

LITERACY STUDIES PH.D. PROGRAM Student Handbook

2026-2027

**College of Education
College of Behavioral and Health Sciences
College of Liberal Arts**

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

The program handbook is designed to serve as a user-friendly, comprehensive guide to the Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program at Middle Tennessee State University. Every effort will be made to update the handbook periodically. Students and faculty should be aware, however, that the university's *Graduate Catalog* is the final authority concerning graduate school policies, programs, and curricula.

For more information about the Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program, students may consult [our website](#) or any of the program faculty or staff:

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WEBSITE

Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program website:	www.mtsu.edu/literacy	literacy@mtsu.edu
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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Mission

The mission of the doctoral program in Literacy Studies is to broaden the understanding of literacy to include an appreciation of the contributions of biology, language, society, and culture as well as instruction on the acquisition and use of literacy skills. The program endeavors to support the application of this broader construct for the advancement of literacy learning through various elements of the education enterprise.

Objectives

The *Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program* at Middle Tennessee State University is designed to address one of education's most pressing needs – the shortage of scholars, practitioners, administrators, and policymakers equipped to bridge the gap between the rapidly expanding body of scientific research on the development of literacy and educational practice, policy, and professional preparation. Drawing on the faculty from the College of Education, the College of Behavioral and Health Sciences and the College of Liberal Arts, this interdisciplinary program offers a flexible framework of courses, field experiences, teaching, and research opportunities designed to

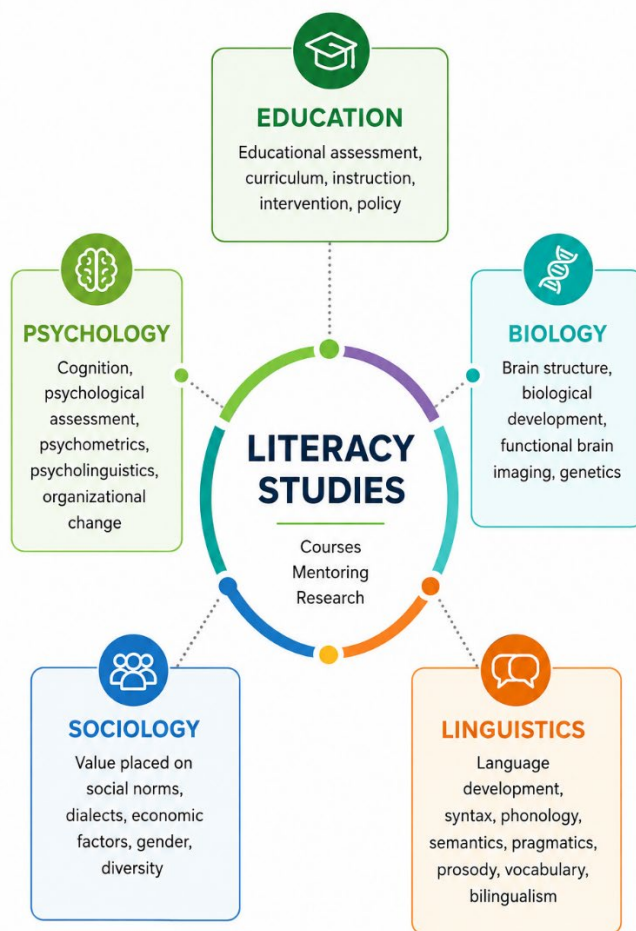
provide professionals in various spheres of influence with the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively address the literacy crisis in the United States and beyond.

Historically, Middle Tennessee State University is a recognized leader in the preparation of professional educators. It employs nationally recognized scholars in education, neuroscience, linguistics, cognition, research design, psychometrics, and statistics who strive to integrate aspects of these various disciplines into education research and training.

The Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program draws on these various disciplines and, in turn, strengthens them by connecting their resources and potential. The result is constructive changes within the various spheres of study and practice.

Program Design

The program is structured to provide coursework involving experienced faculty in three colleges, the College of Education, the College of Behavioral and Health Sciences, and the College of Liberal Arts. The coursework is designed to establish the foundation for a comprehensive and interdisciplinary understanding of literacy within biological, psychological, linguistic, and social contexts of human development. As illustrated in the figure below, this program broadens the scope of investigations of literacy development by applying the analytic strengths from each of the independent academic disciplines. The program's interdisciplinary nature is reflected in all three aspects of its design: program structure, coursework, and doctoral research.



