges, etc. You will not be able to file for graduation unless you are an

active student, so continue to enroll in English 7000, every consecutive term, until you finish. Again, you need to enroll in English 7000 only if you are not enrolled in any other courses.

If you do not pass your exam, you may retake it once the following semester. You will receive different questions for the retake exam.

## **The Thesis or Project**

Students who choose the thesis/project option often do so because a class (or something they read in a class) inspired them to pursue a particular question or topic. Theses/projects can be on literary, linguistic, rhetorical, or pedagogical topics; projects can also include creative portions. See the samples on our website for the range of student interests they represent. As stated above, in “General Information,” you will need a three-professor Graduate Committee, and one professor on that committee must be your chair and mentor (usually the professor who specializes in the area of your topic). You will need to have a Prospectus approved before you begin your thesis/project in earnest, and you will have to defend your thesis/project orally.

The CSU requires that a pdf/word copy of your thesis/project be kept in department records, so please send a copy to the Graduate Program Director at the same time you submit it to the library. For more information about the thesis/project, and how to submit it to the library, see our department website.

### **Prospectus:**

A prospectus presents the scholarly rationale for your thesis or project, and it must be approved by all three members of your Graduate Committee (see the Instructions for Writing a Prospectus, and samples, on our website); do not begin your thesis/project without a prospectus that was approved at least the semester before you intend on finishing and Graduating. In other words, *your prospectus must be submitted and approved the semester before you start writing your thesis/project*. Keep in mind that professors are unlikely to be able to provide feedback on work presented to them near the end of the semester (many professors will wait until the following semester to review late-semester work, and this goes for thesis/project chapters, as well).

### **Oral Defense:**

Oral defenses often take place in graduate or other department courses once your committee approves the thesis/project. Consult your committee chair or the graduate program director about scheduling a defense; no matter what, alert the graduate program director of when and where it is taking place so that the entire department (professors, students, staff) can be invited (technically,

defenses are open to the entire campus, and we do alert the Graduate Student Center of defenses).

During your defense, you will explain and present your thesis/project in a presentation of around 15 minutes and field questions from your committee or other attendees (visual accompaniments welcome). Following a successful defense, the members of your graduate committee will sign the signature sheet for your thesis/project so you can submit it to the Walter Stiern Library fully completed (create a signature sheet by looking at the thesis samples you see on our website, then ask your chair to send it to the department's administrative coordinator, who will send it out for electronic signing). Let your chair know you need to defend in time to generate a signature sheet and meet the library deadline, which is always on the university's Academic Calendar (see our website and the WSL library website for more information).

### **III. Getting the Degree and Diploma**

Through Peoplesoft/MyCSUB the university reminds you to apply for graduation/a grad check, which you should do well before the semester you intend on graduating. There's paperwork and record keeping that must be done for you to receive your diploma; keep in mind that you might need evidence of having completed the degree for the job market. The grad check helps students make sure all required courses have been taken (and following the Graduation Outline will also ensure your successful, timely completion of the degree).

For extra help with getting your degree and diploma, contact the Graduate Student Center. Advisors and staff there thoroughly understand the (always changing) administrative processes of the university. Also be aware that the Office of the Registrar is where grad checks take place and degrees and diplomas are generated.