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ABSTRACT

The American University proposes a Ph.D. program in Literary Studies that will: (1) encourage students to exercise initiative and take responsibility for their own learning through intimate contact with faculty members similarly engaged in learning; (2) offer a new approach to the subject matter that will give the students a disciplined understanding of specific approaches to Literary Study and detailed analysis of important works in light of these; and (3) integrate teaching and learning in the graduate program. A detailed description of the program is offered as well as an outline of study by semester. (HS)

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The PhD Program in Literary Studies
at The American University

Rationale

It is not necessary here to rehearse the evils of graduate education in English. They are well known today. A surprising number of today's objections to doctoral study in literature have been voiced repeatedly as long as there have been doctoral programs. Our profession has been able to ignore them only because good students educate themselves under almost any system. What needs to be underlined is that all the current proposals for reform with which we are familiar envision one or another kind of tinkering with the various components of the traditional program. Our design has grown out of reconsideration of the most fundamental aims of graduate study. Logically speaking, we believe that our principles and our specific proposals must be seen as an organic whole if they are to be understood.

1. We believe that it is both possible and desirable for faculty members and graduate students to come together as a community of learners. We propose therefore a graduate program whose central aim is to encourage students to exercise initiative and take responsibility for their own learning through intimate contact with faculty members similarly engaged in learning. A series of seminars, one each semester for three years, has been designed to give students a grounding in the basic approaches to literary study and research. Beyond that they will work with the members of the graduate faculty in a variety of different ways, depending upon the substantive interests of the students and the faculty. Each student will read under the guidance of a faculty tutor. In order to stimulate and shape his thinking, he will keep during each semester a journal of his intellectual experiences and developing interests. Journals will be submitted to tutors at the end of each semester. More formal papers will also be assigned by tutors and seminar teachers as desirable. For his major projects, during each of his three years, a student will concentrate on one major piece of investigation, the

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results of which he will be expected to present to his fellow students and the graduate faculty. Those members of the graduate faculty who are not teaching seminars will offer "short courses" or lectures based on their current investigations. During a student's second and third year he will work with his tutor to develop and teach a course whose subject matter will be related to his own investigations. In general, we envisage a system which will permit graduate students and faculty and undergraduates to become a genuine community of learning. We believe inquiry is a valid mode of learning; we believe it to be particularly valuable for those who will follow careers as professional students of literature.

2. We believe that it is both possible and desirable to redefine the essentials of literary study. We propose a graduate program therefore which represents a new approach to the subject matter of our discipline. The subject matter itself is literature, not British and American literature (it has never been English literature). We have deliberately rejected the unrealistic expectation that our students can acquire in three years a knowledge of all literary facts and periods. Much more significant, we feel, is a disciplined understanding of specific approaches to literary study and detailed analysis of important works in the light of these approaches. We shall therefore require our students to take seminars in each of the following subjects: theory of literary criticism, theory of literary history, theory of literary form, and theory of literary ideas. Two other subjects, the nature of language and the nature of the creative act, seem also to warrant special seminars although we would make them optional. The most radical part of this conception of our discipline is our view of literary history. We wish quite deliberately to break the stranglehold that the historical approach has traditionally had on English departments. However, we believe that students should understand the contribution that literary history can make to the appreciation of literature; we wish also to put that contribution into proper perspective.

Further, we shall require that every student demonstrate an adequate mastery of one discipline outside of literature and that he be able to relate the concepts and methods of that discipline to the study of literature. He may elect a foreign language and literature, but he will be free to use psychology, music, theology, physics, or any other discipline he finds helpful in his work. The greatest value

of foreign languages comes from the access they provide to another literature and culture, not from the access they give to scholarly work: the day when all scholarship, let alone the best scholarship, was written in French and German has long since passed, and we see no reason for according languages special status as a requirement. Other intellectual disciplines are just as important in providing perspective on literature.

