

# LIBERAL STUDIES, MASTER OF ARTS

The distinctive feature of the 30-credit Master of Arts (M.A.) in Liberal Studies is that students have the freedom to design a highly individualized, interdisciplinary program in their own focused area of interest. Students can pursue an intellectual or creative interest and develop theoretical understandings by approaching that interest from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The disciplines must be drawn primarily from the liberal arts (e.g., the humanities, social sciences and/or natural sciences).

Every M.A. in Liberal Studies degree program is unique. Nonetheless, there are some common approaches to designing programs.

- *The Creative Approach* – Students may have a large project in mind and already have some professional experience in a particular creative field. Students may have an idea for a fiction or nonfiction book, or an artistic work that can be produced, performed or exhibited. This program can help students achieve their goal. Students will co-design a set of relevant electives with the guidance of faculty who will help you actualize your culminating creative project. Examples of past projects include a historical fiction novella, exhibit of original works of visual art, and a stage script with performance of a one-act play.
- *The Thematic Approach* – Students may have a topic of special interest. Students may be interested in the lives of college students, Elizabethan England, the study of leisure or the family in contemporary society. Each of the electives can address a different aspect of the theme. For example, students can take electives on the psychology, history, art, biology, philosophy or politics of their theme. The final project for the program can be an in-depth look at some aspect of the theme. Students may not have a definite idea for a final project when they begin the program, but it can emerge as electives are completed.
- *The Professional Approach* – This program is fundamentally liberal and interdisciplinary in nature, rather than professional and applied. Yet some students find that liberal studies can meet their professional needs. There are many graduate programs that will help develop professional skills (e.g., M.Ed., M.B.A., M.S.W.). The M.A. in Liberal Studies is different; it allows you to view a field from a broad social and historical perspective, to explore alternative perspectives, and to draw upon a variety of disciplines to enrich professional practice. Often a final project will be of an applied nature: a practicum on commercial theater, development of an online program or a plan for a holistic health center, to give some examples.

## Program Delivery and Tuition Rate

This master's program is delivered through online courses and synchronous, virtual/online meetings, known as residencies, which are attached to specific courses and are a fundamental part of the program. The program is billed at the non-MBA rate.

Prior to graduation, M.A. Liberal Studies students may be considered for the National Honors Society of the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs (<http://www.aglsp.org/national-honor-society/>). Contact the Liberal Studies program coordinator or advisor for more information.

## Admission

Admission to this program is selective. This program enrolls new students in the fall and spring terms. Applicants should possess a bachelor's degree.

## Application

Please see the Graduate Admissions (<http://catalog.esc.edu/graduate/admission/>) pages of this catalog for a complete listing of materials required to complete a graduate application.

## Program Curriculum

The M.A. in Liberal Studies program offers four core courses (12 credits), five electives (15 credits), and one capstone (3 credits).

Code	Title	Credits
<i>FOUNDATION AND CORE COURSES</i>		
LACS 6005	Foundations of Liberal Studies	3
LACS 6010	Designing your Degree: Interdisciplinary Studies	3
LACS 6015	Exploring your Field: The Academic Literature Review	3
Models of Critical Inquiry (choose one):		3
LACS 6020	Models of Critical Inquiry: Art Aesthetics & the Body	
LACS 6025	Models of Critical Inquiry: Landscapes of Learning	
LACS 6027	Models of Critical Inquiry: How We Know	
LACS 6030	Models of Critical Inquiry: Relationships to the Past - History & Culture	
LACS 6035	Models of Critical Inquiry: Science & Society	
<i>ELECTIVE COURSES (5)</i>		15
<i>CAPSTONE</i>		
LACS 7025	Capstone Project	3
<b>Total Credits</b>		<b>30</b>

## Enrollment Sequence

The typical enrollment sequence below is based on a fall enrollment on a part-time schedule. Due to the individualized nature of the degree, it is very important that students work with their advisors to develop their degree plans.

Code	Title	Credits
<b>TERM 1</b>		
LACS 6005	Foundations of Liberal Studies <sup>1</sup>	3
<i>Choose one of the following five "Models" courses: <sup>1</sup></i>		3
LACS 6025	Models of Critical Inquiry: Landscapes of Learning	
LACS 6027	Models of Critical Inquiry: How We Know	
LACS 6030	Models of Critical Inquiry: Relationships to the Past - History & Culture	
LACS 6020	Models of Critical Inquiry: Art Aesthetics & the Body	
LACS 6035	Models of Critical Inquiry: Science & Society	
<b>TERM 2</b>		
LACS 6010	Designing your Degree: Interdisciplinary Studies <sup>1</sup>	3
LACS 6015	Exploring your Field: The Academic Literature Review	3
<b>TERM 3</b>		
Elective 1		3

Elective 2	3
<b>TERM 4</b>	
Elective 3	3
Elective 4	3
<b>TERM 5</b>	
Elective 5	3
LACS 7025	Capstone Project
<b>Total Credits</b>	<b>30</b>

<sup>1</sup> Virtual Residency-based courses

## Electives

Students design and/or select their electives through a combination of individualized electives, scheduled electives, transfer credit or cross registration.

