



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

**FACULTY OF
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

M.St.
**(English; English and
American Studies)**
Programme Specifications

Revised to September 2008

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATIONS FOR THE M.ST. IN ENGLISH.

1. Awarding institution/body	University of Oxford
2. Teaching institution	University of Oxford
3. Programme accredited by	Not applicable
4. Final award	Master of Studies
5. Programme	English
6. UCAS code	Not applicable
7. Relevant subject benchmark statement	See http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/English07.asp for honours statement.
8. Date of programme specification	January 2003 (revised December 2003, revised May 2008)

9. EDUCATIONAL AIMS OF THE PROGRAMME

The programme is designed to serve both as an autonomous degree programme for students wishing to pursue more advanced studies in English literature for one year and as the standard preparation for a subsequent two- or three-year course of research for the doctorate.

The programme aims to enable students to:

- a) acquire advanced knowledge of written texts in a specific period of English literary history, of the cultural and historical background to those texts, and of the critical and analytic approaches that have been productively used for them;
- b) develop an understanding of general scholarly method and research practices in English studies;
- c) have the opportunity to study and acquire specific tools of scholarly research in the field, including bibliography, textual theory, and the description and transcription of manuscript materials;
- d) develop skills in writing at an advanced level.

10. PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of:

- a) literature written in English and related texts in the period of their choice, from the early Middle Ages to the present day;
- b) scholarly method in the study of English;
- c) the relationship between literary texts and the conditions of literary production in a particular period;
- d) research resources in a particular field of English literature;
- e) recent advances within their specialist fields.

Related teaching, learning and assessment methods and strategies

Teaching and learning

- a) Courses on literary texts, backgrounds and approaches are provided by a wide range of academic staff, chosen for their expertise in the particular topic, to ensure a full engagement with past and current scholarly research on each subject.
- b) Courses on scholarly research tools are provided by specialists in bibliography, palaeography and textual criticism, including expert staff from research libraries.
- c) There is provision for annual rotation and revision of optional courses, to ensure that students are in contact with the latest developments in their chosen subject.
- d) Teaching is mainly by small, dedicated classes to allow flexibility of approach and regular interaction between students and teachers.
- e) Work towards the dissertation is based on one-to-one sessions with a supervisor in which independent critical thinking and the cogent presentation and defence of argument can be developed.

These mixed teaching and learning contexts are intended to:

- deepen students' understanding of the complex relationship between literary texts and their social, political, and cultural contexts and modes of production;
- nurture good professional practice; to encourage the ability to work independently and in dialogue with others;
- identify appropriate techniques and technologies for the assembling, recording, and presenting of research materials.

Assessment

Formative assessment is offered through a range of class presentations and in-course tests in the Bibliography, Palaeography and Textual Criticism component of the course and in the special options. Other forms of formative assessment include regular individual sessions with a supervisor who reads and comments on written work and advises on the construction of argument. Further opportunities of an informal kind (such as discussion sessions within period-specific seminars) foster the formulation of ideas and engagement in debate. Students receive agreed feedback from the examiners as well as a final mark for their first- and second-term essays, which allows the fullest possible scope for refinement and improvement in subsequent work submitted for examination.

Summative assessment is by formal essays submitted at the end of each of the first two terms, and by a dissertation submitted at the end of the third term. Students choose their own topics for the essays, based on issues and texts discussed in the relevant courses, but are required to discuss their topics with those teaching the courses in advance and the title must be approved by the Chair of Examiners. For their dissertation, students usually have identified a potential topic at the time of application and a supervisor is allocated towards the end of the first term to provide specialist guidance. Again, the Chair of Examiners must approve the topic. The essays enable students to apply what they have learnt to topics or texts of their own choice, and to develop skills in scholarly research and method. The dissertation enables them to develop scholarly techniques in the elucidation, analysis and presentation of literary research, developing out of the work done in the first two terms.

11. PROGRAMME STRUCTURES AND FEATURES

The course extends over nine months. It is divided into five main periods or 'strands', to ensure appropriate focus to the teaching and learning and to facilitate student interaction:

- a) 650-1550
- b) 1550-1780
- c) 1780-1900
- d) 1900-present day
- e) English and American Studies

But the boundaries are designed to be flexible and there is opportunity for students to take courses from different periods.