3. We believe it is both possible and desirable to build a program which will be in the highest sense pre-professional. We believe that, in the lives of the best professionals in the field of literature, teaching and learning are integrally related processes, and therefore we propose to integrate teaching and learning in our graduate program. During the first year when each student will be adjusting to the program and concentrating on his own reading and study, his teaching internship will be limited to the role of observer. In succeeding years his teaching responsibilities will increase gradually, and he will in his third year invent and teach a course related to his own studies. Thus, by the time he has his degree he will be ready to undertake the responsibilities of a fulltime teacher-scholar; in particular, he will have had experience thinking about the materials of his particular interests in relation both to undergraduate students and to his fellow professionals.

Our basic intent is to train professional humanists for a career of learning. We would expect our degree holders to have a demonstrated capacity to read and think independently and to share ideas and the joy of discovery with undergraduate students, departmental colleagues (at both home institution and abroad), as well as colleagues in other academic disciplines. We would expect our graduates to be devoted to research but not to amassing publication records for their own sake. Rather we would expect them to appreciate the process by which fresh critical insights come to maturity and to accept responsibility for transmitting carefully developed ideas through whatever media seem appropriate. Above all, we would hope that our graduates might be genuinely humane in their attitude toward their various audiences, contemporary life, and learning itself.

The PhD Program

We propose a three year degree program. We will accept ten students each year. Each will be fulltime and receive financial support. Under special circumstances we will accept a limited number of parttime students if they have already earned a master's degree and can arrange to finish their remaining two years of work in a maximum of four years. In addition, we propose a post-doctoral year for those students who have developed specially meritorious projects which deserve further immediate development.

The Graduate Faculty

Appointment to the graduate faculty under the proposed program means that a faculty member will: Serve on a panel for evaluating the progress of graduate students and either a) Conduct a core seminar or b) Serve as tutor to at least one and no more than three graduate students and be available for short seminars and lectures.

The Tutorial

Each student will be assigned to a faculty member under whom he will read widely according to a plan arranged between them and with whom he will consult concerning his teaching experience. Students will have extensive experience with at least two tutors during their program of studies - ordinarily a different tutor each year. Students' intellectual journals will be submitted to tutors each semester, and other writing and reports will be arranged as seems desirable.

It is intended that the first year of tutorials will give students the opportunity to read widely and intensively in order to develop their interests and provide the basis for further research. Because students do not teach during the first year, twice as much time is allotted for tutorials during that year.

Graduate Seminars in Literary Studies

One seminar shall be taken each semester.

1. Theory of Literary Criticism - one semester

To be taken by graduate students in their first semester. Study of the variety of critical approaches that have been taken by literary critics and scholars. Biography, formalism, myth, Freudianism, Marxism, etc. Attention will also be devoted to basic assumptions about the nature of literature as a mode of art and of knowledge, with particular attention to such transrational concepts as paradox and ambiguity, mood and tone, narrative. Special problems such as the affective and intentional fallacies.

2. Theory of Literary History - one semester

To be taken by graduate students in their second semester. Study of periodicity, literary traditions, the relation of minor and major writers and of literature and society. In general, a consideration of the concept of periods as a tool of criticism.

3. Theory of Literary Form - two semesters

Study of the nature of form and its role in literary expression. Special attention to particular forms or genres, depending on the interests of the instructor.

4. Theory of Literary Ideas - two semesters

Study of the manner in which literature expresses ideas. The value and limitations of analyzing literary themes. The role of traditional ideas. Consideration of literary traditions whose distinguishing traits are intellectual. The relation between literary ideas and ideas as they appear in other cultural forms.

Courses which may be substituted for one of the semester seminars in Literary Form or Literary Ideas

1. Language - one semester

Study of the nature of language, its history and structure and relationship to literary expression. Students will be able to elect language courses in Linguistics and Anthropology as well

as in English, both at American and at the other universities in the Washington Consortium.

2. Creative Writing - one semester

Study of the nature of literature by means of participating in the creative act.