CURRICULUM

The doctoral program requires completion of 75-87 semester credit hours distributed as follows:

<u>Curriculum Component</u>	<u>Hours Required</u>
Literacy Studies Core	36
<i>Foundations of Literacy</i>	09
<i>Language & Literacy</i>	09
<i>Pedagogy</i>	06
<i>Research Design & Data Analysis</i>	09
<i>Practicum</i>	03
Concentrations	12
Electives	15
Dissertation	<u>12-24</u>
TOTAL:	75-87

ESTIMATED TIME FOR COMPLETION

Full-time: approximately 3-4 years

Part-time: approximately 5-6 years

Maximum time: There is a time limit of ten (10) years to complete all Ph.D. degree requirements. That is, all doctoral coursework as well as the dissertation must be completed within ten (10) years of the first semester of enrollment.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Overview

A common set of **core courses** provides a comprehensive understanding of literacy within biological, psychological, linguistic, and social contributions to human development, learning, and motivation. Students in this program will develop an understanding of how changing social and political perspectives and evolving scientific knowledge affect how literacy is defined, taught, assessed, and acquired. Core courses will assist students to build upon prior education and experience. They will inform students about designs and methodologies typically employed to research the process of literacy learning and the outcomes of teaching. The program incorporates several components including coursework specific to the core of the program, courses selected to deepen knowledge in an area of concentration chosen by the student, and service-learning requirements tied to specific courses and a practicum.

Program Structure

Core Courses Required of All Students (36 credit hours):

Course Number	Course Title	Hours
Foundations (9 hours)		
LITS 7130	Literacy in Socio-Cultural Contexts	3
LITS 7100	Historical Issues, Trends & Methodologies	3
LITS 7120	Professional Seminar in Graduate Studies	3
Language & Literacy (9 hours)		
LITS 7010	Literacy Development and Language Learning	3
LITS 7011	Neurobiology of Language and Literacy	3
LITS 7400	Reading Comprehension: Theoretical Models and Research Methodologies	3
Pedagogy (6 hours)		
LITS 7110	Models of Literacy Assessment	3
LITS 7210	Evidence Based Methods for Literacy Development	3
Research Design & Data Analysis (9 hours)		
LITS 7140	Research Design and Methodology in Literacy	3
PSY 7280	Psychological Statistics: Regression	3
PSY 7290	Psychological Statistics: ANOVA	3
Practicum (3 hours)		
LITS 7200	Practicum	3

The core courses marked as interdisciplinary in the core are hybrids that draw content from many disciplines and integrate this knowledge through application to the topic of literacy. These courses have been developed by faculty with expertise in a primary discipline (e.g., neurobiology) in consultation with the interdisciplinary Program Coordination Committee, which ensures that the content specific to the discipline is explicitly related to issues in literacy.

Table of Interdisciplinary Course Content

		Biological	Education	Linguistics	Psychology	Statistics / Measurement	Sociology	Speech - Lang Path
LITS 7010	Literacy Development and Language Learning		●	●	●		●	●
LITS 7100	Historical Issues, Trends & Methodologies		●				●	
LITS 7110	Models of Literacy Assessment	●	●	●	●	●	⊙	●
LITS 7130	Literacy in Socio-Cultural Contexts	⊙	●	●	●		●	⊙
LITS 7140	Research Design and Methodology in Literacy	⊙	●	⊙	●	●	⊙	⊙
LITS 7210	Evidence Based Methods for Literacy Develop.	●	●	⊙	●	●	⊙	⊙
LITS 7011	Neurobiology of Language and Literacy	●	●	⊙	●		⊙	⊙
PSY 7280	Psychological Statistics: Regression				●	●		
PSY 7290	Psychological Statistics: ANOVA				●	●		
LITS 7120	Professional Seminar in Graduate Studies		●			⊙		
LITS 7400	Reading Comprehension: Theoretical Models and Research Methodologies		●		⊙			⊙

Key

Major emphasis in course



Minor emphasis in course



Core Course Replacements

It is required that all students complete 36 hours in the Core, distributed as detailed above. However, it is possible that some students will have taken one or two of the above listed courses as part of a previous graduate program. When a student documents that a specific course listed in the core has been satisfactorily completed, within five (5) years preceding admission, the advisor and student will jointly identify a replacement course that satisfies the interdisciplinary goals of the program as well as the career goals of the student. For instance, if a student entering with a master's has already taken graduate classes equivalent to a core course, such as Literacy Development and Language Learning, the core requirement for that specific course would be waived, but the student would take an additional three hours of coursework, specific to the literacy framework of this degree, to bring the total hours to 75. This request must be made within two (2) years of admission to the program.

No more than two courses in the core will be considered for replacements. Requests must be made within two (2) years of admission to the program. Students requesting such course replacements will be required to provide adequate documentation of the content of the course, such as a copy of the course syllabus, to be approved. This

will permit evaluation of its similarity to the related course in the Ph.D. program. Only courses in which a grade of A- or better was earned will be considered for replacement.

Course-Based Service-Learning Experiences

Students in this program will complete two field-based service-learning experiences through which they will gain practical knowledge in work settings. The field-based experiences are embedded in LITS 7110 Models of Literacy Assessment and LITS 7210 Evidenced-Based Methods of Literacy Development. Typically, the service-learning experiences will require 15-20 clock hours in the field. Field experiences provide opportunities for students to work in a variety of environments where they are exposed to current issues in literacy research and practice. For the most part, these field experiences will provide a service to the sponsoring organization. These experiences are in line with the university's stated interests in encouraging service-learning experiences.

