Master of Arts in Literature

AN OVERVIEW:
THE DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE

We chose our current title over the more common title, “Department of English,” because we interpret the idea of literature as broadly as possible. Our faculty and our course offerings reflect our deliberate diversity. While we regularly offer courses in traditional subjects such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, the novel, poetry, and surveys of British and American literature, we also offer an array of unique courses in Latin American, Chinese, and other literatures in translation; Third World, African American, and Asian American literatures; critical theory, women’s studies, and feminist theory. We include cinema studies as part of our program; our offerings in cinema reflect both our traditional and global interests, including courses pertaining to the national cinemas of France, Canada, Latin America, and other countries and areas, along with a focus on film genres such as film noir and musicals.

THE PROGRAM:
OBJECTIVES, OPTIONS

The M.A. Program in Literature is designed to hone students’ skills in the analysis and interpretation of literary texts and to broaden their knowledge of key literary periods, theories, genres, and cultures. You may tailor your program of study still further by selecting from one of four specialized concentrations: pre-doctoral, interdisciplinary, teaching or generalist. Graduates of our program have garnered excellent teaching and editorial positions and have been accepted into first-rate doctoral programs in English.

OUR PROGRAM:
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

Our department emphasizes intellectual daring, and our professors are stellar embodiments of this emphasis. We also value excellent teaching, as is evidenced by the many university teaching awards our faculty receive. The relatively small size of the program makes possible small seminars and opportunities for independent study, a high level of student-faculty interchange, and specially-tailored concentrations. For example, those who expect to continue their studies in a Ph.D. program may opt for the pre-doctoral concentration, while those interested in teaching high school or college writing may take the Teaching Composition seminar and then apply for one of several types of internships in the department. You may choose to prepare a mentored scholarly essay for possible publication, or write a thesis under the guidance of a faculty advisor. You may be granted a teaching assistantship, through which you will gain practical experience leading class discussions, developing assignments, and working closely alongside a professor with undergraduate students in a General Education course.

OUR FACULTY:
ACCOMPLISHED SCHOLARS

Our professors are notable for their scholarly achievement, academic productivity, and collaborative activities with other faculty and graduate students. As a result, there is an exciting atmosphere of learning and discovery in the department. Members of the department regularly publish and present scholarly work at conferences; many
have received national recognition for their publications as well as for their service to the profession. Faculty biographies are available on the M.A. web site: http://www.american.edu/cas/lit/ma_lit.cfm (click on Faculty).

**INTRADEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION**

The M.A. Program in Literature and the M.F.A. Program in Creative Writing benefit from a close working relationship. Our faculty, a unique mix of literary scholars and creative writers, includes the authors of numerous recent scholarly studies as well as widely recognized novelists, poets, short story writers, and essayists. Our *Visiting Writers Series* brings several distinguished writers to campus each semester. Our Graduate Speakers Series in the MA Program features talks each semester on a wide variety of subjects by intellectually stimulating scholars. Students will also have the chance to interact with these scholars on a more informal basis.

**OPPORTUNITIES IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Washington D.C. offers unparalleled resources for research, internships, part-time employment, and intellectual enrichment. The extensive collections of the *Library of Congress* provide unique research opportunities for literature students. The *Folger Shakespeare Library*, of which American University is a founding member, sponsors an Institute for Renaissance and Eighteenth-Century Studies. The Institute brings noted scholars from across the United States and from abroad to offer semester-long seminars, some of which are open to American University graduate students for residential course credit. Participants are eligible to use the *Rare Book Library* while their courses are in progress. Our students have held internships at the *Folger Library*, the *National Endowment for the Humanities*, the *National Endowment for the Arts*, *National Public Radio*, *The National Geographic*, local theaters, and many other area institutions. Local theaters—large and small, traditional and avant-garde—present an exceptional range of live performances; the *American Film Institute*, local cinemas, and our own campus *Media Center* offer an extensive selection of films. In addition to the film courses that are part of the Literature Department’s curriculum, professors often supplement traditional approaches to the study of literature by including cinema and other contemporary media in their courses.

**ENTERING THE PROGRAM**

Meet with the Program Director

The M.A. Program is currently directed by Anita Gilman Sherman. Please see Professor Sherman (asherm@american.edu) for all your advising needs. She will serve as your faculty advisor throughout your course of study at American University. Upon entering the program, you should discuss the following with the director:

- **Your general aims** in the program and the specific courses you will take in the coming semester.
- **Any graduate credits** from other universities (or courses taken with non-degree status at American University) that you wish to transfer towards your M.A. degree. [Note: a maximum of six credit hours from another university or twelve hours from AU non-degree study
may be applied toward your M.A. degree.

