Liberal Studies MA Program

Overview
The Master's Program in Liberal Studies supports the varied interests of students pursuing graduate study in a variety of areas across the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The program is focused on issues in contemporary cultural theory in a global context. Students in the program pursue an individualized course of study, focused on a particular problem or area of intellectual interest, to be defined in consultation with the program Director and participating faculty. While the areas of study are flexible and open, we particularly invite students who are interested in issues of pressing concern that cut across disciplinary boundaries – postcolonial studies; globalization; new media; race, gender and ethnicity; human rights; literary and cultural theory; feminist theory; politics, law and culture; and similar areas of work, all of which are reconfiguring the boundaries of contemporary liberal education.

Unlike most Liberal Studies programs in the United States, our program is designed for students who intend to go on to further doctoral work, or who intend to use their particular research interests as a platform for the development of their careers. Recruitment for this program has a national and international orientation, and we invite students who are interested in developing an international perspective on challenging issues in contemporary social and cultural theory.

Requirements for Admission
Applications to the M.A. in Liberal Studies should be submitted to the Graduate Studies Office by the appropriate deadline, so that students may begin coursework in the first semester after they are admitted to the program. Students wishing to start in the Fall semester should submit complete applications by March 15; those who wish start in the Spring semester should submit complete applications by November 1.

Completed applications must include (1) transcripts of all previous undergraduate and graduate-level work, (2) GRE scores, (3) a TOEFL score (for non-native speakers), (4) at least three letters of recommendation, (5) a statement of purpose that explains the applicant's intellectual goals and interest in this program, and (6) a sample of critical writing. We welcome non-degree applications from students who wish to attend and take classes without completing the degree requirements.

Regarding financial aid: due to limited university funding, assistantship support is not available for Liberal Studies students.

Program Requirements
The program of study, designed in consultation with the Director of Liberal Studies and participating program faculty, is directed toward the student's interests and specific career objectives. It consists of the following:
Advanced Standing
A student may apply for up to 8 hours of previous graduate credit to be counted toward the credit hours required for the Liberal Studies degree. The precise credit value of previous graduate coursework will be determined during the student's initial interview with the Director of Liberal Studies. Courses presented for advanced standing are subject to all the requirements and restrictions described in the University’s Graduate Bulletin.

Coursework
All students must earn a minimum of 30 credits, distributed as follows:

(1) Two core requirements (6-8 credits), which include one course from the list of approved core courses in Humanities, and one course from the list of approved core courses in the Social Sciences, or appropriate alternate courses as advised. These core courses are typically “field courses,” or surveys of a broad disciplinary area, designed as introductory courses for graduate students in a variety of disciplines. Full time students must complete the core courses during their first year of study. Part-time students will complete them as advised.

(2) Elective courses selected in consultation with the Director or a designated faculty advisor (minimum 18 credits), which may include GLS 697 (Directed Readings, 1-4 credits), and which must include at least 2 courses at the 600 level (6-8 credits). Electives must also include courses in at least two departments.

(3) GLS 699 Master’s Thesis (4 credits). This independent research project is based on (but not reducible to) the student’s course work. This thesis is designed in consultation with a minimum of two full-time faculty supervisors, and must be approved by the program Director.

Students are not permitted to register for GLS 699 until they have (1) identified a thesis committee of at least two full-time faculty members who agree to serve as first and second readers; and (2) submitted a written thesis prospectus of 8-10 pages, with a supporting bibliography of at least 25 items, that outlines the research project and is formally approved in writing by the thesis committee and the Director of Liberal Studies. It is therefore imperative that students submit the approved prospectus during the semester before they expect to write the thesis, ideally at the time of pre-registration.

The final research thesis represents the culmination of the degree. It provides evidence of the student's academic work, and will be used to represent the student for any further doctoral program applications and/or employment following completion of the degree. In planning this thesis, students should begin to formulate a research topic as early as possible in their course of study, and should choose their individual courses accordingly. They may also find it useful to compile and revise annotated bibliographies as a way to help define their area of study. Other recommendations will be made by the thesis committee as appropriate.
Forming the Thesis Committee
The student begins this process by consulting with the Director of Liberal Studies or a designated faculty advisor, to identify faculty members who might direct the research. The thesis committee must consist of at least two full-time faculty members, one of whom will serve as the director, the other as second reader. In appropriate cases, a third committee member is possible, though not required. Faculty members from other institutions are also permitted to serve as second or third reader with the approval of the program Director.

The student should present prospective committee members with a draft of a 1500-2000-word research prospectus, along with a draft of a bibliography of at least 25 items that define the principal area of research, including primary texts and/or objects of research, and secondary theoretical/critical texts, which together will constitute the basic subject matter of the thesis. Working with the committee, the student will then revise the draft prospectus and bibliography as necessary. When the committee has approved both documents, the student submits them to the Program Director along with a signed memorandum from the committee members approving the prospectus. When the Program Director approves the prospectus, he or she formally constitutes the committee, names one member as thesis director and notifies all others of their appointment, which allows the student to enroll for GLS 699.

Guidelines for Completion and Submission of the Thesis
Once the committee has been constituted, the student continues to work on the reading list, and drafts the chapters of the thesis. The student is expected to work independently, but also to communicate regularly with committee members to discuss progress and problems and to determine the direction of further work. The faculty member designated as first reader on the committee is charged with supervising this process, with advice and participation from the second reader being determined at the discretion of both committee members. The first reader is charged with being accessible to the student, establishing and maintaining the protocols governing the student-committee relationship, compiling all relevant correspondence, calling any meetings of the committee and student, setting the date of completion, and so on. The student is charged with completing the work, and keeping the committee members informed of his or her progress, but should also remember that faculty members have classes during the school year and may have research plans for the summer. Deadlines and turnaround times for preparatory materials prior to submission of the final document therefore need to be both very explicit and agreed upon well in advance, as does the date for submission of the thesis. The above process is subject to the review of the program Director, who is expected to be available for consultation with both the student and the faculty committee, and who is further charged with approving the constitution of the committee and the completed prospectus, as well as the final research thesis. Changes in the student’s committee are possible at the request of either the student or the faculty committee members, with the Director’s consent.
Other research thesis projects may be formulated in consultation with the committee and submitted with the written approval of the committee and program Director. The thesis normally emerges from the students' academic work in the Liberal Studies program. Accordingly, it is typically influenced by the coursework completed for the degree; the final thesis, however, must consist of substantially new research and writing, beyond work done in fulfillment of course requirements. Students are responsible for reviewing the relevant University regulations published in the *Graduate Bulletin*. Once the thesis has been completed and approved by the thesis committee, it should be prepared for final submission in accordance with the guidelines established by the University Library and the Office of Graduate Studies, and submitted to the program Director for final approval.