

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

A Guide to Admissions

PhD Program in English and Comparative Literature Columbia University

How to Apply to our Doctoral Program

All students apply to the doctoral program in English and Comparative Literature through Columbia's general online graduate school application portal, which goes live every September on the [GSAS Admissions website](#). The application deadline generally falls in early-mid December. [Check here for the current deadline](#).

Application Requirements

| Document Name | Required? | Details |
|---|-----------|--|
| Statement of Academic Purpose | Yes | 1-2 pages. |
| Writing Sample | Yes | 15-20 pages, preferably a single research essay related to your academic interests |
| Resume | Yes | 1-2 pages |
| Transcripts | Yes | Copies in English of all official transcripts from colleges and universities you have attended. Do not send high school transcripts. If you have not yet graduated and don't have official transcripts, send a screenshot or PDF of your academic record. You will have to submit official transcripts before enrolling. |
| Letters of Recommendation | Yes | 3 letters, preferably from teachers or mentors familiar with your academic work |
| GRE General Exam | No | n/a |
| GRE Subject Exam | No | n/a |
| TOEFL for non-native English speakers (or equivalent) | Yes | See GSAS Admissions FAQ for current score requirements. |

The most important parts of the application are the Statement of Academic Purpose and Writing Sample. In both these documents, our admissions committee looks for a sense of a personal voice and direction, an awareness of relevant scholarly debates, and a good match between the applicant's interests and those of our faculty. The committee pays close attention to applicants' overall undergraduate record (and prior graduate record, if any) and letters of recommendation but we are most interested in the direct written evidence of your abilities and interests.

For more information about general application and admissions requirements at Columbia, please read the [GSAS Admissions FAQ](#).

Application Fees

GSAS charges a nonrefundable fee of \$120 to apply to Columbia. (Please note: this fee is not levied by, nor does it go to, the Department of English and Comparative Literature.) If you cannot afford this fee, you may apply for an application fee waiver. For information, [please see this website](#).

Selectivity, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Our doctoral program is highly selective. We typically receive around 600 applications per year for under 15 places, for an admissions rate of about 2.5%.

While this means it's extraordinarily difficult to get into our program, that doesn't mean we only accept students with perfect academic records from elite universities. We are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in admissions and we regularly admit students with a wide range of educational experiences and from a diverse range of backgrounds. You do not need to have been an English or Comparative Literature major to apply, but it will certainly help your application if you can show experience in literary or cultural studies, or training in a related discipline such as art history, classics, history, modern languages, philosophy, or religion.

“Subfield” Designations

The online application system requires you to select from a short list of two subfields of literary study that best reflect your academic interests (e.g., Renaissance, Postcolonial and Global South). We refer to these as your Primary Subfield and Secondary Subfield and they are used to distribute applications for evaluation to the most appropriate specialists on our faculty. Subfield designations also are used to help achieve a balanced representation of interests among incoming classes of graduate students.

When you apply, please select the subfields that most closely reflect your current and expected area(s) of academic specialty. You are not, however, making a long-term commitment to some narrow area of study. Graduate education should be a process of

experimentation, and we expect that some students will change their areas of interest over time.

Students with an Interest in Comparative Literature

If you are planning to study Comparative Literature – i.e., literature in more than one language tradition -- you should make sure to list “Comp Lit” as your Primary Subfield. This specification will help ensure that your application is read by faculty in your areas of interest.

Many of our doctoral students also have an affiliation with the [Institute for Comparative Literature and Society](#), the interdisciplinary home for comparative cultural and social analysis at Columbia, where many of our faculty hold joint appointments. You may check a box on the online application signaling your desire to be considered for ICLS affiliation, or you may apply to be affiliated with ICLS after your arrival at Columbia. Visit the ICLS website for further information about the requirements of its [graduate certificate program](#).

Program Structure

Like all doctoral programs in New York State and at Columbia, ours is sequential in nature, with students proceeding through three degree stages:

- MA Stage (Year 1)
- MPhil Stage (Years 2-3)
- PhD Candidacy (Years 4-6)

The vast majority of students complete all three stages, graduating with the PhD in an average of 6.7 years. Between 2010-18, our doctoral program attrition rate (the percentage of students who leave the program without receiving the PhD) was only 9%.

Progression through the three stages is not, however, guaranteed. At the end of Year 1 and Year 3, we encourage students to talk to their advisors if they have any doubts about continuing in the program. Faculty will also sometimes initiate this discussion, especially if a student has struggled with exams, research, writing, or oral communication. In most cases, the decision to continue in the program is easily reached. Still, the sequential nature of our program provides two natural departure points for students having second thoughts or experiencing academic difficulties.

All doctoral students must be enrolled full-time. We do not allow part-time study in the doctoral program.

Advanced Standing / Transfer Credit

We regularly admit students with and without Masters degrees. We do not require the MA to apply, nor do we discourage students with an MA from applying.

We do not, however, offer advanced standing to students with an MA. All doctoral students must complete the full first year of coursework, including all MA requirements, before applying to transfer any credit from a previous graduate degree. We allow for a maximum of four classes of transfer credit, but generally recommend fewer so as to ensure that students get the full benefit of Columbia coursework before beginning research.

Program Size

We generally admit between 10 and 15 students per year to the doctoral program. This number allows us to offer a full range of graduate classes across all fields of literature in English, and to offer a variety of courses in comparative, theoretical, and interdisciplinary subject areas.

Funding

All doctoral students are fully funded with tuition, fees, and a stipend. Funding is guaranteed for 6 years. International students and U.S. citizens receive the same funding.

After union dues, the stipend for 2022-23 is \$33,333, paid over 9 months. The summer stipend for 2023 will be \$6,000. Under the terms of the current contract between the university and Student Workers of Columbia, doctoral students will receive minimum stipend increases of 3% annually until 2025.

Teaching

We pride ourselves on the excellence of our graduate student teachers, as well as the range of teaching opportunities available to them.

The standard teaching schedule for our doctoral students is as follows:

- Year 1: Coursework (no teaching)
- Year 2: TA for departmental lecture class
- Year 3: [University Writing](#) (instructor of record)
- Year 4: University Writing (instructor of record)
- Year 5: Dissertation Fellowship (no teaching)
- Year 6: University Writing/[Teaching Scholars/Core Preceptorship](#)

Pre-Application Appointments, Tours, and Emails

Given the volume of applications, we cannot answer all admissions queries individually, nor can we generally facilitate pre-admissions Zoom meetings, in-person meetings, or campus tours. We apologize for not being more accessible, but we need to reserve most of our attention for students already enrolled in the program.

You should feel free to email professors whose interests align with yours, or whom you envisage as potential advisors. (See the [faculty directory](#) for more information.) Please note, however, that our professors receive many such emails and cannot reply to them all, so please don't be discouraged if your note goes unanswered. Likewise, please understand that a lively email exchange with a professor does not guarantee admission, even if they express interest in working with you. Entry to our doctoral program is decided by committee vote and no individual professor can guarantee admission.

Further Information

If this document leaves a question unanswered please read the [GSAS Admissions FAQ](#) first and only then contact the department by writing to Professor Matthew Hart, Director of Graduate Studies, at mh2968@columbia.edu.

For more information about our doctoral program, including academic requirements and key academic benchmarks, please browse the [department website](#). Given the volume of queries we receive from applicants, please do not write or call until you have consulted the website.