There is in each period a core course (A) running through the first term (6-8 weeks), which is attended by all students. It is taught collaboratively, and covers kinds of writing, critical approaches, contexts and backgrounds. It is designed to ensure that students acquire a thorough understanding of the period and of current scholarly issues.

In each of the first two terms a range of other courses is provided, divided into (B) research training courses (classes in bibliography, textual theory, and the description and transcription of manuscript materials) and (C) special options in literature, language and background. These are mainly taught in weekly classes, though occasionally as tutorials. Students take either one from each or two from C, in each term. The programme of teaching is supported by regular (weekly or fortnightly) graduate seminars in each period, which run throughout the academic year and are attended by graduate students at all levels and academic staff, and by a wide range of lectures.

At the end of the first term students write a 5,000 word essay on a topic covered by the optional subjects taken under C (or one of them if they have taken two). At the end of the second term they write two further 5,000 word essays, either on the two special options which they have taken under C or one essay on one of the research training options they have taken under B and another on a special option taken under C. In the final term students undertake research on a topic of their choosing which has emerged out of the course, and submit a 10,000 to 11,000 word dissertation. The final assessment for the degree is based on the marks for the three essays and the dissertation. Students wishing to go on to the doctoral programme are assessed on the basis of their marks in the M.St., and particularly the dissertation, and on their research proposal, which would normally be a development of the M.St. dissertation.

A two-year M.Phil. is also available in the 650-1550 period. The first year is identical to the M.St. and the second year allows study in greater depth of medieval literature, language and history topics, as well as the opportunity to write an augmented dissertation.

12. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR LEARNING

A PERSONAL

- a) Two academic convenors in each period are appointed from the outset, and available to give guidance and advice.
- b) A supervisor with primary responsibility for guiding the dissertation and advising on research resources is appointed from the beginning of the second term, once research directions begin to become clear.
- c) All students are also based in colleges, where there is a tutor for graduates or dean of graduates, with special responsibility for graduate students, and a college supervisor for each individual.
- d) There is an active graduate student representative body in English, which operates a mentoring scheme.

B RESOURCES

I Libraries

Reflecting the nature of English as primarily a text-based discipline, and the essential requirement for adequate Library resources, English students at Oxford have access to the major holdings of the Bodleian and its associated libraries and resources, including:

- the Radcliffe Camera and Upper Reading Room, with their large English holdings on open shelf;
- The English Faculty Library, which has approximately 96,000 volumes including holdings of rare books and literary manuscripts;
- College libraries, many of which are rich in archival material relating to particular authors (the OLIS cataloguing system incorporates the holdings of most college libraries);
- Faculty libraries in related subjects, whose holdings may be relevant to an M.St. student's particular area of research.

The extensive resources available provide support for both taught and research elements of the course.

II IT Resources

There is an extensive network of IT resources and support within Oxford. Major subject related resources are available through the Faculty web page and the University gateway OxLIP. Colleges provide good IT resources and Support Officers prepared to train and assist students. The Oxford University Computing Services also provides facilities for graduates, and a variety of training programmes, such as the course Electronic Resources for Literary Students, of direct relevance to English graduates.

The English Faculty offers several specialised IT courses and options and employs its own Resources Development Officer and IT support officers. Rapid contact with IT support is offered through the Faculty web page. There is a Faculty IT teaching room and a graduate work-space, each of which provide access for up to 25 users simultaneously.

III Working Space

There is a substantial working area, equipped with computers, in the English Faculty building set aside for graduates. Close by is a graduate common room for English, and a series of seminar rooms which are used for regular graduate research seminars.

C ACADEMIC/PROCEDURAL ADVICE AND INFORMATION

Prospective applicants can obtain course information from the Graduate Prospectus, whilst the Notes of Guidance for M.St. students provide further detail about course content and on various related matters. Both publications are available online. Advice for students on course is available through those teaching each course element and through the student's supervisor. The supervisor will have been chosen on the basis of his/her expertise in the field in which the student wishes to pursue research and will provide specific in-depth advice on the research topic, but will also be able to give more general guidance about library resources.

13. CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION

Prior requirements are not laid down, though typically, applicants will require a first-class honours degree in English or a related subject, or equivalent.