[Service-Learning Form](#)

Practicum Experience

Students may register for a practicum experience no earlier than their second year in the program, having completed a minimum of 21 credit hours of coursework within the core and at least 6 credit hours in a concentration. Typically, the practicum experience will require 80 total clock hours in the field.

Practicum experiences are designed to provide students with appropriate experiences related to their areas of concentration. For example, a student concentrating in *Literacy Instruction and Staff Development* might work with a district curriculum supervisor and gain hands-on experience in the evaluation of curriculum materials and/or providing support and in-service training to teachers. A student concentrating in *Reading Disabilities/Dyslexia* might be placed in a Title-I or Special Education program to gain hands-on experience diagnosing reading disabilities and providing support and in-service training to the teachers who provide remedial instruction. A student concentrating in *Literacy Measurement and Analysis* might work with the Tennessee Department of Education or any data-producing agents.

Approval of Practicum Sites and Supervisors. Sites for practicum will be screened to ensure the quality of the site, the supervisor, and the nature of the work to be done. Clearly defined expectations for practicum will be established through contractual agreements between students, on-site supervisors, and the practicum coordinator. The contract will detail the activities to be engaged in and the work product(s) expected, as well as the nature of practicum. The contract will be reviewed and approved by the practicum coordinator.

Rubric/Number	Course Title	Credit Hours
**LITS 7200	Practicum	3

** Practicum work is graded according to the College of Graduate Studies grading scale (see *Grades and Academic Standing* section of this handbook)

[Practicum Course Guidelines](#)

[Practicum Course Contract](#)

[Practicum Experience Evaluation Form](#)

Concentrations (12 hours)

Students must choose one of the following concentrations:

- Literacy Instruction and Staff Development
- Reading Disabilities/Dyslexia
- Literacy Measurement and Analysis

Please note: Courses listed here, within each concentration, are examples of those deemed appropriate. However, this list is not exhaustive. Substitutions may be arranged with the permission of a student's program advisor.

Independent Study Courses - LITS 7330 (Special Topics in Literacy), LITS 7340 (Literature Review and Readings) and LITS 7350 (Research Seminar in Literacy) can be offered each semester and may be applied as electives or concentration courses with advisor and program director approval.

1. LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

This concentration is intended primarily for individuals who already hold licensure or certification in a profession (e.g., school psychology, speech-language pathology) or are credentialed in specialized areas of education (e.g., reading education, special education, and educational administration). The doctorate prepares these individuals for a career in pre-service teacher education and in-service staff development. Instruction and staff development specialists are needed to oversee the changes in literacy education inspired by new research and mandated in new policies. There is a growing need for professionals who can help implement changes, such as RTI, by training new teachers and updating the skills of in-service teachers. This concentration provides additional coursework to enhance graduates' capacity to address important problems within their areas of competence.

Rubric/Number	Course Title	Credit Hours
CDIS 6000	Speech, Language, and Literacy Development	3
ESL 6800	Curriculum Design & Instruction for ELs	3
LITS 7021	Cognitive Neuropsychology of Literacy	3
LITS 7150	Multilingualism & Literacy	3
READ 6000	Foundations of Literacy	3
READ 6710	Adolescent Literacy	3
READ 6730	Curriculum and Supervision of Literacy Instruction	3
READ 6750	Research in Literacy	3
READ 6760	Early Literacy	3
SPSE 6140	Teacher Leadership for School Improvement	3
SPSE 6900	Online Learning and Instructional Design	3
PSY 6530/7530	The Psychology of Reading and Reading Development	3

2. READING DISABILITIES / DYSLEXIA

This concentration includes added coursework in dyslexic studies, learning disabilities, and communication disorders in order to prepare master's level professionals (e.g., special education mild/moderate, school psychologists, speech pathologists) who have specific training and experience diagnosing and teaching children with reading disabilities for a variety of second careers. These careers include college faculty, developing curriculum materials or assessment tools for publishers, or serving as professional consultants to schools, school systems, and State Departments of Education.

Rubric/Number	Course Title	Credit Hours
DYST 7000	Introduction to Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties	3
DYST 7010	Identifying Students with Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties	3
DYST 7011	Interventions for Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties	3
CDIS 6000	Language, Speech, and Literacy	3
LITS 7021	Cognitive Neuropsychology	3
LITS 7150	Multilingualism and Literacy	3
PSY 6530/7530	The Psychology of Reading and Reading Development	3
PSY 6750	Psychology & Assessment of Learning Disabilities	3
PSY 6190	Advanced Cognitive Psychology	3
READ 6750	Research Seminar in Reading	3

3. LITERACY MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS

This concentration is intended for those who may be interested in a career related to work in the development of assessment tools and curriculum materials under the umbrella of a publishing house, for careers in consulting with school systems on the application of measurement tools, or with a career in state or national governmental agencies that use measurement to draft, direct, and enforce literacy policies. Preparation in this concentration will enhance skills related to data analysis and test construction as well as adding to background knowledge related to the utilization of assessment in K-12 education.

