

# MASTER OF LIBERAL ARTS

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## Program Description

The Master of Liberal Arts (MLA) program aims to provide a flexible, interdisciplinary program for returning adult students who seek a broad education in the liberal arts. Begun in 1991, the underlying premise of the MLA program is that knowledge gained through an interdisciplinary course of study leads to intellectual independence and satisfaction not always found in discipline-based programs of study. The goals of the MLA program are to develop advanced critical thinking, to foster intellectual range and flexibility, and to cultivate an individual's ability to find the connections among different areas of human thought: art, history, literature, music, philosophy, political science, science, and theology.

The program is designed with part-time students in mind: seminars meet in the evening, and students complete the degree in 4-5 years. All master's seminars are taught by members of the Stanford faculty. Seminar size is limited to 20 students.

## Learning Outcomes (Graduate)

The purpose of the Master of Liberal Arts Program is to address subjects that cross disciplinary boundaries; to develop an understanding of the strength and the shortcomings of disciplinary evaluation; to help students to refine their skills in writing, research, critical thinking, collaborative work, and collegial discussion. While students are not being groomed for academic careers, graduates of the program have used their experience to gain acceptance into Ph.D. programs at Stanford and elsewhere. Students who complete the MLA program are well positioned to advance in careers that require the careful analytical and rhetorical training they receive. This training is achieved through the completion of four foundations courses, which together emphasize the program's goals as stated above; seven seminars that offer a more specific engagement with interdisciplinary subject matter; and a master's thesis, accomplished under the direction of a Stanford faculty member who is expert in the subject of the thesis.

## Degree Requirements

Candidates for the MLA degree must complete a minimum of 50 units of course work with at least a grade point average of 3.3 (B+). These units must include a three-quarter foundation course (equal to 12 units total), one 4-unit core introductory seminar for second-year students, at least seven 4-unit MLA seminars, and a 6-unit master's thesis. Students must also fulfill distribution requirements in each of the following areas: humanities; social science or social policy; and science, engineering, or medicine.

## Foundation Course

During the Autumn, Winter, and Spring quarters following admission to the program, a three quarter foundation course is required of all students, MLA 101A Foundations I, MLA 101B Foundations II: the Middle Ages and Renaissance., MLA 101C Foundations III: the Enlightenment through Modernism. The purpose of this course sequence is to lay the groundwork for the interdisciplinary, intercultural studies the student will shortly undertake. The foundation course introduces students to the

broad framework of history, literature, philosophy, political science, and art.

## Core Seminar

During the first quarter of the second year, students take the core introductory seminar, MLA 102 An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Graduate Study. This seminar prepares students for interdisciplinary graduate work at Stanford. Students concentrate on writing a critical graduate paper, conducting library research, presenting the results of their research, and productively participating in a collaborative seminar.

## MLA Seminars

Students are required to take at least seven MLA seminars of 4 units each. Each MLA course requires a substantial seminar paper. Students are encouraged to use these papers as a way to investigate new fields of interest, as well as a way to develop different perspectives on issues in which they have an ongoing interest.

## Master's Thesis

The MLA program culminates in the master's thesis. Students approaching the end of the program write a thesis, approximately 75-100 pages in length, that evolves out of work they have pursued during their MLA studies. The thesis is undertaken with the prior approval of the MLA program, and under the supervision of a Stanford faculty member. During the process of writing the thesis, students are members of a thesis-in-progress course, which meets regularly to provide peer critiques, motivation, and advice. Each student presents the penultimate draft of the thesis to a colloquium of MLA faculty and students, in preparation for revising and submitting the final draft to the adviser and to the MLA program.

## Enrollment Requirements

MLA students must enroll for each academic year from the time of original matriculation until conferral of the degree. To remain active, students must either:

1. complete a minimum of two courses (eight units) in one academic year, defined as from the beginning of Autumn Quarter through the end of the following Summer Quarter; or,
2. be actively working on their thesis and regularly attend a minimum of three quarters of the thesis-in-progress meetings from the time the student enrolls in thesis-in-progress through graduation.

## Timeline for Completion

All requirements for the Master of Liberal Arts degree must be completed within five years after the student's first term of enrollment in the program. If extraordinary circumstances prevent completion within five years, a student may submit a written petition for a maximum one-year extension to the Associate Dean and Director. This petition is reviewed by a committee which makes a recommendation to the Director; the final decision is at the discretion of the Director. To be considered, the petition must be submitted on or before May 1 of the student's fifth year in the program.

