ASHOKA UNIVERSITY

MA in English

Orientation Handbook

2026-2027

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I. Welcome to the MA Programme at Ashoka!

A brief guide:

MA students will complete a total of 48 credits over four semesters, with 12 credits per semester. Each course carries 4 credits. Students cannot formally enroll in more than 3 courses per semester. MA students may take one elective outside the Department of English.

Participating in each class fully is essential for success. That entails attending class regularly, arriving punctually, doing the reading, and doing all the work in good faith and on time. Individual faculty have discretion over how courses are run. Success is ultimately up to the student. In addition to completing all requirements, students are also expected to participate verbally in the classroom. Professors will rarely lecture – the Ashoka classroom is a dialogic space.

Students should submit work on time. Good time management is key.

Students should note that courses meet throughout the day. Some required courses may be scheduled in the evening and might only get out at 8:30 or 9:00 PM. Students with care responsibilities or obligations outside of Ashoka should consider this.

Writing is core to the academic mission and hence core to the MA. Different classes may have different forms of writing. Students are encouraged to speak to their faculty about any doubts they may have about the forms of writing they will undertake.

Faculty will be available to speak to students throughout the semester. Please contact them or consult the syllabus for their availability. Cultivating a positive working relationship with faculty members will pay off during and after the programme.

The MA Thesis: MA students (except those who completed the a four-year BA at Ashoka) will have the option of composing a thesis under the guidance of a primary advisor and the faculty leading the proseminar. Students wishing to write a thesis will need a faculty mentor. For a rough timeline see Section II Part D, "Recommended Thesis Timeline."

MA students have the option of declaring a concentration. Those who opt for a concentration will write their thesis on a subject that belongs to the subfield covered by that concentration. The concentration can be changed at any point. For more detail see Section II "Programme Overview."

Students may approach any member of the Graduate Studies Committee with any questions, concerns, or requests for advice. We are: Alexander Phillips (MA Director) (alexander.phillips@ashoka.edu.in), Mandakini Dubey (MA Associate Director), Abir Bazaz (PhD Programme Director) (abir.bazaz@ashoka.edu.in), Subhasree Chakravarty (PhD Programme Associate Director) (subhasree.chakravarty@ashoka.edu.in).

II. Programme Overview

The English department's Master of Arts programme will train students to read literature and culture within the framework of an interdisciplinary liberal arts curriculum, under the guidance of internationally acclaimed faculty who are innovative teachers as well as prolifically published scholars. In that spirit, students will have the opportunity to do work that crosses disciplinary, national, cultural, and chronological boundaries.

A. Roadmap for the MA Programme

The MA in English is a two-year, four-semester programme. 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.

The **Graduate Seminar in Literary Theory** is required for all MA students and should be completed in the first semester. The **Graduate Pro-Seminar: Thesis Writing** is a two-semester sequence offered in the monsoon and spring semesters. Students who opt for a thesis are required to take it in their second year. Those who do not opt for a thesis should select three elective courses.

One course outside of the English department may be counted towards the degree. Additionally, only one Independent Study Module (ISM) may count towards the degree.

B. Outline of Required Courses

The four required courses that students will take at specific points across the course of the MA English programme are:

Seminar in Literary Theory: This course will focus on the study of various schools of literary theory. It seeks to examine the bigger questions of literature—ranging from the ways in which texts can engage with various issues to an understanding of how we make meaning—by examining how various theorists have addressed them.

Graduate Pro-Seminar: Thesis Preparation: *Required only for students on the thesis writing track*. The graduate pro-seminar is a two-semester sequence. In the first semester, students will further develop their writing skills and have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the methodological foundations of thesis writing by engaging with research-active faculty and their writing, learning directly from scholars in the field. By the second semester, the pro-seminar will transition to a workshop format culminating in an academic symposium at which thesis writers will present their research to a larger audience.

C. Recommended Thesis Timeline

By the end of the second semester students who wish to pursue a thesis should start thinking about their thesis projects. Here is a rough timeline.

- **End of Second Semester:** Approach prospective faculty advisors with rough ideas for a thesis topic. The topic need not be finalized, instead the goal will be to get some orientation and direction.

- **Summer into Year 2:** Spend time reading around. Identify an object of study, read some secondary literature, and get a sense of what the project might be.

