Students entering the MA program in Fall of 2015 and thereafter are required to complete a take-home written essay exam, administered over a period of three days, though which they are expected to demonstrate broad knowledge of Anglophone literary histories, works, genres, contexts and major theoretical approaches by constructing persuasive critical arguments that effectively enter into scholarly conversations about literature. The exam is divided into four sections:

Section 1: covers literature produced prior to 170
Section 2: covers literature produced between 1700-1900
Section 3: covers literature produced between 1900 and the present
Section 4: requires critical analysis of literary passages

A selection of questions is provided in each section and the student chooses one (per section) to answer. Responses to sections 1-3 should range from 1200-1800 words, per section; responses to section 4 should range from 800-1200 words.

Questions will cover matters of genre; literary and cultural history (including literary movements); political or social context; themes or ideas; and theoretical approaches. All authors appearing in the questions themselves will come from the reading list. Students may use authors who are not on the list to answer questions. Answers will be expected to include quotations and close readings of texts from primary sources. Students will not be permitted to consult secondary sources while taking the exam. They will asked to sign an honesty pledge at the end of the exam stating that no outside sources have been consulted during the three day exam period.

Advice on How to Study for the English MA Exam

1) Study the major work (or works) of the authors on the reading list, synthesizing the texts into your own thinking. (Hint: Think about how you would teach the texts.)

2) Study literary movements associated with the authors.

3) Study genres associate with the authors.

4) Be familiar with major literary critical scholarship on the authors.

5) Be familiar with the most influential uses of theory in literary criticism.

6) Study the M.A. Assessment Rubric to understand expectations for exam performance.

7) Begin studying early in your M.A. career; do not wait until a month or so before the exam.