## Registration

Master of Liberal Arts students enroll in courses through Stanford's Axess (<http://axess.stanford.edu/>) system.

## COVID-19 Policies

On July 30, the Academic Senate adopted grading policies effective for all undergraduate and graduate programs, excepting the professional Graduate School of Business, School of Law, and the School of Medicine M.D. Program. For a complete list of those and other academic policies relating to the pandemic, see the "COVID-19 and Academic

Continuity (<http://exploreddegrees.stanford.edu/covid-19-policy-changes/#tempdeptemplatetabtext>)" section of this bulletin.

The Senate decided that all undergraduate and graduate courses offered for a letter grade must also offer students the option of taking the course for a "credit" or "no credit" grade and recommended that deans, departments, and programs consider adopting local policies to count courses taken for a "credit" or "satisfactory" grade toward the fulfillment of degree-program requirements and/or alter program requirements as appropriate.

## Graduate Degree Requirements

### Grading

The MLA Program counts all courses taken in academic year 2020-21 with a grade of 'CR' (credit) or 'S' (satisfactory) towards satisfaction of graduate degree requirements that otherwise require a letter grade, provided that the instructor affirms that the work was done at a 'B-' or better level.

### Foundations/Core Courses

The MLA Program requires that students successfully complete (earn a B- or better) each Foundations course before moving on to the next Foundations or Core course. If students choose to take a Foundations or the Core course for CR/NC, student work must be at a B- or better level to fulfill the requirement.

MLA students should consult the 2020-21 MLA Student Handbook for detailed grading policies. The handbook is available on the MLA website.

For a statement of University policy on graduate advising, see the "Graduate Advising" section of this bulletin.

The MLA Program has an advising program that is created to respond to student need as well as the unique nature of this student group. That is to say, the MLA student group is diverse in age, experience, expectation, and availability. The program has determined that important gateway moments in the program (finishing core courses and entering the seminar track, preparation of the thesis prospectus, work on thesis) require cohort advising meetings. Individual academic advising, however, is best accomplished one-on-one, between student and adviser, at a mutually convenient time and place. The advising structure has two stages: Pre-thesis Advising and Thesis Advising.

Pre-thesis Advising begins just before matriculation and lasts until the student has been assigned a thesis adviser.

- Specific pre-thesis academic advising sessions occur before students begin the program, at the conclusion of their foundations course year, as they begin to choose their seminars, and as they begin to contemplate their thesis topics. The dates for these sessions are published well before the events, and students recognize the importance of attending; when exceptional circumstances keep students away, the program offers make-up sessions in person or by phone or video call.
- Entering students are also assigned a faculty adviser as they enter the program. They are encouraged to meet with the adviser during the first year to establish a relationship with the faculty member. Once they begin to choose seminars and to move toward thesis subject matter, the program encourages students to contact their adviser once a quarter, before they sign up for the following quarter, for a meeting.

### Year 1

Incoming students meet individually with the Associate Dean and Director in July, prior to starting the program. This meeting provides an opportunity to talk about student and program expectations, to clarify the

administrative specifics of the program, and to pass on information about the resources available to the student. This meeting also constitutes an open invitation for students to consult the Associate Dean and Director throughout their time in the program. Before this meeting, students are sent the *MLA Student Handbook* for their perusal.

In October of their first year, students are assigned a Stanford faculty adviser, from among the members of the MLA Faculty Advisory Committee. These advisers are familiar with MLA program policies and the MLA curriculum; they also are familiar with the *MLA Student Handbook*. This adviser works with students throughout Foundations, Core, and seminar classes, until they are assigned a thesis adviser.

In their first year, students should plan to reach out to their adviser at least once. The meeting (or meetings) during their first year provide an opportunity to get to know the adviser before the students and adviser begin meeting regularly during the second year.

Students meet with the Associate Dean and Director again in June at the completion of their first year. This meeting provides an opportunity to go over how the year went, and discuss concerns or challenges the student is having.

### Year 2

During Autumn Quarter, second-year students are taking their final core course. One session of that course begins an hour early, and addresses the students' move into seminar choice. The Associate Dean and Director and the Chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee conduct the meeting; faculty who will be offering seminars through the rest of the academic year are invited to the session. This meeting takes place just prior to enrollment opening for Winter Quarter.

