

Graduate Program Handbook

As a student in Literary Arts, you are in a unique position among graduate students. You have the opportunity to choose a number of your eight semester-long courses from any university department or program. Though the Graduate School requires that you take classes appropriate to your graduate status, you have the freedom to design much of your curriculum. When a new class of undergraduates arrives at Brown, each of them, too, must choose courses without the constricting guidelines of distribution requirements. The first-year undergraduates, however, have eight semesters with which to experiment. Since you have just three or four courses to work with, and nothing like the undergraduate's safety net of faculty and peer advising, you will want to make good choices the first and every time. As long as you feel your courses will help you in your writing, the department will support your choice.

We have designed this handbook not only to introduce you to our policies and procedures, but also to prepare you for making the decisions that will shape your two years at Brown. Our statements parallel and incorporate official statements, when appropriate. Through we have tried not to omit any crucial information, we have undoubtedly missed things that you will want to know. The important thing is to ask questions. Your workshop leader, your professors, the chair, the academic program director, the director of graduate studies, your colleagues, students in other programs, are all invaluable sources of information. Your official advisor each semester is your workshop leader; your secondary advisors are the chair and the director of graduate studies; you should feel free, however, to seek advice from any member of the department faculty.

It is not part of the scope of this Handbook to provide information on housing, meals, recreation, etc. For this kind of information, you should consult the guide provided by the Brown University Graduate Student Council, along with web sites found through Brown's A to Z guide.

The Genres

When you enter the Literary Arts Department, you will arrive as a poet, a digital language artist, or a fiction writer. Sometimes, students take graduate workshops in other genres. To do so, approach the instructor of the workshop in the semester before (or during the summer before) the course begins.

Advising

Your official advisor is Thalia Field, director Graduate Studies; however, you should also rely on your workshop (or thesis advisor) for day-to-day concerns. Should you feel it necessary, you may also approach the chair, Cole Swensen. If you are having a problem that needs outside review, you should contact the Graduate School to arrange for a meeting with one of the deans.

Choosing Courses

Many students choose to take their non-writing courses via literature departments. If you plan to seek a PhD after completing this degree, you may want to consider studying literature in the English Department, Comparative Literature, the language departments, the Theatre Department, or in Modern Culture and Media. You are not limited to literature courses; the department will support your choice as long as you feel the course will help you in your writing. Students in the past have studied a second language, other arts, such as painting and sculpture, and a wide variety of academic disciplines. Once you venture into such territory, you have to work a little harder to get good advice about courses. Some basic rules are:

1. Attend many classes during the first week of classes (no choice made before school starts need be your final decision...);
2. Check out the books through the bookstore (or through the online syllabus, if posted).
3. Talk to the instructors (or write to them electronically). If their courses don't seem right for you, they may suggest alternatives.

4. Talk to students, both undergraduates and graduates. Many may have had useful experiences with the instructor of the class.

Incompletes

Although you should make every effort to avoid taking an incomplete in a course, certain situations may demand that course of action. If you are considering taking an incomplete, you must have the instructor's permission. Check with the Registrar's office as to what steps must be taken to complete this process. Incompletes should be completed as soon after the next semester begins as possible. Earning NC's and carrying Incompletes may affect your standing in the department.

Choosing a Thesis Advisor

By the time you start the fall semester of your second year in the program, you will have studied with at least two faculty members. Sometime in the early part of your third semester, the department will provide you with a thesis advisor preference sheet. You'll be asked to rank the two or three faculty members with whom you'd most like to work. You'll be asked to return the form by a particular deadline. Shortly after the deadline, the department will match you with your advisor. Once your advisor has been assigned, we recommend that you make contact with her or him to begin the process.

The Thesis

Completed by the end of April of your second year, your thesis will be a substantial manuscript or project of publishable material—a collection of poetry or short fiction, a novel, long poem or electronic work (or works). It must be formatted according to the guidelines provided by the Graduate School, with one minor exception: the rule about double-spacing does not apply to poets. Early in your second year, you should visit the Graduate School's web site, where you can download the Graduate School's requirements.

The final copy of the thesis is submitted to the Graduate School in duplicate (the original on high-quality, acid-free paper) and both copies must bear the signature of your advisor. You should follow the Graduate School's instructions exactly—they mean business. You will work on this project with your thesis advisor, getting credit (through LITR 2410) during the second semester of that year. You'll arrange a schedule with your advisor so as to meet the Graduate School's deadlines. In order to ensure feedback, it is important that you submit a final draft to her or him several weeks in advance of the final deadline.

You should register for LITR 2410.

Financial Information

It is the department's goal to provide financial aid to all students in good standing. In the first year, typical aid is through a fellowship, and includes: a stipend, health fee, health insurance and tuition (for two courses a semester).

In the second year, those who are approved will teach an undergraduate workshop in the fall and the spring semesters. They will receive a stipend, health fee, health insurance and tuition (two courses a semester).

Guaranteed student loans are available through the university. You should visit the Graduate School's web page for more details on this.

