

# American Studies Ph.D. Timeline and Requirements

(Revised version: March 4, 2020)

*(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:

<https://gradschool.unc.edu/policies/faculty-staff/gsrecord/>

The Graduate School Handbook:

<http://handbook.unc.edu>

Doctoral Degree Requirements from the Graduate School Handbook:

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

## Contents

- [Overview to process leading to doctoral candidacy](#)
  - [Coursework](#)
  - [Comprehensive Examinations](#)
  - [Dissertation Prospectus](#)
  - [Advancement to Candidacy](#)
- [For students who enter the program with an MA](#)
  - [Fall of first year](#)
  - [Spring of the first year](#)
  - [Summer between first and second year](#)
  - [Fall of second year](#)
  - [Spring of second year](#)
- [For students who enter the program with a BA](#)
  - [Fall of first year](#)
  - [Spring of first year](#)
  - [Summer between first and second year](#)
  - [Fall of second year](#)
  - [Spring of second year](#)
- [Petition for Exception](#)

## Overview to process leading to doctoral candidacy:

### Coursework

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, demonstrate sufficient grasp of shared core ideas and methodologies in the field of American Studies. Students without an MA will take AMST 902: MA Research Seminar and AMST 992: Capstone Project in their second year. At the end of their second year, students produce a capstone project, whether a traditional master's thesis or the equivalent.

### Comprehensive Examinations

Each student will make an examination committee of three members (no more than one of whom may be from outside of 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 readings and other materials in one of these areas of concentration. The student will complete a professional portfolio in one of these areas and one ninety-minute exam for each of the two other areas.

### Dissertation Prospectus

Your dissertation prospectus is a fairly brief explication of your research question, your sources, your core argument, and the chapters or parts of your dissertation project. You must defend your prospectus before your three-person committee before moving into Ph.D. work.

### Advancement to Candidacy

Students should have passed their comprehensive examinations, devised and defended the dissertation prospectus, completed the language requirement, 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 or will select a preliminary advisor. The preliminary advisor will help to familiarize the student with the program, check in on their 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.

\*\* During this semester, students should begin to identify potential sources for summer funding.

## Spring of the first year:

### January – February

- Each student chooses a principal advisor to guide them through the comprehensive examination process. They may be the preliminary advisor assigned to the student or another appropriate and willing department member. This person will usually go on to serve as chair of the student's dissertation committee.
- In consultation with their principal advisor, the student chooses two other examination committee members. Two of the three committee members should be American Studies faculty. 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, they must petition the Graduate Studies Committee for permission.

### March

*No later than the Friday before Spring Break.*

- Student submits a declaration specifying their 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 they will cover by exam, which they will cover with the professional portfolio, and the nature of the portfolio (teaching, museum, policy, etc.).
- The student submits copies to their 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** (contact the Graduate Student Services Manager or DGS for access).
- Should the student make any subsequent changes to these documents in consultation with their advisors, they will update the version in Sakai.
- Each student should advise the Graduate Student Services Specialist that they have 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, or other products of scholarship and creative energy.
  - 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 the last day of classes.*

- Each student submits their 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.

**\*\*** During this semester, students should apply for summer funding. For more information about funding opportunities, speak with the DGS and/or consult the Graduate Funding Information Center.

### Summer between first and second years

- Student studies the works on their area of concentration reading lists.

### Fall of second year

- Student enrolls 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 their examination committee, works on their 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 their 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>.
- As soon as the student has constituted their five-person dissertation committee, they should request that the Report of Doctoral Committee Composition and Report of Approved Dissertation Project form be completed by the Graduate Student Service Manager: <http://gradschool.unc.edu/pdf/wdcomm.pdf>. The Graduate Students Services Manager will keep the form; the student will retrieve it from them before the prospectus defense, at which the dissertation committee members will sign Part II. The Graduate Student Services manager will then be sure the DGS has signed Part I and submit the form to the Graduate School.

### October

- The student signs up for AMST 895 Directed Readings for Graduate Students with their examination committee chair as one of three courses for the Spring semester. This course is a chance to constitute one of the lists of books for your comprehensive exams.

### November

*No later than the 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 Dissertation Prospectus Sakai site).