Short Courses and Lectures

Apart from the seminars, in which all students participate, there will be several short-term seminars and lectures on subjects announced by faculty members or requested by as few as three students. The courses may meet once or several times but will not continue longer than eight weeks. Seminars may be arranged on single texts, authors, problems, and critical approaches. Students will keep a record of short courses in their intellectual journals.

Special Study Projects

In order to ensure both depth and diversity of literary study students will prepare with tutorial advice special study projects in each of their three years. They will be spread, without overlap, across the following fields:

1. The study of a major writer
2. A study of some aspect of the role of convention in literature
3. The relationship between literature and a discipline other than literature.

Each project will consist of two phases, comprising the formulation of a literary problem (with a review of the critical literature) and the development of a conclusion or conclusions. Each phase, insofar as phases can be separated, will be presented formally to both graduate faculty and graduate students.

Projects must be evaluated and approved by the graduate faculty.

Project reports will be prepared for preservation in permanent form. Written essays, television tapes, movies, or records would meet the criterion of permanence but where a project is not in writing it

must be accompanied by the student's written statement of his reasons for choosing his form, his explanation of his method, and his evaluation of his success. One project may be presented orally, in which case the presentation will be taped for future reference and evaluation.

Interdisciplinary Study

During the first year each student will be expected to select an outside discipline in which to specialize. During his second and third years he will read and/or take courses in that field.

Teaching Apprenticeship

First year - Students will serve as participant observers. All ten first-year students will attend sections of the undergraduate Studies in Literature course which will be taught by faculty members. They will also attend bi-weekly staff conferences.

Second year - Students will teach sections of the department's Studies in Literature course under the supervision of the faculty member in charge of the course.

Third year - Students will design and teach their own courses under the supervision of their tutors.

An Individual Student's ProgramSemester One:

Seminar - Literary Criticism
 Informal Study:
 Tutorial - General reading
 Preparation of
 first question
 Short courses and lectures
 Teaching Fellowship

Semester Two:

Seminar - Literary History
 Informal Study:
 Tutorial - General reading
 Preparation of
 first answer
 Short courses and lectures
 Teaching Fellowship

Semester Three:

Seminar - Literary Form
 Informal Study:
 Tutorial - General reading
 Preparation of
 second question
 Short courses and lectures
 Teaching Fellowship
 Interdisciplinary Study

Semester Four:

Seminar - Literary Form
 Informal Study:
 Tutorial - General reading
 Preparation of
 second answer
 Short courses and lectures
 Teaching Fellowship
 Interdisciplinary Study

Semester Five:

Seminar - Literary Ideas
 Informal Study:
 Tutorial - Preparation of
 third question
 Short courses and lectures
 Teaching Fellowship
 Interdisciplinary Study

Semester Six:

Seminar - Literary Ideas
 Informal Study:
 Tutorial - Preparation of
 third answer
 Short courses and lectures
 Teaching Fellowship
 Interdisciplinary Study

Evaluation

Although course credit will not be counted in this program, and grades will be de-emphasized, each student will receive a rating of Distinction, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory, or Incomplete each semester for his seminar, special project, tutorial, teaching, and, in his last two years, for interdisciplinary study. (If necessary for official records, these ratings may be understood as A, B, C, and I respectively.)

In view of the structure of our program, which insures that each student will have experience in four different methods of literary analysis, traditional comprehensive examinations do not seem appropriate. Frequent objective evaluation is therefore essential to maintain a high quality of students and program. A panel of the graduate faculty will evaluate each candidate's work in toto twice each year.

Judgments will be based on students' journals and written descriptions and evaluations from short course instructors, teaching supervisors, seminar leaders and tutors, and especially on the quality of special projects. At the end of each semester, each student will be said to have completed with distinction, completed satisfactorily, left incomplete, or failed half a year's work. This evaluation shall serve as the formal basis for appraising his standing in the program.

If a student decides to withdraw or if the Graduate Faculty decides he should not be permitted to continue, the student may, at the option of the Graduate Faculty, be given an examination, successful completion of which will entitle the student to a master's degree.