Rubric/Number	Course Title	Credit Hours
PSY 7210	Advanced Psychometrics	3
PSY 7550	Structural Equation Modeling	3
PSY 7580	Multivariate Data Analysis	3
PSY 7585	Test Construction and Validation	3
PSY 6560	Computer-Based Statistical Packages	3
LITS 7150	Multilingualism and Literacy	3

Electives: 15 hours

All students will include fifteen (15) credit hours of electives for their coursework. These electives may serve to extend credit hours in the concentration area or add to the knowledge base in another area of interest. Electives will be chosen in consultation with an Academic Advisor.

Course Credit Transfers

In cases where an applicant has taken some post-bachelor courses leading to a master's degree or a post-master's degree, and one or more courses in that program are directly related to this doctoral program, the applicant may request that previous credits be applied to this degree if the courses were completed within ten (10) years preceding admission to this Ph.D. program. The applicant may submit up to fifteen (15) hours for consideration from a master's program. Requests must be made within two (2) years of admission to the program. The recommendation to accept these credits must come from the graduate program director after she or he has made an analysis of the courses requested for transfer. Final approval must be given by the dean of the College of Graduate Studies. Coursework accepted for credit toward a graduate degree at MTSU must represent graduate coursework relevant to the degree, with course content and the level of instruction resulting in student competencies at least equivalent to those of students enrolled in the institution's own graduate degree programs.

Dissertation: 12-24 hours

Candidates will design and conduct a research project culminating in the presentation and oral defense of a dissertation.

Rubric/Number	Course Title	Credit Hours
LITS 7640	Dissertation Research	12-24

The dissertation is a work of original, advanced research written in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. A dissertation is a lengthy, unified, coherent work, usually exceeding 100 pages, that makes an original contribution to scholarship in the field. This is the document that secures the candidate's right to enter into the academic profession and provides proof of professional competence. (Refer to page 11 for details.)

Please see the [Graduate Catalog](#) for further information on dissertations and all other mentioned academic regulations and procedures. (After clicking link, use the dropdown box to choose Graduate Catalog.)

RETENTION AND GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

The Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program is designed to be completed in four years of full-time study. Coursework and the preliminary examination could be completed in six semesters. Dissertation research and preparation of the document could be completed over two to three additional semesters. This time frame is consistent with guidelines that traditionally have been associated with availability of assistantships and fellowships for doctoral study. Throughout the program, students will be engaged in raising viable research questions, designing studies, analyzing data sets, and professional writing. Collectively, these experiences will prepare students to undertake the dissertation research project.

Annual Evaluation

Upon admission to the Ph.D. program, each candidate will be assigned an academic advisor. Advisors are members of the program faculty. Guided by the mentorship model, this advisor, in consultation with other faculty in the program, will advise the student on an appropriate program of study, will provide any other required academic advisement, and will conduct a written annual review of student progress toward the degree. Students must submit a self-evaluation annually.

Literacy Research Conference

Faculty and students will participate in presenting research at the one-day conference. All students are required to attend. A keynote speaker will be invited. Conference information can be found on the Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program website each year as it becomes available.

Course Program Progress

It is advised that students check DegreeWorks for coursework progress. Please discuss with your advisor or program director and use the [Graduate Revision Form](#) if you need to request changes.

Research Tools, Techniques, and Methodology Requirements

The Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program requires students to demonstrate proficiency in the application of research skills. Statistical methods and tools will be acquired in two required courses in advanced statistics. Students with professional interests in statistics and measurement may take additional courses as part of the concentration Literacy Measurement & Analysis.

Ethical Development

Issues of professional ethics as well as obligations of researchers to ensure confidentiality of research subjects, and to protect data collected from the dangers of misuse, will be addressed directly in coursework, the practica experiences, and in research mentorship. Students will assist in preparing requests for IRB approval for any studies in which they participate. They are required to successfully complete the CITI training course prior to approval of the dissertation proposal and will prepare a request for IRB approval to conduct the dissertation research project.

Residency

Residency requirements are established by each program, pending Graduate Council approval. Students must be enrolled in at least 1 credit hour in the semester in which they graduate unless they have met the deadline for submission in the previous semester which waives this requirement.