Students are admitted on the basis of academic merit which is evaluated with reference to the following:

- Prior academic performance as indicated by course results;
- Academic references;
- One or two pieces of written work;
- Research proposal/statement of academic interest. Applicants need to be able to specify a feasible research topic at the time of admission.

Applicants whose first language is not English will be required to prove their proficiency as described at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/postgraduate/apply/english.shtml>.

Applications will be considered by the two permanent Faculty postholders appointed to as convenors for each of the period 'strands'. Final approval to their recommendations will be given by the Graduate Studies Committee or the Director of Graduate Studies on behalf of that committee.

14. METHODS FOR EVALUATING AND IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Responsibility for the course is vested in the Board of the Faculty of English Language and Literature, which is part of the Humanities Division. The Divisional Board has formal responsibility for the maintenance of educational quality and standards across its subject area and exercises its responsibility through its Academic Committee, and in particular the consideration it gives to reports of examiners, course revisions, and academic appointments.

Student evaluation of all aspects of the programme takes place directly by the new electronic Graduate Supervision System, which facilitates direct written comment from each student on her or his term's work. These are carefully monitored and approved by the Director of Graduate Studies.

Students also have the opportunity to raise course-related matters at meetings of the Graduate Consultative Committee, which comprises six to ten graduate members and the Director of Graduate Studies or his or her deputy. GCC business is then reported to the Graduate Studies Committee for action or for further discussion.

Detailed reports from internal and external examiners, produced at the end of each examining session, are also widely discussed throughout the Faculty, and many of these meetings include student representation. These reports have an important role to play in improving the quality of teaching and learning as well as in refining the examination process itself. They are circulated to all Faculty members and the internal reports are made available to students through colleges.

Any changes to the programme agreed by the Faculty have to be reviewed and approved by the Humanities Board and by the Educational Policy and Standards Committee of the University.

Provision is also made for improving the quality of learning from a staff-training perspective, by means of the University's Institute for the Advancement of University Learning. The Institute exists to support the quest for excellence in learning, teaching, and research at the University. It has three primary aims:

- to foster a research-informed approach to learning and teaching and to the development of educational policy
- to conduct research into approaches to learning and teaching in Oxford, and in higher education more generally;
- to promote and facilitate the professional and vocational development of all of the University's staff.

The Institute runs induction programmes for new appointees, an extensive in-service training programme and a Postgraduate Diploma in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

For those appointed as lecturers, the University operates a five-year probationary period: a full appraisal of the contribution (including teaching) of new staff is carried out after this period before their appointment can be made permanent. For such posts, the English Faculty also operates an interim assessment procedure at the end of the second year. Post-holders will be assigned a Faculty mentor (typically a more experienced post-holder in the same field) who will be able to provide general guidance. The University also operates an annual appraisal scheme in which all post-holders are required to take part.

The Faculty, in association with the Institute for the Advancement of University Learning, runs short training courses for graduates wishing to make themselves available for college teaching. Attendance at such a course is a prerequisite for entry on the Faculty's list of available graduate teachers.

15. REGULATION OF ASSESSMENT

Examinations under the Board of the Faculty of English, in common with those in every Faculty and Department, are subject to Proctorial appeal procedures.

The Faculty Board is responsible for approving the marking and classification conventions for all taught degrees, and for publishing these. The Appointments, Finance, and Planning Committee appoints the internal Examination Boards for each of its degrees, and nominates External Examiners, who are invited to serve by the Vice-Chancellor.

Boards of Examiners, under their Chairs, are responsible for approving all essay and thesis titles, and for marking the scripts of the examinees. They may appoint Assessors to assist in the approval and marking of the more specialist papers, where the subject matter is not within the expertise of two of the examiners.

All public examinations in English involve blind marking of anonymised scripts. Each M.St. essay is marked by two examiners or assessors; where their marks differ they will discuss the script to obtain an agreed mark. If they are unable to agree, the external examiner will be asked to read the script and give it a mark. After scripts have been marked, the Board of Examiners meets to classify the students in accordance with the rules established by the Faculty Board. A key role in this process is played by the External Examiner, who acts as an impartial advisor, providing the English Faculty and the University with informed comment on two major issues:

1. To verify that standards are appropriate to the award, in part by comparison with the standards of comparable institutions, and to ensure that the assessment procedures and the regulations governing them are fair and otherwise appropriate.
2. To ensure that the conduct of the examination and the determination of awards has been fairly conducted, and that individual student performance has been judged in accordance with the regulations and conventions of the Examining Board. This will entail signing the Class List as an endorsement that the processes of examination and classification have been fairly conducted.