- **End of September, Year 2:** Finalize the advisor selection. It is fine to have a different advisor than the one approached at the end of the third semester. Change is possible even after this point, but should be an exception.

- **End of September/Beginning October:** Have a firm topic.

- **End of Monsoon Semester:** Complete a proposal for the project in the form of a prospectus. Guidelines to be given in the proseminar plus the beginnings of a draft.

- **Winter Break:** More reading of primary and secondary sources, preliminary drafting.

- **End of February/Early March:** First draft of the thesis.

- **End of March/Early April:** Second draft of the thesis. Further drafts as per negotiation with the advisor.

- **May:** Final draft of the thesis.

D. Electives

Apart from the required courses, students are free to take elective courses that cater to their individual interests.

The electives offered by the English and Creative Writing Department will vary across several areas and will be taught by our research-active faculty. If students have an area of interest that has not been explored by any of the offered electives, they may also approach faculty to propose the possible creation of an **Independent Study Module (ISM)** that focuses on the subject in question. The availability of ISMs will depend on the consent of a faculty advisor; these will not be granted simply on demand. Among the total of 12 required courses, students can take up to a maximum of **one** ISM on a topic of their devising. This applies to students on both the two-year track and those on the one-year track who completed a BA with a thesis in English at Ashoka (see section II part E).

Among the eight electives students take, AT LEAST one must be in seminars whose subjects deal with literatures and cultures from before 1800.

The MA programme emphasizes interdisciplinarity. While students will have plenty of opportunity to do interdisciplinary work within English electives, they are also highly encouraged to take a graduate seminar offered in a different department. This will be one of the electives they take across the course of the programme, and they may take it at any point during their time at Ashoka. This option is available to students on both the one-year and two-year tracks. Only one course outside of the English Department may count towards the MA degree.

Regarding Courses at the 1000-3000 Level: Graduate students should take graduate courses. Undergraduate courses will not count towards the MA degree unless prior approval from the MA director has been granted in writing. Undergraduate courses are tailored to the specific needs of those students, needs that are different from those of graduates. Approval for MA students to enroll in undergraduate seminars will only be granted in exceptional cases where there is a compelling need, as in the case of students who wish to pursue creative writing or some other field where there is a lack of offerings at the 4000 or 5000 level. Students must write to the faculty member leading the seminar **and** the directors of the MA in English stating the rationale and requesting approval to enroll in courses at the undergraduate level. Please note that the fact that a course topic is interesting or relevant to a student's thesis is not a sufficient rationale to enroll in an undergraduate course (although the student may speak to the faculty member about auditing, i.e. sitting in on a course).

E. Requirements for MA Students Entering after a Four-Year BA in English with Thesis from Ashoka

Students who are admitted to the MA programme after completing a four-year BA in English may count the fourth year as the first year of their MA. This option will only be available to students who completed an undergraduate thesis and passed the Graduate Pro-Seminar sequence. These students will not have to take any of the required courses during their year in the MA English programme at Ashoka; instead, they will take six elective graduate courses during their one year.

F. Concentrations

Within the programme, students have the option of pursuing a **concentration** and specializing in a particular field. They are also free to follow a general path of literary studies and choose **not** to have a concentration, opting instead to explore various fields. Students who choose to pursue a concentration are required to take a minimum of two electives as well as write a thesis in their field of specialization**.** Should students select a concentration, it is required that they do so by **the beginning of the third semester,** so that they are able to fulfill these requirements.

The following seven concentrations are being offered for the year 2023-2024:

- South Asian Literatures (SAL)
- Global and Indian Shakespeares (GIS)
- Studies of Gender and Sexuality (SGS)
- Modern Literature and Culture (MLC)
- Global Medieval Studies (GMS)
- Performance Studies (PS)
- Creative Writing (CW)

To know more about these individual concentrations, check the concentrations section at https://www.ashoka.edu.in/programme/master-of-arts-in-english/

III. Assignments and Assessments

There are many forms of assessed assignments at Ashoka University. These include (but are not confined to) essays, projects, in-class writings, online discussion forum contributions, oral presentations, and quizzes. All courses use continuous assessment; any missed assignments will adversely affect the final grade**.**

Participation in class is expected. Not participating, or worse, not attending, may affect the final grade. It will certainly affect one's ability to do good work and be successful.