- **Your status within the academic program** and any special concerns you may have about coursework. Feel free to visit the Director during her posted office hours or by appointment. [Note: You must meet with her at least once a semester to register for the following semester, to confirm that your course of study is on track and to verify that your coursework will help you to prepare for the Comprehensive Exam].

**Become familiar with Services**

An array of academic services at AU offers assistance to meet student needs. We encourage you to become familiar with these services and utilize them for your benefit; they offer supplemental services and information that can enhance the educational process. Such services include The Writing Center, Academic Support Services, Counseling and Career Services, and Library Services.

**Register for Classes**

There are several important components of the registration process that students should consider:

- **Register early**: Spring registration begins in late October and Fall registration begins in mid-March. [Note: Exact dates are provided in the published Schedule of Classes and on the university’s Academic Calendar].
- **Enrollment counts**: Please note that courses that do not enroll ten or more students by the Friday before beginning of the term will usually be canceled.
- **Course Registration**: Pre-registration for courses for the following semester is conducted on-line. You may also check course listings on-line through the university’s web site. You must meet with the Director to discuss course choices and receive authorization to register. Courses that require the instructor’s permission, including LIT 730 and LIT 731 (The Teaching Composition and Literature sequence), LIT 793 (Mentored Scholarly Essay), and LIT 797 (Master’s Thesis) require online authorization from the Director.

**Keep up with Communication**

As soon as you have accepted admission into the program, you will be given an AU email account and access to Blackboard, the university’s on-line academic site. Please check your accounts regularly, as well as the AU website (my.american.edu) for important information pertaining to classes, campus announcements, and correspondence from faculty and fellow students. Be sure to provide a forwarding address if you wish that university e-mail be directed to your personal address. Mailboxes for M.A. students are located in the hallway outside Battelle-Tompkins 237, the Literature Department main office. Check your mailbox regularly for announcements and other communications since it is an important way for faculty and fellow students to keep in touch with you. Also check nearby bulletin boards for current notices of interest to M.A. students, including internship and job opportunities.

**NOTE**: Certain courses, such as Teaching Composition, Theories and Methodologies, each genre among the genre-specific 500-level survey courses, and the 700-level theory seminar, are only offered once a year, so plan accordingly.
Your professors’ office hours and the hours of Battelle-Tompkins and campus computer labs are important to know. A list of professors’ office hours is available in the Literature Department office, Battelle 237.

PURSUING YOUR DEGREE

Program Requirements
To complete the M.A. degree, students must complete a total of 36 hours (12 courses) of approved graduate work, of which half must be in 500- or 700-level graduate seminars. No classes may be taken pass/fail for the MA degree. (Internships, however, are pass/fail.) Students must take and pass a written Comprehensive Exam, based partially on literature taught in M.A. seminars and other literature courses and partly on students’ independent preparation.

Course Requirements
- 3 credit hours of LIT 520 (Theories and Methodologies), a gateway course offered every fall and mandatory for incoming Masters’ students.
- 6 credit hours (two courses) selected from among the four intensive graduate genre seminars (LIT 521, LIT 522, LIT 523, or LIT 524);
- 9 credit hours (3 courses) selected from graduate seminars (500- or 700-level courses);
- 9 credit hours (3 courses) selected from any graduate-level courses (500 level or above, including 400/600 level courses);
- 9 credit hours in one of four specialty concentrations within the M.A. program (details below).

SPECIALIZING YOUR STUDIES

Four specialty concentrations permit you to customize your course of studies while pursuing the Master’s degree: pre-doctoral, teaching, interdisciplinary, and generalist. While the degree certificate will not mention your specialty concentration, you will benefit from the personalization and orientation offered by these options. You should select one of the four concentrations by the end of your first year in the program, based on your future academic or professional goals.

Pre-Doctoral
- 3 credit hours of Literary Theory (LIT 732) and one of the following:
  - 6 credit hours in literature at the 700 level, or
  - 3 credit hours in literature at the 700 level and 3 credit hours devoted to research and writing of a mentored scholarly essay (LIT 793), or
  - 6 credit hours of Master’s Thesis (LIT 797).