Research Competency Expectations

The Research Competency should be completed in the first 3 years (before moving to candidacy & starting dissertation hours). Students will report progress on meeting the research competency expectations annually at the end of each Spring Semester until they reach candidacy. The following are the minimum requirements for the research competency across all years:

- 9 LITS Events (e.g., writing retreat, data retreat, dissertation defenses, Leader's Lab events, LITS conference, Fox conference, Dyslexia Center training)
- 3 local or regional conference presentations
- 1 national conference presentation
- 1 submitted journal article/chapter as a co-author

Teaching Competency Expectations

In alignment with our core mission of bridging the research-to-practice gap, the Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program at MTSU will require that students fulfill teaching competency requirements before graduating. These requirements focus on developing literacy leaders who can teach at the post-secondary level, mentor future educators, and design professional learning experiences. While strengthening K-12 teaching practice is valuable, these competencies are distinct from routine professional development that teachers complete as part of their current positions. Our goal is to prepare scholars who can lead literacy initiatives, conduct teacher preparation, and advance the field through higher education instruction and leadership. The Teaching Competency should be completed before graduation. Students will report progress on meeting the research competency expectations annually at the end of each Spring Semester until they reach candidacy.

Before graduating, Literacy Studies students are expected to complete at least 1 item in each of the following areas:

- **Engagement with Andragogical Training** - The goal of this requirement is to demonstrate evidence of reflective practice and continuous improvement in teaching adult learners. Evidence of this requirement includes documenting your completion of one or more of the following:
 - Literacy Studies coursework (i.e. LITS 7250 Educator Preparation and Professional Development, LITS 7200 Practicum in Literacy Studies)
 - Workshops on curriculum development, assessment, and/or instructional design for pre- or in-service teachers
 - Training in online and hybrid teaching modalities
 - Professional learning communities/book clubs related to teaching pre- and in-service teachers
 - Synthesis of feedback received from teaching college courses or facilitating professional development and demonstration of how you have responded to that feedback in your future practice
- **Teaching and/or Professional Development Presentation Skill** - The goal of this requirement is for students to develop skills in facilitating literacy learning opportunities for adults, as these skills are required in many of the career paths our graduates pursue. Evidence of this requirement includes documenting (via materials, evaluations, observation documents, and/or participant feedback) your completion of one or more of the following:
 - Presenting and/or leading discussion in Literacy Studies courses
 - Presenting at the Annual Literacy Studies Conference
 - Guest Lecturing in college courses in education and/or literacy
 - Developing online materials, such as videos, discussion boards, interactive digital assignments, and/or complete modules for digital learning platforms such as Canvas
 - Sharing evidence-based practices related to literacy in practitioner-oriented journals, blogs, podcasts, or professional organization websites
 - Supervising fieldwork in K-12 settings or literacy clinics
 - Serving as instructor of record in college courses in literacy and/or education
- **Teaching Statement** - The goal of this requirement is for students to develop skill in describing their teaching acumen to potential employers. Before graduating, each student will write a teaching statement in line with the desired career path after MTSU and submit to their advisor for feedback. This brief statement (typically 2 pages) is an opportunity to distill evidence of how the student has grown as a teacher over the course of the program and will synthesize some of the evidence from the first two requirements.

Preliminary Examination Guidelines and Procedures

General Guidelines

Research projects for the preliminary examination help prepare students for dissertation work and provide an assessment of which students are prepared to advance to candidacy. Examples of acceptable research projects include intervention studies, measure development, individual differences studies, observation studies, surveys, modeling of extant data, meta-analysis, and systematic reviews. Note that this list is not exhaustive, and students should discuss options with their advisors.

Students should work with their advisors to plan the research project for their preliminary examination. Planning should start no later than the student's second year in the program.

Students must have completed the majority of their core coursework when applying for the preliminary examination and have attained a 3.25 GPA. Students must complete all coursework, research competency requirements, and pass the preliminary exam before they can fully advance to candidacy and register for dissertation hours.

Preliminary Examination Evaluation Procedures

1. The student should identify a research project in collaboration with their advisor at least one year before completing coursework.
2. They should also identify a second reader for the evaluation of the preliminary exam. This reader may be involved in the design and implementation of the study or only serve as an evaluator. These responsibilities should be delineated at the beginning of the project.
3. The student must submit an intent to take the preliminary exam no later than the semester they plan on submitting the exam. [Preliminary Exam Registration Form](#) Note that the student's advisor, second reader/evaluator, and the program director must approve the preliminary project.
4. Students have 3 semesters (including summer) to complete the exam once they submit the form. If the student needs an extension, they must provide a written request to the LITS faculty committee with a plan and timeline for completing the preliminary exam.
5. Students should complete the exam by the deadlines provided by the director each semester (typically at the end of October, March, & June) to stay on track for registering for dissertation hours if they pass the exam.
6. The student will work closely with their advisor (and possibly second reader) in designing and conducting the research study for their preliminary exam. Responsibilities and a schedule for completion should be clearly outlined. Planning for publication and final authorship should begin early in the planning process. IRB must be obtained for all projects involving human participants.
7. Although faculty will fully support students in the design and implementation of the project, the student will write the research manuscript independently with limited feedback on it (e.g., in-line corrective feedback) from faculty. When preparing the manuscript, students should use the APA JARS guidelines for quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and systematic reviews. The student should also review the Preliminary Examination Evaluation Form and Preliminary Examination Scoring Rubric (see below).
 - a. If the student has a disability that may require additional support or accommodations, please contact the program director, Amy Elleman (amy.elleman@mtsu.edu). A letter from the Disability and Access Center (615-898-2783) should be included with any requests for additional support or accommodations.
8. When completed, the student should submit the research manuscript to Angela Morrell, the Program Executive Aide (angela.morrell@mtsu.edu) and copy the program director, Amy Elleman (amy.elleman@mtsu.edu). The manuscript will then be distributed to both readers with links to the evaluation form. [Preliminary Exam Guidelines, Evaluation, and Rubric](#) The evaluation will take approximately 2 weeks to complete.
9. Once the readers complete the evaluation, they will submit the evaluation of the manuscript to the director (and copy Angela Morrell). The evaluation will include direct feedback in the manuscript using the

