**PhD Program in English Literature and Cultural Studies**

The Ph.D. Program in English Literature and Culture welcomes students from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines ranging from English and American Literature, Cultural Studies, Philosophy, Communication and Media Studies, History, Art History, Psychology, and Translation Studies, to Political Science and International Relations.

The program is uniquely designed to guide intelligent, motivated students as they develop their interests in literary studies as well as in broader cultural and social issues, and to advance their understanding of interpretative methods, argumentation, and critical thinking.

The fields of literary and cultural studies are interdisciplinary and international, and their focus is on interpreting texts – broadly defined as products of culture – as well as on analyzing the concepts and methods that affect and inform interpretation. This focus is part of the department’s broader educational mission, which is not simply to pass on existing forms of knowledge, but to question how these are produced and used, with a view to generating new forms of knowledge and modes of understanding.

The Ph.D. program is thus based on literature, but with diverse theoretical, philosophical, cultural studies and interdisciplinary components; these are continually modified, as critical frames of reference are constantly developing and changing. The program provides depth as well as breadth of engagement, as the courses offered reflect the research interests of the faculty – which are focused primarily in the areas of 19th, 20th and 21st-century literary, cultural and theoretical studies – in relation to the most contemporary, interdisciplinary approaches to critical thinking and analysis.

The program engages students in three areas:

**a) Literature**

The term “literature” has traditionally been limited to cultural products defined as poetry, fiction and drama; however, over the last century, developments in literary theory and criticism have questioned these categories and their limitations – such as distinctions made between poetry and song, or drama, performance and cinematic adaptation, or fiction and non-fiction, or speech and writing. As a result, today the study of *literature* is understood much more broadly as the study of *texts,* including conceptual, written, auditory, visual, cinematic, gestural and other forms of expression which are open to interpretation through a wide, interdisciplinary range of approaches and techniques. A work of literature, in short, cannot be isolated from wider cultural contexts and intertextual frames of reference.

**b) Cultural Studies**

The study of literature is thus interwoven on many levels with “cultural studies.” This research area has evolved since the 1950s and 1960s to become a broad, interdisciplinary exploration of the social and political contexts in which knowledge, ideologies, and power relations operate. It therefore covers a vast range of subjects and a variety of theoretical perspectives. In general, it refers to the critical analysis of the ideological frames and applications of social constructs and practices – belief systems, structures, rituals, customs, histories, etc. – as they are seen, heard, or otherwise experienced and encoded in the languages of societal products (art, literature, film, media, etc.) and activities (from economics to politics to technology).

**c) Theory and Criticism**

The program’s third area of focus has to do with the approaches and frames of references that are engaged in literary and cultural studies. In a contemporary sense, “criticism” describes the practice of interpreting and analyzing texts, broadly defined, and the word “theory” is used to refer to two things: on the one hand, to the paradigms and frames of reference that come into play in the processes of reading, interpreting, and constructing meaning; and on the other hand, to methodological reflection, or questioning the underlying philosophical assumptions, validity, usefulness, limitations and implications of these paradigms and frames of reference. This self-conscious questioning of one’s own frames of reference and approaches to interpretation is fundamental to critical thinking and analysis, and is therefore an integral part of the program.