

Guidelines for Portfolio Option Master of Arts in English

**Department of English
Kutztown University**

Revised 9/22/2011

I. General Description of the M.A. Portfolio

Whereas the Thesis Option asks students to produce a single, sustained piece of writing, the Portfolio Option asks students to consider the relationships among texts they already have written as part of their graduate studies. Generally, the Portfolio is a collection of an M.A. student's work over the course of her or his graduate studies at Kutztown. The work of the Portfolio Semester is to *substantially* revise two seminar projects that the student has already written and provide critical, scholarly reflection on that work. "Seminar projects" are to be interpreted loosely, as creative and professional writing projects may as likely emerge from graduate course work as traditional scholarly research. Rigorous standards of performance on all projects should be assumed.

The Portfolio provides a pedagogically and intellectually rigorous option for a graduate capstone project that has currency nationally. The English department recognizes that the thesis option is not for everyone—especially students who have not settled on one particular area of study in which they want to concentrate. The Portfolio Option allows students to begin to articulate intellectual, scholarly, theoretical, and/or aesthetic position with roots in their graduate study. In addition to representing the culmination of a student's M.A. experience, the Portfolio is excellent preparation for terminal degree applications, readings, academic conferences, job applications, and perhaps publication.

II. Contents of the Portfolio

Students should:

- Choose two (2) projects they have completed for graduate classes at Kutztown. Projects should then be substantially revised. All writings should be carefully proofread to ensure they are free of typographical and grammatical errors and conform to formatting conventions appropriate to the field of study (e.g. *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* or the *Associated Press Stylebook*). Because the pressures of the semester frequently prevent the development of the highest standard of work, *substantial revision* implies that the research be extended and the thesis or project developed as a result. The final, revised projects should be of *presentation quality* in an appropriate academic field.
- Write a 15-20 page critical, reflective essay that introduces the revised projects, provides a sustained discussion about the relationship between the projects, and articulates an intellectual/scholarly agenda based upon the work of the projects.

III. Selecting a Committee

A portfolio committee consists of three faculty members, a Convener and two department members with whom the student would like to work. The Convener serves an organizational and mentoring role, guiding the student through the portfolio process.

In consultation with their Convener, students choosing the Portfolio option will select two additional faculty members as their Portfolio Committee. Once the Portfolio is completed, the student will orally present and discuss his or her work in a Portfolio review. Portfolio Committee responsibilities are detailed below.

There is no strict rule for the composition of a Portfolio committee. In general, two faculty members on the committee should be professors for whom the student created the projects they are including in their Portfolio. The third faculty member may be any member of the English Department faculty, and should be selected in consultation with the student's Convener. In extraordinary circumstances, an alternate faculty member can serve in place of a faculty member for whom the student wrote a paper.

Roles of Committee Members

Convener

- This faculty member serves as the chair of the student's Portfolio Committee. The primary responsibilities of the Convener are to guide the student through the process, make arrangements for the portfolio review, and coordinate the work of the committee. The Convener may be one of the faculty for whom the student wrote a paper, or the student may request a third faculty member to serve as the Convener.
- In addition to working closely with the student in substantially revising both seminar projects, it will be the primary responsibility of the Convener to work with the student on the critical reflection component of the Portfolio.
- The student should approach a potential Convener first. Once a faculty member has agreed to serve as the Convener, the student and faculty member work together to plan the project and identify other faculty members who might be appropriate faculty representative(s). Once the student and her or his Convener have identified potential faculty representatives, the Convener will approach those faculty members to see if they are willing and/or able to serve in that capacity.
- The Convener and student will also draft a research and revision plan and timeline for the completion of each part of the Portfolio. This plan must be circulated among all members of the Portfolio Committee. It shall be the responsibility of the Convener to track the student's progress and help the student revise his or her timeline as needed.
- The Convener makes recommendations for how the student should get started on the project and discusses the expectations for a strong Portfolio. Presentation quality for the field of study must be defined in consultation with the Portfolio Committee.
- Once the faculty representatives have agreed to serve on the committee, the Convener shall do her or his best to ensure that lines of communication remain open and that all members of the committee remain clear on the expectations for the Portfolio.
- The Convener should make every reasonable attempt to ensure that any serious problems with a student's work, progress, or approach to the Portfolio are addressed as part of drafting process. That is, problems in a student's work should not be addressed for the first time during the Portfolio review. It is primarily the responsibility of the student to address substantive objections, suggestions, and recommendations by the Convener and faculty representatives. A Portfolio Review shall not be scheduled until such time as the whole committee agrees that the Portfolio represents acceptable mastery of the subject matter.
- The Convener is responsible to schedule the Portfolio Review.
- Once the Portfolio Review is completed, the Convener will collect the committee's feedback on the Portfolio and draft a discursive statement that articulates the committee's response to the portfolio for the student. This document should be thought