comments feature in Word and a completed evaluation form. Within approximately one week, the program director will report the outcome of the preliminary exam: *Pass*, *Fail*, or *Revise and Resubmit*.

10. If the student passes the exam on the first attempt, they will advance to candidacy and are eligible to take dissertation hours. If the student receives a score of *Fail*, they will not advance to candidacy and must withdraw from the program.
11. If the student does not pass the exam on the first submission but receives a score of *Revise and Resubmit*, the student will have the opportunity to use the readers' feedback to revise the paper for resubmission and re-evaluation. The student should make all changes and write a cover letter (similar to the process used with journal submissions) addressing all of the substantive changes requested by the readers. The student should also highlight all of the changes made in the revised manuscript. The student will submit the new manuscript (with highlights) and the cover letter to the program director, Amy Elleman and copy Angela Morrell. Angela will send the manuscript to the readers who will have two weeks to evaluate it. The readers will then complete the Preliminary Exam Evaluation Form and submit it to the program director. The program director will then average the two readers' new scores and provide a final score and decision to the student. Note that only one resubmission is allowed. If the student receives a score of 79% or below or if the student scores below a 5 in any category on the second attempt, the student will not be allowed to continue in the program.
12. Students who receive a passing score will be encouraged to work with their advisor to publish the manuscript.

Advancement to Candidacy

Once the student has successfully completed all coursework, residency, and the preliminary examination, the program director will file the Graduation Requirement Notification Form with the College of Graduate Studies in order for the student to be admitted to candidacy and to enroll in dissertation credits. No more than seven [7] credit hours of C grade will count towards the requirement of a Ph.D. degree. Grades of D and F will not count towards degree requirements but will be computed in determining the GPA. The student must have a GPA of at least 3.25 in the program of studies to advance to candidacy status.

Dissertation Committee and Proposal

Candidates for the Ph.D. in Literacy Studies will be required to conceptualize, formally propose, and independently carry out an original research project, which will add to the knowledge base in an area of inquiry that is integral to Literacy Studies. Following advancement to candidacy, the student must formally establish his/her dissertation committee. The committee should include a minimum of three graduate faculty with current status as full members; the chair and at least one member must be from the program committee and one or more may be from outside the program. The chair of the committee must be a current member of Middle Tennessee State University's graduate faculty and must be recommended by the Program Director. The dissertation committee should consist of faculty from different disciplines in order to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the program. Once the committee is established, the student may then draft the research proposal. **The proposal may take either the traditional dissertation format or the article format. The dissertation proposal should propose an original research study developed by the student. Data collected prior to dissertation proposal is subject to approval by the dissertation committee and may not be sufficient for meeting dissertation requirements. After the proposal conference, the student must follow through and address all issues and suggestions raised by each member of the committee and redistribute the revised proposal within three weeks of the proposal conference.** Upon successful defense of the proposal before a committee, which will be comprised of the dissertation advisors and other experts in the field of interest (e.g., speech/language, learning, teaching), the final proposal must be approved by the Program Director. Then, the student will be allowed to initiate the IRB application. Once MTSU IRB approval is obtained, the student may conduct the research study. Finally, consultation and advice will be provided by the dissertation committee as the student develops and prepares to defend the document as well as during the post-defense revision process.

[Graduate Studies Dissertation Guidelines](#)

[Dissertation Advisory Committee Form](#)

[Dissertation Proposal Approval Form](#)

Defense of Dissertation

Upon submission of the completed dissertation, the doctoral candidate who has successfully completed all requirements for the degree will be scheduled by the chair of her/his dissertation committee, in consultation with other advisory members, to defend the dissertation. The College of Graduate Studies will publish the dissertation title, date, time, and location of the defense at least two weeks prior to the defense. The defense is open to all members of the university community who wish to attend. The dissertation defense is administered by the advisory/dissertation committee according to program guidelines. Successful defense of the dissertation must be attested to in writing on the [Dissertation Approval Dynamic Form](#) by all members of the advisory/dissertation committee, the Program Director, and the Associate Dean of the College of Graduate Studies.

