

# American Studies Ph.D. Timeline and Requirements

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*(This document provides elaboration and specification of degree requirements listed in the UNC Graduate Record, especially regarding the comprehensive examination process.)*

Graduate Record entry for American Studies:

<http://www.unc.edu/gradrecord/programs/amerstud.html>

The Graduate School Handbook: <http://handbook.unc.edu/>

Doctoral Degree Requirements from the Graduate School Handbook:

<http://handbook.unc.edu/phd.html>

## **Overview of process leading to doctoral candidacy:**

- All students will take AMST 700 History and Practices of American Studies and AMST 701 Research Methods in American Studies during their first year. Successful completion of these courses, including a final major paper or project, will be considered to demonstrate sufficient grasp of shared core ideas and methodologies in the field of American Studies.
- Each student will constitute an examination committee of three members (no more than one of whom may be from outside the department). With the help of these advisors, each student will choose three areas of concentration with an eye not only to immediate research interests but also to building their careers long term. Each member of the examination committee will advise the student in assembling and studying a list of materials in one of these areas of concentration. The student will complete a professional portfolio in one of these areas and a three-hour written examination covering the other two.
- Students should have passed their comprehensive examinations, devised and defended the dissertation prospectus, and advanced to candidacy by the end of the second academic year after entering the program for those who began with an MA, third academic year for those who began with a BA.

**For students who enter the American Studies PhD Program with an MA:**

- **Fall of first year:**
  - Upon admission to the PhD program, each student will be assigned a preliminary advisor. The preliminary advisor will help to familiarize the student with the program, check in on his/her progress during the first semester, and advise the student on selection of courses during the first year. Students should make plans with the preliminary advisor to meet with and/or take courses with faculty members whom they may want to invite to serve on their examination or dissertation committees. Students should also make plans to complete the language requirement before the end of their second year of studies.
- **Spring of first year:**
  - January-February: Each student chooses a principal advisor to guide him/her through the comprehensive examination process. This person will usually go on to serve as chair of the student's dissertation committee. This faculty member may be the preliminary advisor assigned to the student or another appropriate and willing department member.
  - Also January-February: In consultation with the principal advisor, the student chooses two other examination committee members. Two of the three committee members should be members of the faculty of the department of American Studies. If the student wishes to have a principal advisor and/or more than one member who is not a regular member of the faculty of the Department of American Studies s/he must petition the Graduate Studies Committee for permission.
  - March (no later than the Friday before Spring Break): Student submits a declaration specifying his/her three examination committee members and three intended areas of concentration, including descriptions of the parameters of each area (no more than 500 words for each) and indicating which two s/he will cover by exam, which s/he will cover with the professional portfolio, and the nature of the portfolio (teaching, museum, policy, etc.). The student submits copies to his/her examination committee members and to the Director of Graduate Studies. The student will also post these materials on the AMST PhD Dissertation Prospectus Sakai site. Should the student make any subsequent changes to these documents in consultation with his/her advisor, s/he will keep the version in the Sakai repository up to date.
  - Each student should advise the Graduate Student Services Specialist that s/he has passed this and subsequent milestones so that these accomplishments can be recorded in the student's file.
  - March-April: The three examination committee members will each advise the student in the preparation of one reading list, which may also include films,

photographs, websites, museum exhibits, etc. Reading lists should encompass a field defined by breadth, depth, and rigor; the number of items on each list may vary and is to be negotiated between the student and the advisor. The student should frame these areas of concentration not only as preparation for the specific intended dissertation project but also with an eye to the kinds of broad preparation that enable one to develop long-term career opportunities.

- April (no later than last day of classes): Each student submits his/her three area of concentration reading lists to all three examination committee members and the Director of Graduate Studies and posts these on the AMST PhD Dissertation Prospectus Sakai site. When emailing the reading lists to the Director of Graduate Studies, the student should cc all three committee members so that they can indicate their approval of the list upon which each advised the student.
- **Summer between first and second years:**
  - Student studies the works on his/her area of concentration reading lists.
- **Fall of second year:**
  - Students enroll in AMST 902 PhD Research Seminar. Over the course of the semester each student, in consultation with the professor teaching AMST 902 and the members of his/her examination committee, works on his/her professional portfolio and a brief (roughly 500-word) preliminary dissertation proposal. (The course will also involve other professionalization exercises to prepare the students for doctoral research and future career opportunities.)
  - In consultation with the members of his/her examination committee, the student chooses two additional members to form the five-person dissertation committee. See Graduate School rules on dissertation committee composition: <http://handbook.unc.edu/phd.html#dissertationcommittee>. The Graduate School allows for the roles of Faculty Research Advisor and Committee Chair to be filled by different faculty members; American Studies will usually have a single faculty member fill both roles. Again, if the student wishes to have a committee that does not conform to the Graduate School's rules, the student must petition the Graduate Studies Committee for permission. If the student wishes to involve a committee member from another university it is especially important to approach that person early in the process. The student will need to obtain the outside committee member's CV and to work with the Graduate Student Services Specialist and the Chair to have this person appointed to a term on the UNC Graduate Faculty.
  - As soon as the student has constituted his or her five-person dissertation committee, s/he should complete Part I of the Report of Doctoral Committee Composition and Report of Approved Dissertation Project form: <http://gradschool.unc.edu/pdf/wdcomm.pdf> (Note that names should be listed in

