

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR MASTER OF STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND MODERN LANGUAGES

1. Awarding institution/body	University of Oxford
2. Teaching institution	University of Oxford
3. Programme accredited by	n/a
4. Final award	Master of Studies (M.St.)
5. Programme	Medieval and Modern Languages
6. UCAS code	as appropriate
7. Relevant subject benchmark statement	as appropriate
8. Date of programme specification	October 2008

9. Educational aims of the programme

The M.St. is a one-year degree, assessed by course work and dissertation. It is more advanced and more independent than undergraduate study and more tightly structured and supervised than doctoral research. The course enables candidates to read widely, to acquire research skills, to develop their own research interest, and to pursue it in a dissertation. Candidates each have a supervisor, who is a specialist in their chosen field of study, and who advises on relevant lectures and seminars, normally supervises the dissertation, and may teach one of the Special Subjects. Progression from the Special Subjects to the dissertation should enable candidates to discover and define their own interests and to explore them with increasing independence. The seminars on Methods of Criticism or Scholarship open up a range of critical perspectives to equip candidates with research skills for further study. The dissertation allows candidates to write a substantial piece of original scholarly work that benefits from the new perspectives opened up by the Methods seminars. Candidates can also shape the M.St. course to suit their own interests by devising their own Special Subject.

The M.St. provides a self-contained qualification that can lead on to further study but is also valuable in its own right. This degree is suitable for candidates who are applying for a one-year grant from the AHRC and expect later to apply for a three-year grant for the D.Phil., but also for those who want to study in Oxford only for a year before continuing their studies elsewhere or going on to a non-academic career.

10. Programme outcomes

A. Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of:

Two specialist areas of literary/cultural history with the associated conceptual framework and methodological and critical approaches; the development and presentation of complex academic argument in the form of essays (5,000 – 7,000 words) and later a dissertation (10,000 – 12,000 words).

Related teaching/learning methods and strategies

Special Subjects are taught in seminars, or in some cases in individual tutorial-type meetings. Literary theory and methods of scholarship are taught by a combination of lectures, classes, and seminars at which students must give an oral presentation. The dissertation is a piece of independent work, done under the guidance of a supervisor, which develops an interest arising typically out of work for the Special Subject, in the light of the theoretical and methodical work done earlier in the course.

Assessment

There is no written examination. Candidates submit a portfolio of essays for their Special Subject (maximum word length 5,000 – 7,000 words), a method essay of 5,000 – 7,000 words and a dissertation of 10,000 – 12,000 words. The dissertation mark always counts, but only the best two of the remaining three marks will be used for the final assessment. There is also a short oral examination (viva voce) at which candidates can clarify their written work and this can have the effect of raising the dissertation mark. Work is sampled, and doubtful cases adjudicated, by an External Examiner.

B. Skills and other attributes

Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills during the course:

I. Intellectual skills

We seek to teach students:

to think and write clearly, coherently, and precisely;

to argue critically and rigorously, to question received opinions, and to assess critically other people's arguments;

to acquire subtlety and sophistication in understanding and applying various theoretical approaches to literature;

to acquire a range of scholarly methods appropriate to their particular interests;

to work independently, but also to sharpen their ideas by constructive discussion with fellow-students and academic staff;

to improve continually their knowledge of the relevant foreign language, and where appropriate to write in the target language;

to present material orally with clarity and concision, and to lead a discussion on it;

to produce written work that corresponds in substance and presentation to high academic standards.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

These skills are learnt through writing essays which are discussed in detail with supervisors; by oral presentations at seminars, followed by extensive discussion; and by writing, under the guidance of a supervisor, a dissertation in which a very high standard both of argument and presentation is expected. Attendance at graduate seminars, in addition to those which form an integral part of the course, is also strongly encouraged.

Assessment:

These skills are assessed informally by the supervisors who read and discuss the essays and monitor the candidates' progress, and formally by examiners who evaluate all submitted work.