Intent to Graduate

The [Intent to Graduate Form](#), available on the College of Graduate studies website must be filed NO LATER than the second week of the semester in which a student plans to graduate.

GRADUATE COURSES

Graduate students take courses at the 6000 (M.A.) or 7000 (Ph.D.) level. No more than one-third of the minimum 75 credit hours in the Ph.D. in Literacy Studies may be at the 6000-level.

Descriptions for all graduate courses appear in the [Graduate Catalog](#). After clicking the link, use the dropdown box to change to Graduate Catalog.

Course offerings for each semester appear in a class schedule, which is available online usually in the month before the end of the current term. Once students know which courses they would like to take in a given semester, they can register for these courses online during their assigned registration period.

Course Load

Students should become familiar with the following information concerning status in regard to graduate loads to avoid problems with registration, financial aid, or academic status:

Full-time status is 9-12 graduate hours.

Three-quarter time is 7-8 graduate hours.

Half-time is 5-6 graduate hours.

Graduate students are limited to a maximum of 12 graduate hours per semester. If an exception is requested, overload forms must be signed by the director of graduate studies and the dean of the College of Graduate Studies. Full-time status for students holding graduate assistantships is six (6) graduate semester hours.

GRADES AND ACADEMIC STANDING

Grades are assigned by professors based on the following notations, mandated by the College of Graduate Studies. Individual professors provide the grading scale for the courses they teach, using some or all of the assigned notations:

Grade	Grade Points
A	4.00
A-	3.67
B+	3.33
B	3.00
B-	2.67
C+	2.33
C	2.00
C-	1.67
D+	1.33

D	1.00
D-	0.67
F	0.00
I (Incomplete)	Not calculated
W (withdrawal)	Not calculated
P	Pass
F	Fail
S	Satisfactory
U	Unsatisfactory

Incompletes

The letter grade **I** is given to students who do not complete required coursework and have been allowed an extended amount of time to complete it by their professor. The incomplete must be removed during the succeeding semester, excluding summer. Otherwise, the instructor default grade is entered. **A student cannot make up the incomplete by registering and paying again for the same course, nor can the student attend a class without registration.** The I grade carries no value until converted to a final grade. Refer the student to their professor for specific information.

Accessing Grades

Grades can be accessed online through PipelineMT. Outstanding financial balances prevent release of grades. There is an option that allows online payment by credit card or check card (VISA or MasterCard) to view grades.

Grade Appeals

The grade appeals process is available to any student who wants to contest a course grade. In general, grade appeals are adjudicated on the basis of policies and procedures outlined in the individual course guidelines and syllabus. The College of Graduate Studies provides policies and procedures, which constitute a two-level appeals process that the student initiates. [Policy 313 Student Grade Appeals](#)

Academic Standing

Students should acquaint themselves with the "Academic Policies and Procedures" section from the [Graduate Catalog](#). After clicking the link, use the dropdown box to change to Graduate Catalog:

1. No more than seven [7] hours of C grade may count toward a Ph.D.
2. No course with a grade lower than a C- may be applied toward any graduate degree requirement.

Doctoral students in the Literacy Studies Program must maintain a minimum GPA of **3.25**.

Academic Probation

A graduate student failing to meet the applicable minimum cumulative graduate GPA retention standard will be placed on **academic probation** for the subsequent term.

STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS

The Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program assumes important responsibilities in preparing students for professional work in teaching and research. The faculty seeks to prepare students by providing courses, field experience, seminars, speakers, research experience, and other activities and resources relevant to students' studies and preparation. Graduate students in turn assume a responsibility to understand and meet all program requirements. Students should be aware of their progress towards meeting program requirements (see DegreeWorks) and communicate their plans regarding dates for completion of coursework, residency, preliminary exam, dissertation proposal, and dissertation defense with their advisor and Program Director. Any changes to plans should be discussed as soon as possible with advisors, the Program Director, and (when appropriate) Graduate Studies.

Students are expected to arrange their schedules to accommodate class meeting times and the office hours of professors.

While faculty will address individual needs whenever feasible, they are also obligated to apply all university, College of Graduate Studies, and Literacy Studies Graduate Program policies and procedures impartially to all students. Students who have special needs related to disability should work through the [Disability and Access Center](#) (615-898-2783; Keathley University Center, Room 107).

Statement of Community Standards of Civil Behavior

The Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program fully endorses the statement regarding valuing diversity issued by the [MTSU Office of Student Conduct](#). Further, the Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program supports the statement of community standards and expectations issued by the [MTSU Student Handbook](#):

Statement of Community Standards and Expectations

Middle Tennessee State University is committed to developing and nurturing a community devoted to learning, growth, and service. Each person who joins or affiliates with the community does so freely and accepts and practices the following core values and expectations:

- 1. Honesty and Integrity.** The notions of personal and academic honesty and integrity are central to the existence of the MTSU community. All members of the community will strive to achieve and maintain the highest standards of academic achievement in the classroom and personal and social responsibility on and off campus.
- 2. Respect for Diversity.** The MTSU community is composed of individuals representing different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, cultures, and ways of thinking. We respect individual differences and unique perspectives and acknowledge our commonalities.
- 3. Engagement in the Community.** All members of the community are encouraged to participate in educationally purposeful activities that support and enhance the MTSU experience. Active involvement and personal investment in the classroom and throughout the community are hallmarks of an engaged citizen.
- 4. Commitment to Nonviolence.** MTSU is committed to the principles of nonviolence and peaceful conflict resolution. Community members will freely express their ideas and resolve differences using reason and persuasion.