- alphabetical order; consult with the Graduate Student Services Specialist if you have any questions about the Faculty Status section.) The Graduate Student Services Specialist will keep the form; the student will retrieve it from her for the prospectus defense, at which the dissertation committee members will sign Part II.
- October: The student signs up for AMST 895 Directed Readings for Graduate Students with his/her examination committee chair as one of three courses for the Spring semester.
  - November (no later than first Friday in November): Each student submits the preliminary dissertation proposal (500 words) to the five dissertation committee members and the Director of Graduate Studies (and posts the proposal on the AMST PhD Dissertation Prospectus Sakai site).
  - December: Students complete their professional portfolio and submit it to the three members of the examination committee by the last day of classes. At this time the student should consult with the examination committee members and schedule the oral examination (within two weeks after the written examination—see timing below).
  - **Spring of second year:**
    - February:
      - By the first Monday—the examination committee chair is responsible for arranging for each committee member who advised the student on one of the two areas to be covered by exam to contribute two questions, for constituting the examination, and for forwarding the examination to the Director of Graduate Studies by the first Monday of February.
      - The Director of Graduate Studies will make the examinations available on the AMST PhD Comps Sakai site. They will become visible to the student at 8 am on the scheduled exam day.
      - First Wednesday after the first Monday—the student undertakes the written examination covering the two areas of concentration other than the area upon which s/he focused the portfolio.
        - Each student may take the exam during any three-hour period convenient for him or her during the appointed day (8 am to 8 am) and at a place of their own choosing. The examination is closed book.
        - The student will pick one of the two questions on each area of concentration and will spend one and a half hours composing an essay in response, three hours total for the examination.
        - When the students have completed their examination responses, they should email these to the Director of Graduate Studies who will

be responsible for distributing them to all three examination committee members.

- Within two weeks after written exams—the three members of the examination committee will assemble with the student for a 90-minute oral examination involving further discussion of the portfolio, and the written exam, and the brief dissertation proposal.
- At the orals, the examination committee chair signs parts I and II of the Doctoral Exam Report form: <http://gradschool.unc.edu/pdf/wdexam.pdf>. The student is then responsible for conveying the form to the Graduate Student Services Specialist, who will keep it in the student's file. (Parts III and IV will be signed by the full dissertation committee at the time of the dissertation defense and dissertation submission.)
- February-April: In consultation with the five members of the dissertation committee the student prepares his/her full dissertation prospectus (see details in separate document) and schedules his/her prospectus defense for late April or early May.
- No later than April 15: Student submits prospectus to full five-member dissertation committee and the Director of Graduate Studies.
- April-May: No later than last day of exams the student defends his/her dissertation prospectus in a meeting with all five dissertation committee members. The student retrieves the Report of Doctoral Committee Composition and Report of Approved Dissertation Project form from the Graduate Student Services Specialist, has the committee members sign to indicate their approval, and returns the form to the Graduate Student Services Specialist.
- By the end of May: The student makes any changes required by the dissertation committee, has the final version approved by the dissertation committee chair, and uploads the approved version of the dissertation prospectus to the AMST PhD Dissertation Prospectus Sakai site.
- Each student communicates to the Director of Graduate Studies that s/he has completed all the requirements for admission to candidacy, including the language requirement. The Director of Graduate Studies will complete the application for admission to candidacy <http://gradschool.unc.edu/pdf/wdcanfrm.pdf> and give it to the Graduate Student Services Specialist. The Graduate Student Services Specialist will keep copies of the completed Application for Admission to Candidacy and the Report of Doctoral Committee Composition and Report of Approved Dissertation Project form from the Graduate Student Services Specialist and will forward the originals to the to the Graduate School.

**For students who enter the American Studies PhD Program with a BA:**

- Fall and Spring of first year:
  - Coursework including AMST 700 and 701
- Fall of second year:
  - AMST 901 with preliminary advisor (or new principal advisor) to work on readings and research in preparation for capstone project
- Spring of second year:
  - AMST 992 Master's (Non-thesis option)—capstone project (see separate instructions)
- The student who joins the program with a BA then follows the timeline for students who enter with an MA, but one year later. Note that this means that the student will be devising reading lists for comprehensive examinations at the same time s/he is completing the capstone project in the Spring semester of his/her second year of studies. The two advisors for the capstone project may also participate in the three-person comprehensive examination committee.
- Students who enter the program with a BA need to complete the language requirement by the end of their third year of studies (i.e., by the time they defend their dissertation prospectus), but are encouraged to do so earlier.

**Petition for exception:**

- Under extraordinary circumstances and with the support of the primary advisor, a student may petition the Graduate Studies Committee in writing for an extension to the established timeline.