Graduate Exam Policy
English Department, MTSU

1. M.A. Comprehensive Examinations. The M.A. Comprehensive Exam, required for the Master of Arts in English, nonthesis option, covers a broad range of literary genres and historical periods. The department has compiled a reading list ranging over a broad spectrum of literature in English from the Middle Ages to the present day. The list comprises a certain number of landmark literary-critical or rhetorical works as well as works from the genres of fiction, poetry and drama. The exam is administered over four hours at a designated time each semester. It consists of two parts: (a) a set of questions based on the reading list described above, in which students are expected to demonstrate their ability to write on a wide range of topics and texts; and (b) a set of questions on five works chosen from the long list, whose titles are announced 2-3 weeks prior to the exam. In this second section students are expected to demonstrate their ability to analyze a text in depth, place it in context, and engage secondary scholarship. The M.A. Comprehensive is the same exam that doctoral students will take as their qualifying exam (see 2.a. below). In addition to designating the performance on an exam as passing or failing, there is a third category: pass with distinction. A student who passes with distinction is exempted from taking the Ph.D. qualifying exam.

2. Doctoral Examinations. The department administers a two-tier system of doctoral exams designated as follows:
   
a. Qualifying Examinations. Before the completion of two semesters of course work above the M.A. level (12 hours of 7000-level work), a student in the Ph.D. program will take a qualifying exam, comprehensive in scope. The qualifying exam is the same exam as the M.A. comprehensive exam and thus is based on the same reading list (see 1. above). A doctoral student who received the M.A. from MTSU and who passed the M.A. comprehensive exam with distinction will automatically have qualified for the doctoral program. Ph.D. students must pass this exam in order to proceed in their program and are expected to perform at a level appropriate to their advanced academic standing. The exam may be retaken once, in the semester following the first attempt. Qualifying exams are administered over four hours at a designated time each semester.

   b. Preliminary Examinations. Upon or near the completion of coursework, a doctoral student will take prelims in two of the
examination areas approved by the program (presumably in areas most relevant to the student's dissertation topic). Preliminary examinations consist of both a written and an oral component. The written questions are administered as two four-hour exams taken on a consecutive Friday and Saturday, at a time agreed upon by the department and in compliance with the schedule for examinations set by the College of Graduate Studies. The oral component for each area follows after the examiners have read and evaluated the written component. Students will be orally examined for 90 minutes in each of the two examination areas. The oral component may cover some of the topics addressed in the written examination but is also expected to cover other aspects of the examination area which were not addressed in the written portion.

3. Exam Areas. Currently approved concentration areas are I: Old and Middle English; II: Renaissance (1500-1660, including Milton); III: Restoration and Eighteenth-Century British Literature; IV: Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (a) Romantic, (b) Victorian; V: Twentieth-Century British Literature; VI: American Literature to 1830; VII: American Literature: 1830-1910; VIII: American Literature: 1910-present; IX: Criticism and Critical Theory; X: Composition, Language, Rhetoric; XI: Children’s and Young Adult Literature; XII: Linguistics; XIII: Popular Culture, Film, and Folklore* (a) Popular Culture, (b) Film; XIV: Anglophone Literature; XV: Folklore. In addition to the currently approved examination areas, students are allowed to designate as a prelim area one of the following broad genres: drama, poetry, fiction, nonfiction literary prose. A student wishing to take a prelim in one of these genres should devise a list, subject to the approval of the Graduate Committee, of 40-50 works. The list should be transhistorical and transnational in scope, ranging from antiquity to contemporary writing, and including literature in translation as well as in English.

*Students taking the doctoral prelims may choose to be examined in IV. a. or b. only, and in XIII. a. or b. only.

Reading Lists for Preliminary Exam Areas.

Revised Fall 2009