Students are encouraged to consult with their faculty adviser prior to enrolling in courses Autumn, Winter, Spring, and summer quarters of the second year to keep the adviser informed of their choices, to discuss program expectations and upcoming responsibilities. These meetings can be held in person, by phone, or over email. Students are expected to initiate these quarterly meetings.

### Year 3

Students are advised to contact their faculty adviser each quarter as they continue their seminar work.

Early in Winter Quarter of their third year, students meet as a group with the Associate Dean and Director, and the writing instructor. This meeting is an orientation for students as they begin to think about their thesis topic, and move into the next stage of the degree program. They receive a substantial binder of policies and advice to consult through their thesis-writing.

As students reach the end of their seminars and begin thinking about thesis topics, they begin a conversation with the Associate Dean and Director and the Chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee about their thesis direction and potential faculty they should speak with as they are writing their prospectus. Students are introduced to and encouraged to consult individual faculty members whose expertise can guide the students' building of the prospectus.

### Thesis Advising, End of Year 3 and Beyond

The MLA Faculty Advisory committee responds in writing to each students' prospectus, approving it, deferring approval, or rejecting it. In each case, the response brings together the considered advice of the committee as to next steps for the student.

Once students have an approved prospectus, the MLA Faculty Advisory committee assigns them a Stanford faculty adviser.

Students with approved prospectuses (or those who are close to having their prospectuses approved) attend a day-long thesis workshop, held

every summer. The MLA writing consultant and instructor directs the workshop; the Chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee, the Faculty Writing Consultant, and the Associate Dean and Director attend, along with representative faculty advisers and recent graduates. The thesis workshop is intended to give provide insight into working with a thesis adviser, to help students to take maximum advantage of class and instructor feedback in the weekly thesis workshops, to address the necessary work of researching and then shaping and focusing the thesis, to inform students about the practices and expectations of the weekly Thesis-in-Progress sessions and of thesis presentations, and generally to illuminate some of the ups and downs of thesis-writing. (The summer thesis workshop is intended for all students who are working on their theses, not only those who are beginning their work.)

As soon as their prospectus is approved, students become a part of the thesis working group, MLA 398 MLA Thesis in Progress. The thesis-in-progress group meets weekly and includes all MLA students who are working on their theses; it is led by the MLA writing instructor; the MLA faculty writing consultant and the Associate Dean and Director attend most meetings. The meetings provide a time for peer feedback and support as well as guidance from the writing consultants.

*Associate Dean and Director:* Linda Paulson

*Director of Graduate Studies:* Linda Paulson

*Participating Faculty:* Jonathan Berger (Music), Jay Bhattacharya (Medicine), James Campbell (History), William Chace (English, emeritus), James Daughton (History), Gerald Dorfman (Hoover Institution, Political Science), William Durham (Anthropology), Michele Elam (English), Paula Findlen (History), Hester Gelber (Religious Studies, emerita), Albert Gelpi (English, emeritus), Barbara Gelpi (English, emerita), Jonathan Gienapp (History), Denise Gigante (English), Robert Gregg (Religious Studies, emeritus), Heather Hadlock (Music), Allyson Hobbs (History), Ari Kelman (Education), Nancy Kollmann (History), Pavle Levi (Film and Media), James Lock (Medicine), Ivan Lupic (English), Marsh McCall (Classics, emeritus), Ana Minian (History), Paula Moya (English), Thomas Mullaney (History), Alexander Nemerov (Arts), Kathryn Olivarius (History), David Palumbo-Liu (Comparative Literature), Grant Parker (Classics), Rush Rehm (Drama, Classics), John Rick (Anthropology), David Riggs (English, Emeritus), Jessica Riskin (History), Eric Roberts (Engineering, emeritus), Paul Robinson (History, emeritus), Thomas Sheehan (Religious Studies), Robert Siegel (Microbiology and Immunology), Peter Stansky (History, emeritus), Stephen Stedman (Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies), Barton Thompson (Law), Elaine Treharne (Humanities), Peter Vitousek (Biology), Michael Wilcox (Anthropology), Caroline Winterer (History), Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (Latin American Cultures).

## Courses

### MLA 101A. Foundations I. 4 Units.

Required of and limited to first-year MLA students. First of three quarter foundation course. Introduction to the main political, philosophical, literary, and artistic trends that inform the liberal arts vision of the world and that underlie the MLA curriculum.

