GUIDELINES FOR THESIS & 30-BOOKS EXAMS

PLAN I: THESIS

The UAB Graduate School requires all Plan I students in English to complete 6 hours of EH 699, "Thesis Research." Typically, these hours are satisfied by registering for 3 credit hours in two consecutive semesters with the required thesis defense scheduled late in the second semester (see the Graduate School website for specific deadlines). In the semester prior to the first EH 699 registration, the student must assemble a Graduate Studies Committee, write a thesis proposal that meets the approval of both the GSC and the Director of Graduate Studies, and then apply to the Graduate School for "Admission to Candidacy" (a pre-requisite to registration for thesis hours). For more information, and for examples of thesis proposals, see the Director of Graduate Studies or the Director of Creative Writing.

Plan I students in Literature or Rhetoric & Composition will have two options for the thesis:

OPTION I: TRADITIONAL THESIS

A traditional MA thesis in Literature or Rhetoric & Composition is a document of approximately 60 pages that presents and develops a single line of argument (i.e. not a collection of unrelated essays). Typically the thesis has a brief introduction, two or three central chapters, a brief conclusion, and the relevant scholarly apparatus (notes, appendices, bibliography, etc.). A thesis in Creative Writing typically consists of a collection of poems, a collection of short stories, a short novel, or a set of non-fiction pieces. For more information on these traditional thesis forms, see the Director of Graduate Studies or the Director of the Creative Writing program. Students may also want to consult the theses that have been completed by previous MA students, all of which are available through Sterne Library.

OPTION II: SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

The scholarly article option will provide the student with practice in the characteristic genres of the discipline. This thesis will consist of a collection of related documents the central one of which should be a thoroughly researched and carefully argued journal article manuscript (at least 6000 words, exclusive of long quotations, notes, and bibliography). This manuscript should be presented in the format appropriate to a specifically identified target journal. In sum, the thesis should consist of the following elements:

- An annotated bibliography of at least 10 significant recent sources relevant to the research topic (to be submitted after the first 3 hours of EH 699 and then included with the thesis)
- The article manuscript along with any guidelines and/or stylesheet information provided by the target journal
- A version of the article suitable for conference presentation (approximately 8-10 pages; supplemented, optionally, by a set of presentation slides)
- An abstract (250 words) for the conference paper
• A briefly annotated list of at least three journals that might conceivably publish the article and at least two conferences which would be appropriate venues for the presentation
• An updated and accurate CV

All Plan I students, regardless of the selected option, will need to schedule and then pass a final oral defense by the date listed in the Graduate School website.

**PLAN II: 30-BOOKS EXAMS**

The Plan II option consists of two exams—one written and one oral—based on a list of 30 books developed by the student in collaboration with the GSC Chair.

**PREPARING THE 30-BOOKS LIST**

During the semester prior to the semester of expected graduation, the student should assemble a Graduate Studies Committee, and then, working with the GSC Chair, the student should compile a list of 30 books that will be the basis of the student’s exams. The 30-books list should begin with a brief (~750 word) introduction describing the student’s interests and intentions, and then explaining the rationale for selecting the books on the list.

**Example:** Suppose a student is especially interested in the literary-historical issue of canonicity. The 30-books list might include several unequivocally canonical works, several non-canonical or marginalized works, and a handful of critical sources examining the issue of canonicity.

**Example:** Suppose a student is especially interested in literary representations of nature. Such a student might compose a 30-books list drawing heavily from the British Romantics and the American Transcendentalists, and then include a set of contemporary works in nature writing and/or ecocriticism.

**Example:** Suppose a student is especially interested in the intersections between composition studies, service learning, and the inclusion of historically underserved students in the university community. Such a student might compose a 30-books list containing some classic monographs in the field (e.g. *Errors and Expectations, Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), some relevant contemporary articles, and potential case studies.

**Example:** Suppose a student is especially interested in developing a comprehensive knowledge of the history of literature in English (perhaps to provide a broad background for survey-level teaching). Such a student might compose a 30-books list highlighting a few canonical standards from the traditional historically-defined periods of English and American literature along with two or three comprehensive historical accounts of the literature (e.g. Pat Rodgers’ *Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, Richard Gray’s *A History of American Literature*).