II. *Practical skills*

Candidates are required to write clearly to a high standard of scholarly presentation. They are also expected to become proficient in using the Internet to access bibliographies and other scholarly materials. Those who choose specific options such as palaeography and textual criticism or history of the book learn the appropriate techniques of manuscript and bibliographical description and analysis.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Assessment

III. *Transferable skills*

Students will acquire the ability:

- to communicate effectively, both in speech and writing;
- to manage time and work to short deadlines;
- to write clearly, coherently, and fluently, and to present an elaborate argument lucidly;
- to work independently;
- to be self-critical, as well as critical of received opinions;
- to participate intelligently and constructively in discussion;
- to give oral presentations, with visual aids as appropriate, and to lead discussions;
- to deepen their knowledge of the foreign language in which their materials are written.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Essays, oral presentations, seminar discussions, and the writing of a dissertation are the means by which these skills are imparted and polished.

Assessment:

11. Programme Structures and Features

Learning

As a one-year course, the M.St. is intensive and also progressive. The candidates move from seminar-based teaching (and in many cases tutorials) in the first two terms, to the independent planning and writing of a dissertation (under the guidance of a supervisor). It is expected that there will be a more or less sharp learning curve together with a growth in intellectual independence and confidence.

Students have to do four elements: two Special Subjects (to be chosen from the published list, or arranged independently), one Method option, and the compulsory dissertation.

The **Special Subjects** in the first two terms may be chosen from a list published in the Faculty's graduate handbook, or devised by the candidate, in discussion with the supervisor, in order to reflect the candidate's own interests. Candidates are encouraged to contact their assigned supervisors before the course begins.

Also in the first term, candidates choose a **theoretical/methodological option** from the following:

- Methods of Criticism and Theory of Literature;
- Methods of Criticism and History of Ideas in Germany from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries;
- Methods of Scholarship: Palaeography and Textual Criticism;
- Methods of Scholarship: History of the Book;
- Essay on Method

All candidates prepare a **dissertation** of 10,000-12,000 words (including footnotes, but excluding bibliography), which must be submitted in the sixth week of the third term of study. The subject of the dissertation will normally be related to the Special Subject, or to the theoretical or methodological option. It allows the candidate to use and extend the reading done for the Special Subject, to apply the theoretical reflections or methodological approaches acquired in the second term, and to undertake a piece of research that may lead on to doctoral work.

Classes And Seminars

In addition to the seminars which are an integral part of the M.St., there is a range of seminars in each language taught at Oxford. Some of these seminars are specifically for graduates, and are generally conducted by the statutory professor in the language; others bring graduates and academic staff together to hear and deliver papers, sometimes from distinguished visiting speakers.

Learning Year 1 (the M.St. is a one-year course)

Subjects

The theoretical/methodological options are listed under 'learning', above. The many Special Subjects are listed in the graduate handbook, which is available in print and online.

Assessment

Special Subjects are assessed by those who teach them, on the basis of a submitted portfolio of essays. The marks are then moderated by the examiners. The theoretical/methodological options assessed by those who teach it. The dissertation is marked by two examiners, and the subsequent compulsory viva can have the effect of raising the mark in the case of a particularly strong performance. The dissertation mark always counts, but only the best two of the remaining three marks will be used for the final assessment. Work is sampled, and doubtful cases adjudicated by an External Examiner.

Year 2

Subjects

Assessment

Year 3

Subjects

Assessment

Year 4

Subject

Assessment

12. Support for Students and their learning

Supervisor. Each student is assigned a supervisor before beginning the course, and is encouraged to contact the supervisor informally before the course begins in order to discuss options, funding possibilities, and other concerns. The supervisor normally teaches the student for one of the Special Subjects (though for one or more tutorials on very specialized topics the student may be sent to a colleague), supervises the dissertation, and may advise on the presentation of the essay on the theoretical/methodological option. The supervisor submits an online report on the student's progress each term.

Faculty Adviser. Each student is assigned a Faculty adviser who works in the same language and has related research interests. The student thus gets to know another member of staff with whom to discuss research and who can advise on academic or pastoral problems and mediate on the rare occasions when a conflict arises between student and supervisor.