As its name implies, this concentration prepares students to undertake more advanced work in order to pursue the doctoral degree at another institution. American University’s M.A. Program in Literature has successfully placed students in prestigious Ph.D. programs at Princeton University, University of Pennsylvania, UC-Irvine, UCLA, Indiana University, UC-Berkeley, and others. We offer information about the top 30 Ph.D. programs in English, including hints on applying, acceptance rates, and statistics that describe admitted
applicants. This information is contained in a folder entitled *Ph.D. Programs*, available for sign-out in the Literature Department main office, Battelle-Tompkins 237.

**Teaching**

- 6 credit hours, including Teaching Composition (LIT 730, offered in the fall only) and ONE of the following:
  - an independent study—working with a mentor teacher in a section of the freshman College Writing course (LIT 690).**
  - an internship in the department’s Writing Center (LIT 691).
  - Teaching Literature (LIT 731, offered every other spring).
  - 3 credit hours in the School of Education (EDU 521, Foundations, or 540, Methods), especially if you want to teach at the secondary school level.
  - 3 credit hours in an approved course in Literature, Education, Linguistics, or Anthropology; or completion of an internship in the Writing Center.

This concentration is for students who might consider teaching at the secondary or community college level.

**Successful completion of LIT 690 makes students eligible to apply to teach College Writing at American University. (NOTE: selection for teaching College Writing is competitive, based on application and interview.)

**Interdisciplinary**

- 9 credit hours at the graduate level in another department or departments in accord with a student-designed program of study approved by the M.A. Program Director.

Students who pursue this concentration take 9 credit hours at the graduate level in another department or departments in accord with a coherent program of studies designed by the student that *must be approved in advance* by the M.A. Program Director. Departments to consider include Women’s and Gender Studies, Art History, Philosophy, History, Performing Arts, Language and Foreign Studies, Anthropology, and Law.

**Generalist**

- 9 additional credit hours in literature at the 500 level or above.

This concentration is for students who wish to attain a broad background in literature for professional enhancement or personal fulfillment. Many students who select the Generalist concentration discover that their training in critical analysis of texts prepares them well for writing-intensive (and thinking-intensive) positions in professional associations, government, or business.

*Other courses that fulfill the LIT 500 through LIT 700 requirements:*

LIT-750 Folger Institute Consortium Seminars
A distinguishing characteristic of American University is its status as a member of the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area, which combines the resources of ten area universities and two colleges. If a graduate seminar is offered at any other Consortium university on a topic not available at American University, you may enroll in it and receive AU credit. To take a Consortium course, you must register through American University, using the registration number for the school offering the course (see “Consortium Courses” in the *Schedule of Classes*); your registration form must be...
signed by both the M.A. Program Director and the Literature Department Chair.

Evening Classes

The Literature Department offers a number of evening classes so that working adults can pursue advanced study of literature. Daytime and evening courses are taught in several formats, including graduate seminars limited to fifteen students as well as somewhat larger courses (rarely over 30 students and often smaller) that also enroll a cross-section of students from the department’s other programs, including M.F.A. students and advanced undergraduate literature majors. Students thus have ample opportunities to get to know their peers and their professors. We urge you to continue the intellectual exchange outside of the classroom. Such conversation may well become the basis for exchanging feedback on research and writing and engaging in group study for the Comprehensive Exam.

EXITING THE PROGRAM

Apply for Graduation

To receive your degree, you must file an Application for Graduation at the Registrar’s Office. You are advised to submit the Application for Graduation at the time you register for your final semester or no later than the beginning of your final semester in the program. The Registrar’s Office will generate a graduation clearance form, which will be forwarded to the M.A. Director. It is your responsibility to check with the Director to be sure that you have met all degree requirements.

Pass the Comprehensive Exam

The M.A. Comprehensive Exam is designed to test both the breadth of your knowledge of literature and your ability to analyze literary texts. In order to graduate, you must receive an evaluation of Satisfactory (Pass) or Distinction (High Pass) on the exam. The Comprehensive Exam is administered once in the fall (October 27 this year) and once in the spring. Normally, students take the exam in the penultimate semester of degree work.

The Comprehensive Exam consists of three essay questions based on a reading list of ten books, to be generated afresh each year. This year (2011-2012), the texts are:

1. Chimamanda Adichie, *The Thing Around Your Neck*
2. John Ashbery, *Selected Poems*
3. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*
4. Peter Greenaway, *The Pillowbook*
5. Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina and Other Works*
8. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*
10. William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*
11. A wildcard text of your choice

In addition, students will need to read up on the critical history of the listed books, the historical context, as well as the theoretical fields in which the books have played a part. Students will answer two of the three questions, each one to be written over a three-hour period. The questions are designed to allow students to display their learning, i.e. a broad knowledge of literary genres and periods; sensitivity to the details
and nuances of language; skill at formulating intelligent arguments; and ability to relate their analyses to theoretical positions.