A. Grading System

A letter grade is issued at the end of every course. These grades are calibrated with two numerical scores: the percentage score and the GPA quality points. The grid below decodes the lettered grades that will be followed at Ashoka University, and their relationship to GPA quality points:

Letter Grade	GPA Quality Points
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1.0
D-	0.7
F	0

Students are expected to maintain a **minimum GPA of 2.7 (B-)** in their coursework.

IV. Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Writing that consciously borrows from another's work without appropriate acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism. Academic work is only possible because it takes place in dialogue with a community of scholars, and by acknowledging the work that helped us to do our work we make visible the labor others did to enable us to do ours. This is also the case with so-called "Artificial Intelligence," which itself only functions because it draws on the cumulative labor of actual humans.

Violating academic integrity is a serious offence. If reported, it will be met with severe disciplinary action and may become a part of your permanent file/show on your transcript.

V. Offices and Centers

Ashoka University has a host of offices and centers with which students can engage. This is a brief mention of the ones that will offer support either in terms of well-being, academics, or both.

A. Office of Academic Affairs (OAA)

The Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) will facilitate and assist with a whole range of academic functions. They will play a pivotal role in advising and assisting you in navigating your academic pathway towards completing your postgraduate degree. You can write to them at oaa@ashoka.edu.in.

B. Career Development Office (CDO)

The Career Development Office at Ashoka endeavours to help students identify their interests, ascertain their strengths, explore a multitude of opportunities, gain clarity about their goals, and empower them to pursue paths they find personally fulfilling. They offer one-on-one career counselling, internship guidance, and organize multiple career-related events throughout the year, conduct workshops to aid students in perfecting their resumes and cover letters, and prepare them for their interviews. They aspire to personalize the job search for you so that your careers are tailored to your skills and interests. If you have any additional questions or concerns, you may contact them at cdo@ashoka.edu.in.

C. Office of Learning Support (OLS)

Office of Learning Support (OLS) facilitates academic adjustments and accommodations for students with learning difficulties. The office provides a support system and acts as a resource centre for specific-needs-related information and services at the University. It also works with students who may need help with study skills to manage academic demands in a more effective manner. In case you, as a student, experience any difficulty due to a disability or otherwise, you can always reach out to OLS at ols@ashoka.edu.in.

D. The Centre for Writing and Communication (CWC)

The Centre for Writing and Communication works with students to help them write cogently and lucidly. They offer one-on-one tutorials, group sessions, or larger workshops that are tailored to specific disciplinary, assignment, and student needs, including for English language support. Contact them at cwc@ashoka.edu.in or book an appointment with a tutor at https://ashoka.mywconline.com.

E. Ashoka Centre for Well Being (ACWB)

The ACWB is a non-aligned centre offering counselling and psychological support for students, staff, and faculty at Ashoka University. The centre provides an emotionally safe space to express your feelings and integrate them with your ambitions, academics, and relationships. You can write to them at well.being@ashoka.edu.in or book an appointment with a trained counsellor at https://acwb.ashoka.edu.in.

VI. Other Details Related to the MA Programme

A. Student Representative

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

B. Discontinuation

Under exceptional circumstances, students might be asked to leave the programme, or not be granted the MA degree at the end of two years. Such circumstances include the following:

1. Students whose GPA does not meet university requirements for graduation.
2. Students who have outstanding grades of Incomplete at the end of the summer after the completion of their fourth semester.
3. Students found to be derelict in their duties as students, TAs and TFs, which include attending classes and meetings, and following up in a timely and responsible manner on matters connected with classes, both ones being attended and taught.
4. Students found guilty of intellectual dishonesty.
5. Students found guilty of sexual harassment.
6. Students in violation of the University's ethical codes in matters of finance.

C. Grades of "Incomplete" and Delayed Graduation

The "Incomplete" ("I") grade is generally reserved for students who have faithfully completed the coursework over the semester but who face some emergency that prevents them from fulfilling all of the requirements, such as a health emergency or death in the family. The issuance of an "I" grade is the sole discretion of the faculty member issuing the grade, and it is up to them to set the terms for completion. Students should inform themselves about relevant university policy on late graduation before electing for this option. Upon satisfactory completion of the work, the faculty member will adjust the student's grade, and their graduation will be processed through the Office of Academic Affairs.