### MLA 101B. Foundations II: the Middle Ages and Renaissance.. 4 Units.

Required of and limited to first-year MLA students. Second of three quarter foundation course. Introduction to the main political, philosophical, literary, and artistic trends that inform the liberal arts vision of the world and that underlie the MLA curriculum.

### MLA 101C. Foundations III: the Enlightenment through Modernism. 4 Units.

Required of and limited to first-year MLA students. First of three quarter foundation course. Introduction to the main political, philosophical, literary, and artistic trends that inform the liberal arts vision of the world and that underlie the MLA curriculum.

### MLA 102. An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Graduate Study. 4 Units.

Limited to and required of second-year MLA students. Historical, literary, artistic, medical, and theological issues are covered. Focus is on skills and information needed to pursue MLA graduate work at Stanford: writing a critical, argumentative graduate paper; conducting library research; expectations of seminar participation. Readings include Homer, Thucydides, Camus, Mann, Kushner, and sacred, scientific, and historical writings.

### MLA 262. The Economics of Life and Death. 4 Units.

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### MLA 295. The American Enlightenment. 4 Units.

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### MLA 298. Heretics, Prostitutes, and Merchants: The Venetian Empire. 4 Units.

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### MLA 300. Oxford Summer Programme. 2-4 Units.

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### MLA 305. Russia Encounters the Enlightenment: The Art, Culture, and Politics. 4 Units.

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### MLA 322. Coffee, Sugar, and Chocolate: Commodities and Consumption in World History. 120--1800. 4 Units.

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### MLA 326. Nature through Photography. 4 Units.

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### MLA 338. William Blake: A Literary and Visual Exploration of the Illuminated Poetry. 4 Units.

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### MLA 339. The Human Predicament in Three Masterpieces. 4 Units.

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### MLA 341. Aesthetics of Dissent in Contemporary Iran. 4 Units.

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### MLA 342. The Human Story in the Archives. 4 Units.

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### MLA 344. Making and Unmaking Apartheid: Topics in South African History. 4 Units.

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### MLA 347. Rome: From Pilgrimage to the Grand Tour. 4 Units.

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### MLA 348. Modern Iranian Politics Through Modern Iranian Art and Literature. 4 Units.

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### MLA 350. From Literature to Opera. 4 Units.

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### MLA 351. The Civil Rights Movement in History and Memory. 4 Units.

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### MLA 352. Virus in the News. 4 Units.

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### MLA 353. The Fourth R: Religion, Education and Schooling in America. 4 Units.

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### MLA 354. Intimations of Mortality. 4 Units.

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**MLA 355. Dante and the Poets. 4 Units.**

Dante Alighieri has had a profound influence on literary tradition. Among his more active respondents were the poets. While the Romantic poets found inspiration in his blend of lyric and epic, of romance and dream vision, of allegorical pilgrimage and spiritual autobiography, pre-Raphaelite poets such as Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (named after the Italian national poet) explored his use of gender dynamics, poetic authority, and the obsessive nature of love poetry. T.S. Eliot was, as always, a mixed bag, and at the same time as he was critical of a poet like William Blake, who illustrated all of *The Divine Comedy* and who was in his illuminated poetry in the visionary Dantean tradition of world-making, used *The Inferno* as the basis for his own deep psychological explorations in poems like *“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”* Prophetic poets like Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats found themselves turning to Dante in their own dying attempts at epic, those masterful fragments *The Triumph of Life* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, respectively. This course will explore the lasting legacy of Dante as a poet of melancholy, alienation, and redemption in the visual and verbal artwork he inspired.

**MLA 356. Film Analysis. 4 Units.**

**MLA 357. Historic Journeys to Sacred Places. 4 Units.**

**MLA 358. The Intersection of Medicine, Science, Public Policy, and Ethics: Cancer as a Case Study. 4 Units.**

**MLA 359. The Big Shift: Demographic and Social Change in America. 4 Units.**

**MLA 360. The Impossibility of Love: Opera, Literature, and Culture. 4 Units.**

**MLA 398. MLA Thesis in Progress. 0 Units.**

Group meetings provide peer critiques, motivations, and advice under the direction of the Associate Dean.

**MLA 399. MLA Thesis Final Quarter. 6 Units.**

Students write a 75-100 page thesis that evolves out of work they pursued during their MLA studies.