December

*By the last day of classes.*

- Students complete their professional portfolio and submit it to the three members of the examination committee.
- 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)

**\*\* During this semester, students should identify potential sources for summer and/or dissertation research funding.**

## Spring of Second Year

February

*By the first Monday.*

- Students do not need to solicit questions from their committee. Rather, the examination committee chair is responsible for arranging for each committee member 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 8am 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 they focused the portfolio.
  - The Graduate Student Services Manager will send the exam to the student via email at 8am. The student will then need to confirm receipt with the Graduate Student Services Manager **at the time they plan to start the exam**. Once the student has confirmed that they have received their exam, the completed version should be returned about 3 hours and 20 minutes later (example – if the student confirm receipt at 8:30am, the completed exam should come at about 11:50am).
  - Each student may take the exam during any three-hour period convenient for them during the appointed day (8am to 8pm). Additionally, students may take a break of up to 20 minutes between questions, meaning students have **3 hours and 20 minutes total** to complete and return the exam.
  - 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 student has completed their examination responses, they should email these to the Graduate Student Services Manager, 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 join the student for a 90-minute oral examination involving further discussion of the portfolio, and the written exam, and the brief dissertation proposal.
- To have a room reserved for the exam, the student must contact the Graduate Student Services manager with 3 possible times for their committee to meet. The Graduate Student Services Manager will then have a room reserved for them.
- At the orals, the examination committee chair signs Part 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 their full dissertation prospectus (see details in separate document) and schedules their 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 the last day of exams.*

- The student defends their 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 Manager, 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 they have completed all the requirements for admission to candidacy, including the language requirement.

**\*\* During this semester, students should apply for summer and/or dissertation research funding.**

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

Students entering the PhD Program who have not previously earned an MA are required to complete a capstone project based upon original research. This project should be similar in scope to an article-length study in a scholarly journal. The capstone project may take the form of an essay (no less than 25, no more than 35 pages), a policy white paper, an exhibition curation project, or a digital humanities work.

### Fall of first year:

- Enroll in AMST 700.

\*\* During this semester, students should identify potential sources of summer funding.

### Spring of First Year:

- Enroll in AMST 701
- Each student chooses an advisor and a topic to focus upon for the MA capstone project.
- In consultation with the advisor, the student develops a bibliography of at least 15 texts and/or works (secondary and primary and all specific to their concentration) that will be central to their project.

\*\* During this semester, students should apply for summer funding opportunities.

### Summer between first and second year:

- Each student studies the reading list they have developed for the capstone project and conducts necessary research (library, archival, ethnographic, etc.)

### Fall of second year:

- AMST 901 with preliminary advisor (or new principal advisor) to work on readings and research in preparation for capstone project).
- A second advisor should be chosen at this time for the Spring capstone project defense.
- Students work on key concepts for their capstone project with their primary advisor, with the goal of producing a workable first draft of the project by the first week of December.

\*\* During this semester, students should seek out summer funding and/or funding for research.

### Spring of second year:

#### Master's Thesis

- Each student signs up with their primary advisor for AMST 992 Master's (Non-Thesis)
- Students then work with their primary advisor to revise and expand upon the draft project, with a goal of March 1<sup>st</sup> for submitting the full polished draft of the capstone project to the primary advisor.

- Primary advisors are then to read the project and respond to queries and/or emendations by the third week of March.
- Students make the required revisions and submit the revised project by April 1<sup>st</sup> to both the primary and secondary advisors. At this time, the student consults with both advisors and schedules the capstone project defense during the last week of classes.
- At the defense, the primary advisor should sign the Report of Approved Substitute for a Master's Thesis form <http://gradschool.unc.edu/pdf/mform2.pdf>. The student should deliver it to the Graduate Student Services Manager, who will keep a copy in the student's file and forward the original to the Graduate School.
- Because the capstone project is not considered a thesis, it does not need to be submitted to the Graduate School. The student should advise the Director of Graduate Studies that they have successfully defended the capstone project and should upload a copy of their project to the AMST PhD Dissertation Prospectus Sakai site.

## Comprehensive Exams

### January – February

- Each student chooses a principal advisor to guide them through the comprehensive examination process. They may be the preliminary advisor assigned to the student or another appropriate and willing department member. This person will usually go on to serve as chair of the student's dissertation committee.
- In consultation with their principal advisor, the student chooses two other examination committee members. Two of the three committee members should be American Studies faculty. 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, they must petition the Graduate Studies Committee for permission.

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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 they are completing the capstone project in the Spring semester of their second year of studies.

The two advisors for the capstone project may also participate in the three-person comprehensive examination committee.

Upon passing your comprehensive exams and transmitting the necessary paperwork to the Graduate Student Services Manager, you are ABD (All But Dissertation)! The next year will be spent researching and writing your dissertation.

#### 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.