



PhD in English

Handbook

August 2019

Welcome to the PhD programme at Ashoka!

Here is a brief guide to what we will expect from you as graduate students in our programme, and what you can expect from us.

You will sign up for 12 credits – 3 courses of 4 credits each – during each semester of your coursework. You will not be allowed to formally enroll for any more than 3 courses per semester. You will also not be allowed to audit any other courses either within or outside the department. The only exception to this rule will be enrolling for a language course which you will need for your PhD.

You are expected to attend all classes, except in case of medical emergencies. Any absences over and above what is permitted by the attendance policies of a class will need to be explained to the professor. In general, please communicate with your professors about any absences, foreseen or unforeseen.

You are expected to arrive in class on time, and to have done all the reading for every class before attending it. Course requirements – which might include online posts, reviews, etc. – need to be fulfilled diligently. Since you are graduate students, professors will not expect to discipline you about fulfilling your course requirements. We simply expect you to fulfill them.

In addition to fulfilling all the logistical requirements for class, you are also expected to participate verbally in the classroom. Professors will rarely lecture – the Ashoka classroom is a more dialogic one. If you are in a class with other PhD students only, then we expect your participation to be full and enthusiastic. If you are in a class with upper-level undergraduate students as well, then we expect you to exercise your judgment: do not silence yourselves, but equally, try not to speak more than the other students in class. As always, be judicious.

In case you would like to ask for an Incomplete at the end of a semester, then please discuss it with the professor well in advance. It will be difficult to entertain late requests.

Your end-of-semester essays will take different forms in different classes, but they will all involve producing significant pieces of writing. Again, please speak to your

professors about writing your essays. Speak to other PhD students about the successful essays they have written for class.

Make sure your classes work for *you*. Feel free to speak to your professors through the semester about any and all concerns you might have. All professors will have office hours posted on their syllabus. But you can also email professors and ask for an appointment outside those hours, if need be. Keep an open mind about professors with whom you would like to work on your dissertation committee. You can change your topic or area of interest at any point in your first two years at Ashoka. You are not obliged to stick with the proposal you made in your application materials. We expect you to keep an open mind, and to grow and change. Of course, if you would like to stick to your initial proposal, then that's fine too.

Starting in Year 2, each of you will be assigned Teaching Assistant responsibilities. As a TA, you will be asked to assist with the logistics of putting together a class – photocopying, Piazza, etc. You might also be asked to hold office hours with students in small groups, grade quizzes, and look over drafts of essays.

You can approach any member of the Graduate Studies Committee with any suggestions or requests for advice. We are: Rita Kothari (rita.kothari@ashoka.edu.in), Gil Harris (jgharris@ashoka.edu.in), and Madhavi Menon (menon@ashoka.edu.in).

Ph.D in English at Ashoka University

The Ph.D in English at Ashoka University aims to admit students who are passionate about literature and the world. Students will study diverse modes of analysing texts, enabling them to formulate questions that are both rigorous and adventurous. We will also train students in pedagogic practice, emphasising at every stage the dialogic nature of all learning and writing. The Ph.D in English thus aims to produce colleagues who will inject both academic rigour and intellectual adventurousness into multiple worlds of letters.

Roadmap through the PhD

Two years of course-work will allow students to study a wide range of theories and texts as they move towards formulating their dissertation topic. At the beginning of the first semester of their third year, students will be expected to take their Oral qualifying exams that will advance them to the dissertation-writing stage. At the end of their third year, students will need to produce and then publicly defend a 10-page dissertation prospectus. The fourth and fifth years will then be spent in researching and writing the thesis. Dissertation defences are due by the end of Year 5.

Years 1 and 2:

Students are expected to register for and complete 12 credits of coursework per semester. Since each course is the equivalent of 4 credits, this means students will register for 3 courses per semester for the first two years. The course distribution will need to be as follows:

Year 1, Monsoon Semester:

1. Introduction to Literary Theory (mandatory)
2. Academic Writing (mandatory)
3. One elective course, ideally at the 500 level; classes at any other level will require special permission from the professor

Year 1, Spring Semester:

1. Three elective courses at the 500-level; classes at any other level will require special permission from the professor
2. TA for one undergraduate class

Year 2, Monsoon Semester:

1. Introduction to Research Methods (mandatory)
2. Two elective courses, including, preferably, a seminar in Advanced Theory
3. TF for the Proseminar

Year 2, Spring Semester:

1. Three elective courses, including, preferably, a seminar in Advanced Theory
2. TF for the Proseminar

Notes: Among the total of 12 required courses, students can take up to a maximum of **two independent studies** on topics of their devising and with professors of their choosing (provided the professors are willing). The maximum number of courses you can take in other departments is **three** across two years. The PhD Director can provide for exceptions to this rule under compelling circumstances.

Teaching: In the Spring semester of Year 1, **TA duties** will involve assisting a professor with the logistical requirements of an undergraduate class, including collating readings for the course, and managing online platforms for classroom posts. In Monsoon and Spring of Year 2, PhD students will be assigned as **Teaching Fellows** for the undergraduate Proseminar. In addition to logistically assisting a professor with a large UG course, TFs will also be asked to lead a discussion section of that class, with a student population not exceeding 17 students each.

Academic Standing: All students in coursework will need to maintain a minimum GPA of 3, which translates into a grade of B or above. This will be assessed at the end of each academic year.

At the end of the first two years, students who have less than a minimum GPA of 3 will be asked to leave the programme. Students with Incompletes in more than 3 of 12 courses will be placed on academic probation. They will not be allowed to proceed to the Orals until they complete their course requirements. The time allowed for course completion shall not exceed one academic year. Now and later, any interruption to the time-table of the programme of the PhD might involve the suspension of a student's stipend for that period, depending on the recommendation of the department. If suspended, students will then need to re-register after the end of their probation period in accordance with University guidelines.