The student’s individual 30-books list must be approved by the GSC and the Director of Graduate Studies prior to registration for the student’s final semester.

**THE 30-BOOKS EXAMS**

During the final semester in the program, the student should register for 3 hours of EH 698 (“Directed Studies”) to provide time to focus on the works from the 30-books list. In conjunction with the GSC Chair, the student should arrange to sit for a written exam approximately two weeks
before the end of the semester. This three-hour exam should consist of essay prompts that will require the student to synthesize material from multiple works from the 30-books list. The GSC Chair will administer the exam, provide copies of the exam and the student's responses to each member of the GSC, and then schedule a one-hour oral exam during which the GSC and the student can discuss the exam and address additional questions regarding the works on the 30-books list. At the conclusion of the oral exam, if the GSC determines that the student's performance on both the written and oral exams is satisfactory, the GSC Chair should inform the Director of Graduate Studies who will in turn clear the student for graduation. If the student's performance is not deemed passable, then the GSC chair should consult with the Director in order to determine the next course of action: either retake the written and oral exams during finals week or postpone for an additional semester of EH 698. A student who fails the 30-books exams twice will be withdrawn from the program.

**Suggested Timelines for Program Completion**

**Plan I**

**Three Semesters (18 Hours Completed) Prior to Graduation:**
- Arrange with faculty member to serve as GSC chair and then complete the GSC
- Write thesis proposal and have that proposal approved by GSC and Director of Graduate Studies
- Working with the Director, File GSC and Candidacy forms with Graduate School (see Graduate School website for deadline)

**Two Semesters Prior to Graduation:**
- Working with the Director, register for 3 hours of EH 699
- Meet regularly with GSC chair to discuss progress on the thesis
- Students pursuing the "Scholarly Article" thesis option should submit an annotated bibliography at the end of this semester.

**Final Semester & Graduation:**
- Working with the Director, register for 3 hours of EH 699
- Working with the Director, file an Application for Degree with the Graduate School (see Graduate School website for deadline)
- In consultation with GSC and Director, schedule date for thesis defense (again, see Graduate School website for deadline)
- Distribute final draft of thesis at least 10 days prior to the defense date
- Collect thesis approval forms from the Graduate School and bring forms to thesis defense
- Defend thesis, then submit completed thesis approval forms to the Graduate School
- Within 10 days of defense, finish final editing and/or corrections on the thesis, give final copy to GSC chair, & submit thesis electronically to Graduate School

**Plan II**

**Two Semesters (21 Hours Completed) Prior to Graduation:**
- Arrange with faculty member to serve as GSC chair and then complete the GSC
• Working with GSC chair, the student should compile the 30-books list and write a brief (~750 word) introduction explaining the rationale for the books' selection. The 30-books list needs to be approved by the full GSC and the Director of Graduate Studies

FINAL SEMESTER & GRADUATION:

• Working with the Director, the student should register for 3 hours of EH 698
• Working with the Director, the student should file an Application for Degree with the Graduate School (see Graduate School website for deadline)
• In consultation with GSC and Director, the student should schedule the written 30-books exam for a date 10 days to two weeks prior to the end of the semester; the one-hour oral exam should be scheduled for some time during the final week of the semester
• The student should spend most of the semester reading and studying the works on the 30-books list
• The GSC chair (in collaboration with the GSC as a whole) should compose the essay questions that will make up the student’s written exam
• On the written exam date, the GSC chair should administer the 3-hour exam, collect the student's responses, and distribute the responses to all GSC members in preparation for the oral exam
• At the oral exam, the student and the GSC should discuss the responses from the written exam, address any further questions regarding the 30-books list, and consider the student's success in achieving the purposes as set forth in the student's statement of interests and intentions (the introduction to the 30-books list)
• Subsequent to this discussion, the GSC should meet privately to determine whether to pass the student. If the student’s performance on the exams is deemed passable, then the GSC chair should inform the Director in order to clear the student for graduation.