

MA Portfolio Guidelines

SDSU Department of English and Comparative Literature

Description:

Your portfolio consists of two essays and an annotated bibliography. The first essay, sometimes referred to as “the star paper,” is a journal-style essay that identifies the specific scholarly conversations it is a part of, sets out the stakes of the issues involved, and makes a compelling argument in favor of its intervention using research and textual analysis. This essay will be based on one you have written for an MA seminar or special study, but is far more than a revision. It is a major *rethinking* of the context and argument of that original piece. The goal is to write an essay that might be published in an academic journal. You will be guided through this process as part of the ENGL 790: Portfolio class and by your supervisor; however, the onus is on you to read widely in the scholarly literature in your field and to rethink your essay so that you are able to identify where your argument fits in with what others are currently saying about the topic. This paper is usually 20-25 pages.

The second paper and 8-10 item annotated bibliography are an opportunity for you to show how you would deploy the skills you have developed in relation to the star paper for this second paper. The two essays in the portfolio (along with the annotated bibliography) should stand as a testament to your scholarly work in the program, allowing you to articulate your research interests and the ways in which these have developed in the course of the MA. You might be asked to talk about this at the defense.

Your annotated bibliography will identify the scholars that you are in conversation with for the second paper and, while you do not need to make revisions to this paper, you will need to be able to talk about the revisions you would make during the oral defense. This paper will also need to show your familiarity with disciplinary conventions.

Process:

The portfolio is based on essays you have written in the program. These essays will need to have been written **before** the semester in which you take the portfolio class (ENGL 790). In other words, as you work on each final paper in your MA seminars, consider whether it might be a topic and argument that you would like to develop further in the portfolio process. You may also use a special study to prepare for the MA portfolio.

You will need to submit a draft of the star paper to the professor teaching ENGL 790 by 15 December of the semester preceding the portfolio class. The professor will provide feedback on this draft at the start of the Spring semester so that you can get started right away with the significant work that will be required to succeed. You will also meet with your supervisor (see below) on several occasions during the course of the semester. Your supervisor will provide suggestions about the content of your paper and may also suggest further readings for you to undertake.

You will submit your portfolio (the two papers and the annotated bibliography) to Mary Garcia in the department office the first Monday after Spring Break. Your defense will take place approximately two weeks later. Any required revisions will be due by early May (depending on specific university deadlines) if you are to graduate in Spring. If the portfolio needs major revisions, you have until 1 December to complete the work. If you do not pass at this point, you will need either to switch to a thesis or restart the portfolio process with a new star paper and supervisor.

Please note: you must be Advanced to Candidacy before you can enroll in ENGL 790 or ENGL 799A.

Committee:

Your thesis will be reviewed by two members of the faculty: a supervisor—who is the professor that will supervise the rethinking and rewriting of the paper—and an examiner, who is a second professor who will serve on your defense committee. You are only responsible for finding your supervisor. The department will assign examiners on the basis of faculty availability and expertise.

You will need to ask a professor to serve as your portfolio advisor in the November preceding your enrollment in ENGL 790. Please note that we would expect, in most cases, that the professor for whom you wrote the original paper would be the adviser for your portfolio. If this is not the case, you need to obtain the consent of the graduate director in advance.

Defense and Outcomes:

At the defense (in April), both your supervisor and the examiner will ask you questions about your essays, about the process of reworking the star paper, and about your development as a scholar within the MA program. After the defense, the two professors will confer and determine, on the basis of the portfolio and the defense, whether you have passed the Portfolio process.

There are several possible outcomes at the defense: Pass (or, in rare cases, High Pass); Minor revisions; Major revisions; Fail. If you receive a Pass, you are done with the portfolio class. If you receive Minor revisions, the expectation is that you will be able to complete any revisions before the end of the semester and still graduate in Spring. If you receive Major revisions, you will likely not be able to graduate until the Summer or Fall. Major revisions is an indication that your committee feels the star paper needs substantial reworking. If you receive a Fail, you will need to consult with the Graduate Director about future options.

Please note: the university requires students to take an official leave of absence for every semester in which they are not enrolled in classes. If you do not complete your portfolio in Spring, you are encouraged to file a leave of absence for Fall in case you need to enroll in ENGL 799A: Thesis or ENGL 790: Portfolio in the following Spring. If you do not file this leave of absence you might be required to reapply for admission to the program should you wish to return.

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