To sign up for the exam, you need to register your name with the Literature Department office.

Confirm Graduation Clearance

Check with the Registrar’s Office to verify the following:

- you have been cleared to graduate
- you have received all final grades

Check with your professors after coursework has been completed to confirm that final grades were submitted.

Resolve Outstanding Balances

Stop by Student Accounts and the Library to clear any outstanding balances. These must be resolved before you can participate in graduation and receive your diploma.

Order your Cap and Gown

If you plan to participate in the Commencement ceremonies, you will need to order the cap and gown designated for Master’s degree students. Orders should be placed during the semester of graduation. Check with the Registrar’s Office concerning ordering information and due dates. [Note: After the deadline, the University cannot insure that you will receive the appropriate sizes of these items.]

Graduation Reception

Once you have been completely cleared for graduation, congratulate yourself—as we congratulate you! You have now earned the degree of Master of Arts in Literature.

Whether you graduate in May, December, or August, we warmly invite you and your family to attend our reception celebrating all Literature graduates, usually held the day before American University’s commencement ceremonies in early May. You will receive an invitation for this event by mail. August and December graduates are honored at a university-wide reception in early December.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Kessler-Roberts Essay Prize

Each spring, the M.A. program awards a $200 prize for the most distinguished piece of literary analysis submitted by a student enrolled in the M.A. Program in Literature.

Conferences, Colloquiums

Just as professors attend conferences, students have the opportunity to present papers at conferences and colloquiums sponsored by AU as well as other institutions. Graduate students who are giving papers or presenting research at conferences in their discipline may request up to $200 from Mellon funds disbursed by the College of Arts and Sciences to help defray the expenses of attending the conference. Additionally, students may compete for funding in two categories:

- international travel for thesis research
- support for archival research

Recipients of these awards are invited to present the results of their research at the annual Ann Robyn Mathias Student Research Conference, sponsored each spring...
by the College of Arts and Sciences at American University. Check with faculty members and the Literature office regarding these potential opportunities; bulletin boards may also have information posted about these events.

FINANCING YOUR DEGREE

Federal Aid

Application for merit-based assistance and other awards, as well as need-based assistance, must be made at the time of a student’s application to the M.A. program. These awards are automatically renewed for a maximum of two years as long as you remain in good academic standing and comply with all appropriate academic regulations. For other sources of financial aid, you may wish to visit the American University Office of Financial Aid, which maintains a comprehensive list of private loans and scholarships. The office also has information on various AU payment plans and on Web sites to check for scholarships.

Employment

You are encouraged to contact the office of Human Resources (202-885-2639) about part-time and full-time employment and, for off-campus employment, the AU Career Center Job Listing Service (202-885-1800). Literature graduate students have occasionally worked as tutors in Learning Services (202-885-3360) and as Writing Consultants in the Writing Center. Speak with the Director of the Writing Center (202-885-3911) if you are interested in becoming a Writing Consultant.

International students should check with the International Student Services Office for information on employment options.

Information about paid internships and job opportunities that we hear about will be posted on the bulletin board outside the M.A. office as they are received. In addition, the Literature Department office maintains a file on internships currently available.

INTERRUPTING YOUR STUDIES

American University requires students who have completed at least one course in a graduate degree program to register each successive fall and spring semester until they have completed the requirements for the degree.

If you do not wish to enroll in courses during a given semester, you must register for a minimum of one credit hour in either LIT 099, Maintain Matriculation, or LIT 797, Master’s Thesis Seminar. The prevailing tuition rate for one hour of graduate credit will be charged. However, if you complete all degree requirements in a given semester but miss the application deadline for receipt of the degree at the end of the semester, you will not be required to register to maintain matriculation thereafter.

You may also request a leave of absence for one or two semesters, during which time your enrollment status in the M.A. program will maintained. You should discuss this option with the M.A. Director.

Please note that if you fail to maintain continuous enrollment by registering for credit, by maintaining matriculation, or by obtaining an approved leave of absence, you will be considered to have withdrawn from the university and will be required to apply for readmission if you wish to resume degree study.

FINALLY...

This handbook is intended to provide you with the most important information regarding the M.A. Program in Literature and the Department of Literature. It does not supplant the University Catalog, which outlines academic regulations.
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