*Individualized electives* are those in which students work one-to-one with a faculty member in their field. These electives are designed during the process of planning the degree program in Perspectives on Interdisciplinary Study and focus on a specific area of inquiry. Students interact regularly with a course instructor through face-to-face meetings, the phone and/or email. These electives are an opportunity to delve deeply into a specific topic, to work closely with a faculty member, and to develop habits of close reading and in-depth analysis.

*Scheduled electives* are offered each semester primarily in online formats. Typically, scheduled electives are structured around a broad theme: creativity, concepts of time and space, the role of culture, gender and sexuality, multiculturalism, social change. Scheduled electives begin with shared readings and assignments. Each student then designs an individual project in a focused area relevant both to the general theme and the student's degree program.

Up to 9 *transfer credits* from previous graduate work can be included in the degree program. These credits must be directly relevant to the student's degree program. (Please see the Transfer Credit Policy located elsewhere in this catalog.)

Students are permitted to *cross register* for courses from another graduate program. This allows students to draw on local academic networks, engage with a local scholarly community, and access local facilities. These opportunities are often particularly important for the technical aspects of a student's degree program such as video production, photographic technique or lab science. (See the Cross Registration Policy located in the Policies and Procedures section of this catalog.)

## Degree Program Planning

Since the nature of the M.A. in Liberal Studies program is both interdisciplinary and individualized, students will be given an opportunity to think deeply about how to design a program of study in their own focused area of interest. In the second term of the program, students will engage with their peers, advisor and Perspectives on Interdisciplinary Study instructor as they craft a unique sequence of electives that serve as a scaffold for anticipated culminating final project. Students have the freedom to design all of their electives or choose to mix in some existing scheduled electives (or certificate sequences).

Their academic advisor and Designing Your Degree: Interdisciplinary Study course instructor will have suggestions about the possible shape

of the program, and useful research activities students may want to undertake as they explore and develop their degree program plan. By the end of this second-term course, students will have created a detailed degree program plan (with course titles, descriptions and sample readings), and a rationale essay in which they explain how the program is designed to reflect an interdisciplinary plan of study, and how it prepares students to complete an anticipated culminating final project.

## Degree Program Plan Content Requirements

In making the final selection of the courses that will comprise their degree program, students must keep in mind a number of criteria set by the School for Graduate Studies for the M.A. in Liberal Studies program. In some cases, the criteria are rather broad and in other cases they are quite specific, but all are criteria upon which the degree program is ultimately judged. Thus, when students have completed a final version of their degree program, they must make sure it meets the following criteria.

- It must be interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary.
- It must be focused in the liberal arts and sciences.
- It must embody breadth and depth.
- It must be coherent.
- At least one proposed course must deal with the broad historical or theoretical background of your field of interest.
- It must contain no more than 9 credits of professional courses.
- It may include no more than 9 credits in a single discipline.
- It may include up to 9 credits of transfer coursework. (Please see the Transfer Credit Policy located elsewhere in this catalog.)
- It may contain no more than 15 credits of transfer and cross-registered credit combined. (Please see the Cross-registration Procedure located elsewhere in this catalog.)
- It should show that the proposed courses together represent a planned progression toward a final project.
- It should be capped by a 3 credit final project that is a significant piece of research in a focused topic within the liberal arts or a creative work of art.

If students are considering doctoral study, they should investigate the requirements of programs that interest them so that they can incorporate the requirements into the M.A. in Liberal Studies degree.

*Note: Students may not enroll for more than 21 credits without an approved degree program in place.*

## Rationale Essay and Literature Review

Designing Your Degree: Interdisciplinary Study provides students with structure and support to design an individualized degree program and rationale essay. Typically taken before or concurrently, students take a study in which they conduct deep research on an aspect of their topic of interest and complete a literature review in Exploring Your Field: The Academic Literature Review. The process and the document complement the design activities in Designing Your Degree: Interdisciplinary Study. The final written work from both studies make up the portfolio of materials that are reviewed by a Degree Program Plan committee of faculty upon completion.

It is important to note that the rationale essay should reflect a level of writing and research that is appropriate to graduate-level study. In addition to being well written, the rationale essay should meet the following objectives.

- It must set a comprehensive framework for the degree program. What is the focus of the area of study? What is its context? Why is it important?
- It should explain the interdisciplinary nature of the program and show how these various courses fit together as an integrative whole.
- It should show where and how the historical and theoretical dimensions of the field of study are incorporated into the program.
- It should contain the reflections upon the contribution of the four required courses to the total degree program.
- It is expected to contain a specific discussion of the remaining courses, showing how they relate to one another, make sense in relation to the selected field of study, and prepare the student for their final project. This discussion is required for courses that may have transferred from other institutions as well as for those proposed to cross register for or enroll in at the college. Students should provide an explicit justification for transferring in, or cross registering for, courses at other institutions.
- The degree program and rationale must be accompanied by a literature review of one topic of central importance to your degree.
- Students should follow appropriate academic conventions in bibliography, documentation and citations.
- the committee approves the general design of the program but requires revisions to the rationale essay and/or the literature review; or
- the committee does not approve the program design and suggests revisions in the program and/or rationale essay.