Teaching

In order to teach for the department in your second year, we expect first-year MFA students to attend the teaching practicum sessions led by the Director of Graduate Study. One or two sessions will take place in the fall, and a few intensive sessions will take place in the spring semester, during your first year. These sessions will be augmented by your visiting at least one workshop led by a second-year graduate student.

If you receive an appointment to teach an undergraduate writing workshop, you'll likely lead an introductory or intermediate workshop. You will be responsible for designing a syllabus, ordering books, leading workshop, holding office hours and submitting grades.

All introductory and intermediate workshops are limited to 17 students, and are graded on an S/NC (Satisfactory/No Credit) basis. While you won't need to worry about assigning letter grades, in order for your students to pass, they must meet the course requirements, spelled out clearly in your syllabus.

Department's Review Process

After each of your first three semesters, you will be given a Course Performance Evaluation form. You will have the opportunity to self-evaluate your performance in the workshop. Once you have returned the form to the department office, your workshop instructor will write an evaluation of your work. You will receive a copy, and a copy will go into your file.

Evaluations deal with any aspect of your work—for instance, your class participation—but will likely focus largely on the quality of your writing.

Each spring, the faculty will meet to evaluate all first-year students. In this meeting, faculty will discuss each student's progress. Should any concerns emerge, the chair will arrange a meeting with the particular student to discuss a course of action, and if needed, will report this to the Graduate School.

If your standing in the department becomes unsatisfactory, you will be notified of this, by the chair, in writing.

Graduate School Statement on Evaluation and Warning

On 22 March 1978, the Graduate Council adopted the following statement:

At least once a year, the status and progress of every graduate student in a department shall be reviewed and evaluated. This evaluation and the grounds upon which it is based shall be entered in writing in the student's file and a copy provided to the student. Students shall have the opportunity to add to their files at any time.

No student shall be withdrawn for academic reasons from a program without at least a semester's forewarning of their possible termination.

A student receiving aid shall not have the aid terminated without a semester's forewarning for sufficient cause. Reasons for termination of financial aid shall be placed in the student's file in writing and a copy given to the student.

Grievance Procedure

Students having trouble with a faculty member should consult the director of graduate studies. The Graduate School has adopted a university-wide grievance procedure, to which you may turn if less formal measures fail. If you want to discuss your situation with someone outside the department, contact the Dean of the Graduate School; to review the [university grievance policy](#) on the Institutional Diversity webpage. If one of your students complains about your teaching and you cannot resolve the problem yourself, you should consult with the assistant director or the chair. If the issue cannot be resolved at that point, you should take the matter to the Graduate School's grievance process.

Leaves of Absence

If you plan to leave Brown for one or more semesters before you receive your degree, you may apply for a leave of absence. You should write a letter to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School, requesting a

leave and stating the reason; you should provide a copy of this request to the chair. The chair will write a letter to the Graduate School, indicating the department's support of your request. The Graduate School grants permission and notifies the chair. Such leaves are granted for up to one year (two semesters).

Returns from Leaves of Absence

During the semester prior to the one in which you plan to return to Brown, you should write a letter to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School, with a copy to the chair, stating your desire to resume study. You can wait until you return to campus to register for courses.

If you will need financial support, you must notify the chair of your intention to return before 1 February (whether you plan to return in the fall or spring of the following academic year). Leaving the department midway jeopardizes your financial aid as a whole, not just your opportunity to teach. The department will do its best to help you secure financial aid, but can make no promises.

Readmission

If you have been away from Brown for longer than one year, you are no longer considered actively enrolled in a degree program, and must reapply to be reinstated. In order to initiate this process, write a letter to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School, with a copy to the chair. Either the chair or a representative will contact you to let you know what steps you must take at that time.

Job Placement

If you intend to search for a job that starts right after graduation, or even if you won't be looking until years later, you should build a dossier through Interfolio. You can learn more about Interfolio through Brown's Career Planning office on Angell Street. Through this service, you can have faculty members (at Brown and elsewhere) place letters on file, which may then be sent out at your request.

Computer Services

We recommend that you activate your Brown account as soon as you get your Brown ID. You can do this at activate.brown.edu. If you wish to forward your Brown electronic mail to another account, you can do it immediately after activating your Brown account; however, you will still need your Brown username and password for things like the computer clusters, online grades, registering for classes...

While the department is largely a Mac-based community, our graduate computer room has both Mac and PC platforms. We appreciate your being respectful of the machines in the computer room and that you report any problems to the program manager as soon as one crops up.

Conference Travel

Graduate students who have been invited to present papers at academic conferences can apply to the Graduate School for up to \$500 to cover travel related expenses. Only students in their second year (or thereafter) are eligible to apply for this reimbursement. For conference travel reimbursement instructions, visit: [Conference Travel-Graduate School](#)

The Graduate Student International Travel Fund is available to full-time Brown graduate students for assistance in meeting the costs of one professional journey per academic year. The travel stipend may be used for a trip to deliver a paper at an international conference. The fund is not designed to cover field work.

The application and information for this is available at: [IATF - Graduate Students](#)