These expectations for community standards would apply to all areas of graduate study—actual and virtual classrooms, writing labs, library, group meetings, presentations, all communication venues, and any other forum.

*The program faculty **strongly encourages** that **all students** become familiar with the [MTSU Student Handbook](#).*

Scholarly Integrity

One aspect of professionalism involves integrity. Faculty members assume that students understand, subscribe to, and practice high personal and professional standards, and they hold students accountable to them. This includes the responsibility of doing one's own work and for complying with professional standards and procedures for attributing the sources of information, images, and other forms of media.

Academic Misconduct Defined (per [MTSU Policy 312](#))

Academic Misconduct may consist of acts of plagiarism, cheating or fabrication.

1. **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, statements, images, or works from another source as one's own without proper attribution. This includes self-plagiarism, which occurs when an author submits material or research from a previous academic exercise to satisfy the requirements of another academic exercise and uses it without proper citation of its reuse. Plagiarism also includes the unauthorized use of paraphrasing tools or "text spinners" and artificial intelligence software.

2. Cheating. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or aids in any academic exercise or test/examination. Cheating also includes unapproved collaboration, which occurs when a student works with others on an individual academic exercise without the express permission of the faculty member. Unapproved collaboration can also include, but is not limited to, sharing of any physical or electronic papers, exams/quizzes, assignments, and/or posting of same to unauthorized websites.
3. Fabrication. Fabrication includes, but is not limited to, unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

Please refer to [MTSU Policy 312 Academic Misconduct](#) and [Academic Integrity](#) for complete information regarding Academic Misconduct.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

Applicants wishing to be considered for a graduate assistantship, in addition to supplying the materials for general application (including a general application form), must fill out an [Application for Graduate Assistantship](#). These applications will be reviewed by the program coordinating committee and will be awarded competitively.

Merit Based Awards

Applications will be awarded by merit. The merit of applications will be judged based on students' grades, GRE scores, letters of reference, availability of students during daytime on campus and skills that students have developed in prior graduate study and professional experience.

Availability of Graduate Assistants During Daytime (9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.)

All 20-hour graduate assistants should be available during daytime for faculty research and teaching. A 20-hour graduate assistant should be available during daytime for at least 10 hours per week, and a 10-hour graduate assistant should be available during daytime at least 5 hours per week. Exceptions can be made by the Program Committee.

Term of Assistantships

Full-time students entering the Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program may apply for up to four years of support through an assistantship. The four-year limit is an appropriate amount of time for full-time students to complete a 75-hour degree program. Students who have been taking courses on a part-time basis may apply for support that is proportional to the number of credits remaining to be completed. For instance, a student who has completed 21 of 75 credits may apply for no more than two years of full-time support. Applications must be resubmitted for review each year: [Program GA Application Form](#).

Responsibilities of Assistantships

Specific duties may vary from department to department and by advisor.

Full-time graduate assistants will work twenty (20) clock hours per week in supervised activities in the department or office of their employment or a combination of contact hours in a classroom or laboratory environment. Full-time graduate assistantships at MTSU pay tuition costs and a stipend.

Part-time graduate assistants will work ten (10) clock hours per week in supervised activities in the department or office of their employment or a combination of contact hours in a classroom or laboratory environment. Part-time graduate assistantships at MTSU pay half of tuition costs and a stipend.

Termination of Assistantships

Students who are awarded an assistantship will typically receive all four years of support, unless their academic performance or performance of duties within the assistantship warrants termination. The MTSU College of Graduate Studies specifies that retaining support is dependent on maintaining a 3.25 cumulative GPA in graduate courses.

Graduate assistants found responsible for academic misconduct will have their assistantship terminated.

For more information about Graduate Assistantships, please refer to [Graduate Assistantship Information](#) on the College of Graduate Studies website.

[Appointment of Graduate Assistants - University Policy](#)

Information in the Literacy Studies Graduate Student Handbook, based on information in the College of Graduate Studies Graduate Catalog or university department and program documents, is superseded by more recently communicated updated policies and procedures from the Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program office. The handbook is available on the Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program's website. It is the student's responsibility to ask the Program Director of the Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program about any apparent inconsistencies that may come to the student's attention. Students should keep in mind that they are generally governed by the policies and procedures stated in the graduate catalog in place when they enter the program unless they elect to be governed by newer policies and procedures when the option is available.