Students will be notified, in writing, of the committee's decision within two weeks of their meeting.

## Changing a Degree Program

If students want to make changes in their degree program after it has been formally approved, students must immediately consult with their academic advisor. After agreement upon the proposed changes, students should prepare a short letter explaining the changes and send it to their academic advisor for their approval and signature. Then the revised degree program will go through a similar process as with the original program: it is sent to the chair of liberal studies, who then forwards it to the Liberal Studies Degree Program Review Committee, which makes the final determination as to whether or not it should be approved. In practice, minor changes are easy to make. To ensure a prompt response, students should provide a brief and clear description of what they want to change and why. If students are making major changes in your program, however, they must submit a more detailed explanation of the proposed changes. Students may even be asked to rewrite the degree program plan and rationale essay and to submit it again for review and approval.

## Degree Plan Mechanics Requirements

- it must include a cover page, list all course titles and number of credits for the degree. The cover page is available through the Graduate Student Center found on the MySUNYEmpire (<https://my.sunyempire.edu>) portal;
- it must include a summary description of the purpose and intended content of each course including the core courses in the program, including several examples of relevant bibliography, fully cited;
- it must contain no more than 9 credits of professional or applied courses;
- it may include no more than 9 credits in a single discipline;
- it may include up to 9 credits of transfer coursework. (Please see the Transfer Credit Policy located elsewhere in this catalog.); and
- it may contain no more than 15 credits of transfer and cross-registered credit combined. (Please see the Cross Registration Policy located elsewhere in this catalog.)

## Submitting the Degree Program, Rationale Essay and Literature Review

The final degree program plan must be electronically submitted on a degree program form available from the School for Graduate Studies Student Portal on MySUNYEmpire (<https://my.sunyempire.edu>) portal, signed by the academic advisor and submitted to the chair of liberal studies. Once the chair has reviewed the materials, they will be forwarded to the members of the Liberal Studies Degree Program Review Committee. This committee, comprised of members of the graduate faculty, convenes regularly to review proposed degree program materials (detailed degree plan, rationale essay and literature review). Each program and rationale essay is carefully considered and evaluated against the program and rationale criteria listed earlier. Several outcomes of a review are possible:

- the committee approves the program and rationale as is;
- the committee needs additional information before it can approve the program;
- the committee recommends changes that will not affect the basic design of the program;

## Research Methods

The research methods needed to successfully complete electives and write the final project will depend very much on the topic and on the various disciplines used. There are a number of scheduled electives that focus on a variety of research methods in the humanities and the social sciences. Whether the student includes one of these scheduled electives in the degree program or works with their academic advisor to create an individualized research elective, this study should be completed one or more terms before the final term in which the final project is completed. **The final project proposal, which should be completed and approved a semester before registering for the final project,** is one of the outcomes of such an elective.

## Final Project Guidelines

No matter the approach a student takes to designing their M.A. in Liberal Studies program, a final project is required as the culminating activity of the degree. Because of the individualized nature of the degree, the sequencing and approval process for the design of the final project has been developed into a set of guidelines for students to follow with the support of their academic advisor. The M.A. in Liberal Studies Final Project Guidelines have been published for student reference in the online Graduate Student Center section of the MySUNYEmpire (<https://my.sunyempire.edu>) portal. It is recommended that students familiarize themselves with the guidance provided in this document early on, so that a successful, individualized, degree plan can be developed and followed with the support of their advisor.

**Upon successful completion of the program, students should demonstrate adequate skills of analysis, critical thinking and/or application of concepts related to each of the following program learning goals:**

- Think critically and communicate ideas clearly to individuals and groups;
- Demonstrate skills of close/critical reading of academic literature across appropriate disciplines;

- Locate and utilize relevant academic literature;
- Craft coherent academic arguments, written in clear and well supported prose;
- Use accepted academic formatting styles properly and consistently;
- Demonstrate respect for principles of academic honesty;
- Conceptualize and use disciplinary and interdisciplinary frameworks appropriately;
- Effectively use different methodological approaches related to one's own stated interest/problem/issue/project;
- Apply concepts of paradigms and paradigm shifts:
- Identify and evaluate theory(ies) relevant to own scholarly inquiry and work;
- Demonstrate the ability to make and support a substantive knowledge claim in one's field;
- Focus and clarify own scholarly aims for a program of study;
- Craft a review of literature and identify your potential contribution to the scholarly conversation;
- Identify key thinkers, debates and theoretical frames in one's field;
- Position and articulate one's own scholarly or creative voice clearly within the broader intellectual discourse;
- Demonstrate competency in all methods used for one's project, including ethical procedures, if required; and
- Demonstrate mastery of the topic of inquiry or creative medium of one's final project.