By the end of the fourth semester, each student will have chosen their dissertation adviser. This should be the professor with whom the student feels most compatible both intellectually and personally. The adviser can be different from the person students might have thought they would work with before entering the programme.

Year 3:

By the end of the fourth semester, students will also have finished compiling a set of four lists for their Oral examinations, in keeping with the following stipulations:

1. Each list will contain a total of 25 texts, with a reasonable mix of both primary and secondary texts (except for the list described immediately below, which will have only primary texts); there will thus be a total of 100 texts across 4 lists.
2. The mandatory list for all students will involve English literature stretching from 800 CE to the present. You will be provided with a list of 100 texts from among which you should pick 25, with the stipulation that at least half the texts should date from before 1800.
3. The other three lists are to be entirely of your own devising, and can be organised both chronologically and conceptually. For instance, a set of three lists might be as follows: 1. Identity and Politics; 2. Religious Poetry in 16th century England; 3. Feminism. Or, another example: 1. Politics of Caste; 2. Queer Theory; 3. 19th century American Literature. Or: 1, Travel Narratives; 2, Digital Humanities; 3. 20th century Indian Film.

Each list should aim for as much breadth as possible; please remember that this examination marks the end of your coursework, and should display the breadth of your knowledge. Advisers must sign-off on these lists by the end of the second year. Every student is expected to spend the summer studying for the Orals, and then **take the exam no later than the second week of their fifth semester in Year 3.**

The format will be as follows: The Oral exam will be two hours long, with 30 minutes of conversation devoted to each list. There will be a committee of four professors, one of whom will be the student's dissertation adviser, and each of whom must have signed off on one of the lists. The Orals committee is thus a one-time committee. Students will need to approach four individual professors with expertise in the area of their lists.

Students will need to pass the Orals in order to continue in the programme. Distinguished performances will earn the grade of Orals with Distinction. Students are allowed a maximum of two attempts at passing the Orals.

By the end of Year 3 – i.e., by the end of their sixth semester at Ashoka – students will write a prospectus for their dissertation. This prospectus will include a rationale for, and an outline of the stakes of, the proposed dissertation. There should also be a brief chapter breakdown at the end of the prospectus. The student will work on the prospectus in consultation with their dissertation adviser. By the second week of May, students will need to defend their prospectus to a group of their peers and any interested students and faculty at Ashoka. The prospectus defence will begin with a short introduction by the dissertation adviser, followed by a half-hour description of the prospectus by the student. The last 20 minutes or so of the allotted hour will be devoted to Q and A and suggestions from professors who are present. **All students must pass their prospectus defence before being allowed to embark on writing their dissertations.**

Teaching: In Year 3, PhD students will be assigned as Teaching Fellows for our Gateway courses (Literary Theory and Forms of Literature).

In Year 4, PhD students will need to propose, in either semester, an ICT or CTS course of their own.

The University mandates a minimum of 4 semesters of teaching; in the English department, we stipulate a minimum of 6 semesters of teaching. After 1 semester as TAs and 4 semesters as TFs, students will apply to teach sections of Introduction to Critical Thinking for 2 semesters.

Years 4 and 5:

Students will be expected to spend the last two years of their PhD writing their dissertation. They will also teach their own course(s) during this time.

By the end of the summer of Year 5, students must defend their dissertations. The dissertation defence will be two hours long, and will involve an initial oral presentation by the student. (Complete dissertations need to be circulated among the committee at least 4 weeks before the defence.) The remaining time will be spent in Q and A and conversations around the dissertation. **Students will need to pass the defence in order to be eligible for the degree of PhD.**

Other Details:

Language Requirement:

During the course of the five years of their PhD, students are expected to demonstrate **reading and writing fluency in any one other language** (Indian or European), as evidenced by the ability to translate 2-3 pages of text from that language into English. The language requirement exam should be set up in consultation with the Director of the PhD programme.

Dissertation Committee (also known as the Student Research Committee, or SRC):

At some point between Years 3 and 4, the student, in consultation with their dissertation adviser, must constitute a dissertation committee. Each committee should have four members, one of whom should be a professor outside Ashoka University (and can be from anywhere in the world). Of the remaining three members, one will be the student's adviser, and two others will be Ashoka professors, at least one of whom must be from within the department of English. Individual committee members must be prepared to help out with bibliographic questions and assistance and must add intellectual value to the project in the eyes of the student.

Student Representative:

Every batch of PhD students will elect a representative who will liaise with the Graduate Studies Committee in the department.

Academic Review:

Each student will receive a brief review at the end of each academic year from the Director of the PhD programme and the Graduate Studies Committee, and will need to be in good academic standing. The decision points for continuation in the programme will be: the end of 2 years of coursework, the Orals, prospectus presentation, and dissertation defence. Under exceptional circumstances, the evaluation of a student's academic fitness to continue in the programme can be conducted at times other than at the end of coursework, Orals, prospectus and dissertation defence.

Circumstances for Discontinuation:

1. Students who do not maintain a minimum GPA of 3 in their coursework.
2. Students who fail to clear any of the four required stages of the PhD – coursework, Orals, prospectus defence, and dissertation defence – will be ineligible from that stage onwards to stay in the programme
3. Students found guilty of intellectual dishonesty will not be allowed to continue
4. Students found guilty of sexual harassment will be asked to leave the programme
5. Students in violation of the University's ethical codes in matters of finance will be asked to leave.

Note: Ashoka University provides support for research and travel to conferences. More details will be communicated by the Graduate School.