of as providing suggestions for further development of the student's long-term scholarly, intellectual, and professional agenda.

Faculty Representatives

- Two faculty members of the committee are the professors who taught the courses for which the student developed the projects in the Portfolio. The third stands as a representative of the department. In extraordinary circumstances, one or both of these faculty members do not have to be the faculty members for whom the student wrote the original papers. The student must submit written justification for such an allowance?
- The primary responsibility of these faculty members is to represent the specific field of study the project addresses and provide critical commentary and suggestions to the student in revising his or her work.
- These faculty members shall be co-responsible for the revisions to papers in their fields. Faculty representatives should expect to meet with the student to discuss appropriate revisions to the paper in their area of expertise *before the Portfolio Review*?
- Faculty representatives shall notify the convener when the portion of the Portfolio under their direction is ready for review.
- Faculty representatives will also read the entire Portfolio upon its completion and prepare questions and suggestions for the Portfolio review.
- Faculty representatives will submit observations to the convener so that she or he may prepare discursive feedback for the student.

IV. Timeline for Completing the Portfolio

A single semester is not enough time to complete the work necessary to a successful portfolio. Thus a student considering the portfolio option should solicit feedback from faculty representatives during or immediately after the semester in which a project was initially developed. Further, the student should use time between semesters to perform research and pursue revisions.

The student should identify the faculty member who will serve as the Convener and complete the first part of the Portfolio Form no later than the **10th week of the semester before the student plans on completing the Portfolio**. A Convener must be a member of the English Department's Graduate Faculty.

The student should work in consultation with his or her Convener to identify two additional faculty members to serve as Faculty Representatives. Students should identify all of their Faculty Representatives no later than the **end of the semester before they have enrolled for Portfolio credits**. Faculty Representatives must also be members of the English Department's Faculty.

The student should draft a research and revision plan, including a research agenda (such as an annotated bibliography or source list) in the semester prior to the semester they are enrolled in Portfolio credits.

The student should expect to submit the completed Portfolio one week prior to the Portfolio Review so as to provide the Committee due time to read and reflect on the Portfolio.

Working with his or her Convener, the student should then make every effort to schedule a Portfolio review date *during the semester in which they are enrolled in Portfolio credits*. The student should schedule their Portfolio review to take place **no later than finals week of the semester in which they are enrolled for Portfolio credits**. If the student is unable to schedule the review during the semester in which they are enrolled in Portfolio credits, the student will take an Incomplete in the course. The Incomplete grade will be changed once the student has successfully passed her or his Portfolio review.

V. Portfolio Assessment Criteria

- A Portfolio is graded. Kutztown University uses a +/- grading system. An “A” portfolio is considered exceptional. A grade of “B” indicates that a portfolio is acceptable.
- Each project must be *substantially revised*. For instance, a project that started out as a scholarly seminar paper should be ready for presentation at an academic conference or publication in the appropriate field. Whatever form the pieces within the portfolio take, they should aspire to professional quality.
- The voice in the revised scholarly papers should be more authoritative; that is, the student should demonstrate both an understanding and comfort with her/his sources and ability to comfortably “enter the conversation” on the topic under study.
- The student’s writing must demonstrate a *mastery* of research processes and methodologies.
- Each paper should be 15 to 25 pages in length and conform to formatting and discourse conventions appropriate to its field of study (e.g. *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*).
- The reflective essay must demonstrate a critical self-awareness of the most significant moments of the student’s graduate education, especially as those moments are evident in the work included in the Portfolio.
- The student’s writing across all work in the Portfolio must demonstrate some degree of elegance and style.
- The student must demonstrate the ability to successfully discuss and defend his or her Portfolio orally during the Portfolio review.