College Adviser. The student's college appoints a College adviser, not necessarily in the same subject area, who primarily helps with non-academic and pastoral problems. In addition each college has a number of officers responsible for student welfare, notably the Tutor for Graduates and the Dean.

Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). The Director meets all new graduates at the beginning of the academic year and is available thereafter to advise them on any difficulties or uncertainties that arise during their course.

Graduate Studies Administrator (GSA). This official has an office in the Faculty and is available to answer minor queries from graduates and to receive the written work that they have to submit. The GSA can also provide information about scholarships, grants, prizes, and funding opportunities.

Course information. Written information about the course is provided in the Modern Languages Graduate Handbook and in the *Examination Regulations*. The handbook is updated each year and is also available on the Faculty website.

Libraries. Graduates have full access to the Taylorian Library, which is the most fully stocked Modern Languages library in this country apart from the British Library. They can enter the stacks and borrow books for a limited period. They may also use all other Oxford libraries, including the Bodleian, as well as the library of their college.

Travel Grants. The Faculty has limited funds to provide travel grants for research purposes. These grants do not normally exceed £300.

Languages. Opportunities to learn additional languages are available at the University's Language Centre.

Careers Service. The University Careers Service is very active in advising those who do not wish to continue in academic work.

Computing. There is a small computer room for Modern Languages students in 47 Wellington Square. It contains 2 modern IBM-compatible PCs connected to a laser printer for high-quality printing. All the computers are connected to the University network for services such as e-mail. Each computer also has a flat bed scanner with Optical Character Recognition software for input of textual and graphic materials. OUCS run regular IT courses which students are encouraged to attend.

Electronic Resources. Oxford University subscribes to a large number of electronic databases which are available through OXLIP, the Oxford Libraries Information Platform.

Other Skills Training. The Faculty is a member of the IGRS research skills training programme, which offers a wide range of training on its website and through seminars organized by the various participating institutions. The Faculty and the Humanities Division organize a number of training sessions during the year, with the help of OUCS and the Learning Institute.

13. Criteria for Admission

Candidates in Modern Languages are expected to have a first-class degree or a good upper-second-class degree (marks of 65 and above). When applying applicants are asked to submit two pieces of work demonstrating their potential for scholarship and independent thought. All candidates from the UK are asked to come for interview. Admissions are conducted in the larger languages by a small panel in which a range of scholarly interests are represented. Every effort is made to deal with applications promptly so that successful applications may be sent on to the candidates' colleges of first choice.

14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of learning

Graduates are asked to submit a self-assessment report each term via GSS (online reporting system), describing their academic work and related activities, and assessing their own progress.

At the end of each academic year the Director of Graduate Studies compiles a detailed report on the M.St. and M.Phil. assessment process. Particular weight is attached to the report submitted by the External Examiner, which is sent first to the Vice-Chancellor and is later considered by the Faculty's Graduate Studies Committee and by the Faculty Board, and changes are made to the course in accordance with the External Examiner's recommendations. The ultimate authority within the University is the Educational Policy and Standards Committee.

15. Regulation of assessment

Final Examination

Assessment is weighted towards the dissertation, which counts double. The pass mark is an overall average of 60. An average of 70 is required for a Distinction.

Marking Scale

>70	Class I	A very good answer that is structured, innovative and comprehensive
60-69	Class II(i)	A good answer that includes major points and their significance
50-59	Class II(ii)	A less than satisfactory answer that includes some major points
40-49	Class III	A weak answer that omits several major points
30-39	Pass	A very poor answer that fails to address considerable areas of the question
<29	Fail	Totally inadequate

16. Indicators of quality and standards

Between 60 and 70% of students achieve a Distinction at the end of the year. The External Examiner reported in 2008 that "the academic standards set for the award elements were fully appropriate for the qualification", and commented that "amongst the higher levels of distinction, there was some extremely impressive work in which suitability for doctoral work, and for excellent scholarly publication, was indubitably established". All those who teach on the course belong to units rated 5* or 5 in the 2001 RAE.