

# Literature and Language Department M. A. Examination

## ***OVERVIEW:***

To register for the exam, students should contact the graduate coordinator one semester before they plan to take the exam. Normally, students will declare their intention to take the exam in the Fall semester, and they will be required to select their areas of testing before Winter break.

Each student will answer one question from each of four periods, with three question options per period.

Students who are responding to four areas have the entire five hours to complete the exam. Students earning their degree with the thesis option have three hours and forty-five minutes to complete the exam.

## ***LOCATION AND TIME:***

The five-hour exam will be given in the Burlison Computer Lab on a selected Saturday. The spring exam is usually administered during the third week of March; the Fall exam is usually administered during the third week of October.

## ***EXAM QUESTIONS:***

The exam questions will allow students to demonstrate their familiarity with the specific works on the reading list and from their coursework; students will also be expected to place the works within their historical and literary contexts. However, the primary emphasis will be on close textual readings. Although students preparing for the exam will be encouraged to read as much of the relevant criticism and biographical studies as is feasible, they will not be held responsible for knowing any particular criticism of individual works, unless they choose to answer a question that requires such a response. In developing their exam answers, students will be expected to develop literary analysis which is supported and illustrated by textual references and citations.

### **Renaissance Sample Question**

**1. Edmund Spenser wrote that “the general end” of his epic, *The Faerie Queene*, was “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline.” Describe how three works from this period (from the reading list) attempt to “fashion a gentleman.” What is meant by “fashion”? What is meant by “gentleman”? Develop a thesis about the readership of Renaissance literature and the nature of “fashioning a gentleman” in this period. Support the thesis with substantial discussion of each text.**

**Suggestions for response:** The graders would expect knowledge of *The Faerie Queene* and the courtly audiences for Renaissance literature; an application of the question to other works that

involve “fashioning” and “self-fashioning”; a question about how women fit into the “fashioning of a gentleman” would certainly be refreshing and might involve Mary Wroth’s *Urania* (with her struggles about her birth and identity). A superior response would bring up Castiglione’s *The Courtier* and the many graces and virtues (including *sprezzatura*) expected of a Renaissance gentleman; Satan in *Paradise Lost* also makes a fascinating figure for this question, inasmuch as he declares that he can make “a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n” in his attempt to re-fashion himself and his followers after the war in Heaven.

### **GRADING:**

The student will be required to pass all sections to pass the exam.

If a student fails only one question on the exam, however, he or she can retake that section within seven to ten days. This supplementary one-hour oral re-examination will be given by the professor who wrote the exam question and by one other professor under the direction of the graduate coordinator.

If the student does not pass the retake attempt, he/she can take the entire exam one more time, but only when it is offered the following semester.

To pass with distinction for the exam as a whole, at least three of four answers must be scored “with distinction” (see scale below).

### **GRADING SCALE and CRITERIA:**

For literature areas:

#### 1. *Pass with Distinction*

- is a clearly focused response to the topic in fluent prose
- is well-organized and well-developed
- has unified and coherent paragraphs
- incorporates specific and appropriate textual citations and examples to support and illustrate its main points
- displays a thorough awareness of the overall significance of this work—why it is considered important, how it relates to other works to which it might be usefully compared or contrasted, and how it relates to the literary and historical period in which it appeared
- shows, when appropriate, a familiarity with significant and influential criticism about the work (or works) being discussed
- contains almost no mechanical or grammatical errors

#### 2. *Pass*

- demonstrates a thoughtful response to the topic within an overall plan, even if the treatment of some points is only perfunctory
- logically develops ideas in ordered paragraphs
- shows an adequate awareness of the significance of the work

- provides sufficient textual citations and examples to support and clarify its ideas but occasionally fails to develop the significance of these citations
- may have lapses in providing transitions
- may occasionally rely on unsupported assertions and generalizations
- contains minor mechanical or grammatical errors

### 3. *Fail*

- discusses the topic only generally or does not directly respond to the topic
- does not follow a reasonable or appropriate pattern of development
- lacks specific textual support for assertions and generalizations
- fails to develop appropriate examples
- does not demonstrate an awareness of the work's overall significance or its relationship to the historical and literary context in which it appeared
- contains numerous mechanical or grammatical errors

For the linguistic area:

#### 1. *Pass With Distinction*

- uses appropriate linguistic terminology
- shows strong understanding of relevant principles of linguistics
- shows strong understanding of relevant methods of analysis
- cites relevant theories and theoretical constructs; discusses them to the degree appropriate to the question
- demonstrates the ability to analyze real-world situations in linguistic terms if relevant to the question
- demonstrates the ability to make and support claims in the conventional manner if relevant to the question (e.g. in the case of data problems)
- follows the conventions of academic English in a Standard variety

#### 2. *Pass*

- exhibits moderate use of linguistic terminology
- shows some understanding of relevant principles of linguistics
- show some understanding of relevant methods of analysis
- exhibits some familiarity with relevant theories and theoretical constructs; discusses them to the degree appropriate to the question
- demonstrates some ability to analyze real-world situations in linguistic terms if relevant to the question
- partially demonstrates the ability to make and support claims in the conventional manner if relevant to the question (e.g. in the case of data problems)
- mostly follows the conventions of academic English in a Standard variety

### 3. *Fail*

- exhibits little or no knowledge of appropriate linguistic terminology
- shows little or no understanding of relevant principles of linguistics
- show little or no understanding of relevant methods of analysis
- exhibits little or no familiarity with relevant theories and theoretical constructs; fails to discuss them to a satisfactory degree
- demonstrates little or no ability to analyze real-world situations in linguistic terms if relevant to the question
- fails to demonstrate the ability to make and support claims in the conventional manner if relevant to the question (e.g. in the case of data problems)
- doesn't follow the conventions of academic English in a Standard variety