External Examiners are expected to report to the Vice-Chancellor in each year in which they act. Their reports are expected to cover all the following points:

- the standards demonstrated by the students
- the extent to which standards are appropriate for the award
- the design, structure and marking of assessments
- the procedures for assessment and examinations
- whether or not external examiners have had sufficient access to, and the power to call upon, any material necessary to make the required judgements
- students' performance in relation to their peers in comparable courses
- the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and their consonance with the explicit roles required of them
- the basis and rationale of any comparisons made
- the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort
- the quality of teaching and learning which may be indicated by student performance

The Report is addressed to the Vice-Chancellor, and will be considered by the Humanities Board and by the Educational Policy and Standards Committee of the University. The Report will also be scrutinised by the English Faculty Board and its Graduate Studies Committee; it will also be discussed by the Faculty as a whole. Where an External Examiner's Report contains particular suggestions or criticisms, it is the responsibility of the Graduate Studies Committee and the Faculty Board to ensure that full consideration is given to these, to institute further discussion or action, and to inform the External Examiner within a reasonable time of what is done.

16. INDICATORS OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS

The Faculty has received the highest possible grade in all four Research Assessment Exercises, most recently being graded 5* in December 2001. Results from the 2007 exercise have yet to be published.

The Faculty was voted the top university for English in 2008 and 2009 by the *Guardian* University Guide, with a score of 100 per cent, and it has consistently been voted in the top 5 universities for English in the UK in the *Times* Good University Guide.

English at Oxford remains a high-prestige course with large numbers of exceptionally highly qualified applicants each year (over 1,300 across the single and joint honours programmes).

The quality of graduates from programmes in English is suggested by their success in the job market and in their admission to graduate courses. This data is collected by the University careers service and is regularly communicated to Faculty members.

Student feedback is very important to the Faculty. In the most recent National Student Survey, 93 per cent of English students at Oxford agreed with the statement 'Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course' and 97 per cent of these students agreed that the course was intellectually stimulating. Results from this, and other internal surveys of student opinion, are regularly reviewed by our Faculty Board and its standing committees. Areas of relative weakness are reviewed and potential solutions discussed.

The Faculty places great importance on the views of external representatives and has an External Advisory Panel, drawn from a range of backgrounds, which gives strategic guidance to the Faculty. Comments from the most recent meeting (in 2006) were overwhelmingly positive and a number of helpful suggestions were made that are being progressed. A further meeting is planned for Michaelmas Term 2008, at which the Faculty will specifically seek guidance on our syllabus reform process.

An internal audit review of the Faculty was undertaken by the University's Education, Policy and Standards Committee (EPSC) in June 2003. The panel was chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Dr Macmillan, and consisted of three external members and one internal member. The recommendations outlined in this report were considered extensively by the Faculty Board and its standing committees, and appropriate actions were taken.

Reports from both internal and external examiners regularly address issues relating to the quality and standards of the Faculty's programmes. Their comments and recommendations are discussed in detail by the Faculty Board, its standing committees and by all faculty members at its termly faculty meeting. Recent comments from external examiners include:

'Standards of student performance are high; much work is very good or excellent and some achievement is quite remarkable... Particularly excellent features of these programmes are the range of subjects in which teaching and supervision are provided, and the focused teaching of skills and methods in bibliography, palaeography and codicology... Skills in written communication are universally excellent.'

'I have been impressed by the high standard of work achieved by candidates in the M.St... The best of the students are at the very top of what one would look for nationally among those taking a Master's degree. There has plainly been some excellent teaching and supervision behind the work of these students.'

'The academic standards set for the M.St. in English are stringent and impressive... Generally the quality of teaching and learning seemed to me very high – the modules are delivered by able and committed teachers working in areas of research expertise.'

17 CONTACT FOR QUERIES

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