

African American Studies Graduate Program Advising Guidelines

The Department of African American Studies offers a Combined PhD in African American Studies and fourteen departments and programs, namely: American Studies, Anthropology, English, Film and Media Studies, French, History, History of Art, Music, Political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, Sociology, Spanish and Portuguese, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. As a combined degree program, advising in African American Studies requires faculty mentors to assist graduate students in navigating the distinct yet complimentary requirements of African American Studies and the partner program.

During the opening weeks of the first term of coursework, the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) assigns each graduate student a primary advisor who has already committed to serve in this capacity during the admission process. Any ladder faculty of African American Studies may serve as primary advisor to a PhD student; however, untenured faculty members must co-advise with a tenured faculty member in African American Studies, or in the student's partner department. During coursework (the first two years of the program) graduate students will consult with their primary advisor and the DGS about course selection and navigating the requirements of the student's two programs. Meetings should take place between student and primary advisor at the beginning of each term, and between the student and the DGS at the beginning of each academic year; additional meetings may also take place as needed, at the request of the graduate student, the advisor, or the DGS.

Two years of coursework is not only about developing knowledge but is also designed to allow students to take courses with various faculty members and thereby assemble the committees of faculty who will guide the student through qualifying exams, and through the conceptualization and writing of the dissertation. Refining the focus of dissertation research, and the selection of these committees unfolds organically during the years of coursework; selection is based on many considerations, including shared research interests, trust, and rapport. Often it is the same team of faculty members leading a graduate student through exams and the dissertation, but this is not always the case, and it is not required. These committees generally consist of three to four Yale faculty members, including the dissertation advisor(s).

Graduate students and primary advisors may also discover during the years of coursework that a different configuration of student and advisor(s) may work better. In this case, in consultation with the DGS, the student will be assigned a different primary advisor. Such flexibility is essential due to the importance of this relationship. In becoming a primary advisor, a faculty member agrees to supervise the dissertation committee, to participate in qualifying exams, to meet with the student on a regular basis, to provide oral and written feedback on written work, as well as practical guidance on setting writing goals, time management, teaching, career planning, and professional placement. The advisor also commits to writing thorough letters of reference for all grant or fellowship applications, and eventually job applications. The advisor and student communicate regularly during the writing of the dissertation, including during the advisor's sabbatical or research leaves.

During the third year, the DGS or other faculty member of African American Studies will offer the Prospectus Seminar. All third-year graduate students are required to take this year-long course, in which they gather regularly with their cohort from the several combined programs and develop their dissertation prospectii together. The faculty member who teaches this seminar will develop a syllabus that structures this process, but the primary advisors of third-year students will also meet regularly with advisees to discuss the development of the prospectus, and to offer written feedback on drafts of the prospectus. At the end of the academic year, each graduate student will

make an oral presentation of their prospectus to the African American Studies faculty for their consideration, questions, and feedback.

Graduate students will also complete their qualifying exams during their third year. These exams follow the rubric of the student's partner department. The student's primary advisor(s) will participate in both the preparation for qualifying exams and in the performance of said exams.

After advancement to candidacy graduate students are now PhD candidates. About a year after the oral presentation of the prospectus, student and dissertation committee will hold a First Chapter Colloquium. The committee offers feedback, advice, and recommendations on this first piece of writing, which may be any chapter of the dissertation. This colloquium is designed not only to consider this first piece of writing, but also to hold a conversation about the direction in which the dissertation is going. How has it changed? What research needs to be done? What does the chapter structure look like now, after a year of work?

The fourth, fifth, and sixth years of the PhD program are dedicated to the research and writing of the dissertation. Members of dissertation committees will confer with the dissertation advisor and other committee members and will meet with students at least once a year to provide oral and written feedback on materials shared, and to discuss progress and career plans. The advisor(s) should meet with the PhD candidate three to four times a year. When the student has completed between two-thirds and three-quarters of the dissertation, the dissertation committee will again convene to discuss progress and provide guidance for finishing the dissertation; normally such a meeting would transpire during the student's fifth year in the program. Both the student and faculty advisors are responsible for maintaining contact, and it can be helpful to schedule regular times to communicate about the progress of the work. It is a good practice to share materials well in advance, and to give plenty of notice when letters of recommendation are needed.

As candidates approach the completion of the dissertation, they should be in regular contact with their advisor(s) about the date of completion and about future career plans. After obtaining approval of the dissertation committee, PhD candidates will notify the DGS and Graduate Registrar of their intention to file the dissertation for the degree, and provide a full draft of the dissertation to their advisor and committee for approval. The due date for the final submission of the dissertation is set by the Graduate Registrar in accordance with the policies of the Graduate School. Students should communicate with their advisor and committee members to agree in advance upon a schedule that provides adequate time for them to read and approve the dissertation before the student submits it to the Yale Dissertation Office.