MA students in particular concentrations may choose to write a Master's Thesis. The thesis option requires six credits of English 698 and English 699. English 698 and English 699 will substitute for up to six credits of graduate coursework in English. The oral defense of the thesis will substitute for the oral comprehensive examination. Students choosing the thesis option are required to pass written comprehensive examinations in all periods required for their concentration.

The thesis should be a deeper and more sophisticated scholarly investigation than a typical paper submitted for a graduate course and should involve gathering and analyzing primary source materials, exhaustively surveying extant scholarship on the topic, and making an original and potentially publishable contribution to the scholarship on the topic. A Master’s Thesis typically comprises 50-100 pages.

1. Form a Thesis Exam Committee (TEC).

Students should work with the graduate faculty member who can best supervise the topic.

The faculty member chosen by the student to supervise the paper becomes the chair of the TEC and first reader. Together, and in consultation with the department chair and the graduate coordinator, they select the two additional readers and work out the procedures and schedule for drafts and completion of the paper. Two of the TEC members must be from the Department of English and Philosophy. All members of the TEC must be members of the graduate faculty in their respective programs. Students seeking exceptions to the requirements for TEC membership (such as the inclusion of a third TEC member who is not on the graduate faculty) must have their request approved by the graduate coordinator and the department chair.

2. Write a Master’s Thesis Proposal that will begin the process of working with the TEC.

Master’s Thesis proposals will typically be considered after a student has completed 18 hours of course work toward the degree. The exact proposal format should be determined by the TEC, but common proposal elements include a title, a statement of purpose, a statement of need, a description of the relevance or significance of topic to the field, a description of the research method, a preliminary reading list, and an outline of chapters. The proposal is not a contract; the thesis may deviate from the proposal as the student’s research progresses, but in such cases the student must seek approval.
from the thesis advisor and TEC members for the changes. Once the proposal is approved, the proposal must be forwarded to the graduate coordinator.

3. Complete the Master’s Thesis in a timely fashion.

Students can begin to enroll for Master’s Thesis credits after the thesis proposal has been approved by the TEC. Students must enroll in English 698 during first semester of thesis work. They may enroll in English 699 during the first semester as well. If additional time to complete the thesis is required, students will enroll in English 699 during subsequent semesters and during the semester they plan to defend the thesis.

The student must submit drafts of each chapter to the thesis advisor for approval and suggestions for improvement during the period of thesis work. A final draft of the thesis must be submitted to the TEC four weeks prior to the scheduled thesis defense. The thesis must be read and must receive preliminary approval by the TEC prior to the oral defense. Students should plan to complete the thesis and schedule the oral defense early enough to allow for revisions that might be required by the oral defense committee.

4. Complete the Oral Defense of the Thesis

The oral defense will be chaired by the thesis advisor; the oral defense is open to the public, and notice of it must be given three days in advance. The student will make a twenty-minute presentation based on the thesis; forty minutes are reserved for questions and responses. The TEC will vote to approve or not approve the defense. If the thesis defense is not approved and significant revisions to the thesis are suggested by the TEC, the student must complete those revisions and schedule a new defense of the thesis. Upon the student’s successful defense of the thesis, the members of the TEC will complete and sign a form indicating completion of the thesis and defense and will submit the form to the graduate coordinator.