

Proposal to Change the Thesis Requirement for the English MA Program

RECOMMENDATION

The Graduate Committee of the English Department unanimously recommends that the Thesis Requirement in the English MA Program be changed to a Thesis Option, thereby allowing students to choose between two paths to acquire the MA, one that includes a thesis and one that does not.

RATIONALE

Providing an option to the thesis will add a much needed measure of flexibility to our program that will enable us to better serve a broader range of our constituencies, including in particular our many non-traditional students whose career goals are not centered on university life and academic pursuits. Many of our students desire to use what they learn in our program in order to achieve specific professional goals, seek teaching positions, or pursue other career opportunities that are less associated with a research agenda. This alternative path to the MA will afford more of our students the opportunity to achieve their goals for graduate study.

PROPOSAL SPECIFICS

Students, including those in the program at the time this proposal is adopted, will select one of the two options outlined below after consulting with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) in English and/or other faculty advisors. They will then submit a brief written statement to the DGS offering a rationale for their choice. As can be seen in the following outline of the two alternative courses of study, students who choose not to write a thesis will be required to take eight additional credit hours of course work, for a total of 40 credit hours.

Thesis Option:

- Required Courses: Students must take two of the program's three core courses for a total of 8 credit hours
- Electives: Students choose six courses in consultation with a faculty advisor for a total of 24 credit hours. These 24 hours may include a third core course and up to 8 credit hours of Internship.
- Required: MA Thesis. 4 credit hours
- Total: 36 credit hours

Non-thesis option

- Required Courses: Students must take two of the program's three core courses for a total of 8 credit hours
- Elective Courses: Students choose eight courses in consultation with a faculty advisor for a total of 32 credit hours. These 32 credit hours may include a third core course and up to 8 credit hours of Internship.
- Total: 40 credit hours

POINTS IN FAVOR OF THE PROPOSAL

- The non-thesis option will better serve a greater number of our students by giving them a choice more closely aligned with their goals for graduate study. Other students, for example those who hope to go on for a Ph. D. and have plans for a true academic career, will still have the thesis option available to them.
- The change will help the program to attract a greater number of high-quality applicants, students for whom the non-thesis option provides the optimal means to achieve their goals. For example, high school English teachers will find a non-thesis program of study to be directly in line with their professional development goals. In our proposed non-thesis program they could take courses at the rate of one per semester and still complete the MA within the current five-year limit, an achievement that is far less likely for them when a thesis is involved.
- We will improve our graduation rate by making a non-thesis option available to our students. Currently, many of our top students do not finish the thesis, and under our current requirements, they have no other path to graduation.
- Making this change will bring our program in line with a majority of English MA programs across the country that offer their students a similar choice. In fact, MA programs that do not offer some choice are rare. Further, the widespread practice of offering a non-thesis program of study by so many other excellent English MA Programs attests to the intellectual rigor and integrity they entail.

CONCLUSION

Changing the Program's Thesis Requirement to a Thesis Option will bring our program into line with the best practices of English MA Programs nationwide and will enable us to meet the needs of a broader range of students who look to IUPUI as a place where they can achieve their diverse academic, professional, and personal goals. The proposal has the overwhelming support of the graduate faculty of the English Department.