Department of French
Columbia University
2026-27

MAO (MA only) Student Handbook[1]
(rev. 10/30/2026)

[1] Adapted from the Graduate Handbook of the Department of Classics

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I. PRACTICALITIES

1. Welcome

Welcome (back) to the Department of French! If you have any suggestions to make on future iterations of this handbook, please contact the DGS.

This handbook should be read in conjunction with GSAS' Policy Handbook.

2. Faculty Officers

Madeleine Dobie, Department Chair
mld2027@columbia.edu

Madeleine Dobie, Director of Graduate Studies
mld2027@columbia.edu

Madeleine Dobie, Graduate Placement Officer
mld2027@columbia.edu

Pascale Hubert-Leibler, Director of Graduate Student Teaching
ph2028@columbia.edu

For profiles of all faculty in the Department, see https://french.columbia.edu/faculty.

3. Staff

Nicole Meily
Director of Academic Administration and Finance (DAAF)
nam2214@columbia.edu
515 Philosophy Hall
Areas of responsibility: general administrative and financial planning/management including departmental hiring, course scheduling/administration, liaising with ISSO

Troy Freeman-Cheng
Manager of Academic Operations
tf2596@columbia.edu
708 Philosophy Hall
Areas of responsibility: financial transactions, including reimbursements.

Haley Donovan
Academic Programs and Curriculum Coordinator
hmd2151@columbia.edu
515 Philosophy Hall
Areas of responsibility: conference room reservations, communications (website and email); exam, prospectus and dissertation defense scheduling; degree conferral processing; student academic job dossier maintenance.

Meritza Moss
Financial Assistant
mm2023@columbia.edu
520 Philosophy Hall
Areas of responsibility: financial transactions including reimbursements.

4. Main French Office and Office Hours

The main French office is located in Philosophy Hall, Rooms 514-521. The Department of French's normal operating hours are 9:00am-5:00pm, Monday-Friday. For faculty office hours, see https://french.columbia.edu/content/office-hours-fall-2026

All graduate students are welcome to request a key to the main French office, which is locked outside of business hours. Please contact Benita Dace or Meritza Moss to request a key, which you should return upon graduation. If you enter the office outside of normal operating hours, please lock the door upon your exit.

You will also have swipe access to Philosophy Hall during business hours. If you would like to request swipe access to the building after hours and on weekends, please contact Julie Stevens, who will in turn contact Public Safety. These requests can take a few weeks to process and must be made every semester.

5. IDs

Information about obtaining an ID card can be found here: https://ssc.columbia.edu/obtain-id-card Students may pick up validation stickers from the Student Service Center (210 Kent) or the ID center (210 Kent) for the valid semester.

The Passport to Museums program grants free access to participating museums to Columbia students who present a University ID card with a valid term enrollment sticker. See https://artsinitiative.columbia.edu/museums/

6. Course Registration and Vergil

Vergil is your multi-purpose tool for:

- checking your registration appointment times;
- registering for your courses;
- viewing your bill;
- updating your address;
- checking for holds that may be blocking your registration;
- requesting transcripts.

7. Email and Website

The Department will send all communications to your Columbia UNI email account; please check it regularly (or set up email forwarding). If you haven't done so already, please activate your UNI

here: https://cuit.columbia.edu/cuit/manage-myuni

It is possible to set up an alias for your email address which will allow you to create an email address that is easier for other people to remember (e.g., eliza.zingesser@columbia.edu instead of ez2135@columbia.edu). To set up an alias, see this site.

The Department of French regularly updates its website with profiles of faculty and graduate students, as well as news about faculty and student accomplishments. If you have information to update or news to share, please send it to Benita Dace.

8. Mail, Mailboxes, and Lockers

Graduate students in French are issued a mailbox in 515 Philosophy. Mail should be addressed as follows:

Name
515 Philosophy Hall, MC 4902
1150 Amsterdam Ave.
New York, NY 10027

Lockers are also available to graduate students in the Department. Students must empty their locker at the end of each semester for cleaning. No food may be kept in the lockers. See Benita Dace for your locker assignment. You must supply your own lock and provide the Department with the code in case of emergencies.

9. Financial Support for Conference Participation

Students are encouraged to give papers at conferences and to apply for funding to assist with the associated costs (travel, lodging, registration fees). The Department will fund up to $600 for M.A.O. students (total, for the duration of the program).

GSAS will match departmental funding up to $400 through the GSAS Conference Matching Travel Fund. Note that there is a maximum of one academic award per year, and a maximum of two awards during a student's enrollment at Columbia. Consequently, you should save matching funds for expensive conferences.

To apply for funding, please contact the Director of Graduate Studies with the following:

- Conference description;
- Copy of participation invitation, or program page (NB: if you have not yet heard from the organizers about your invitation to speak, you may still apply for funding, which may be approved conditionally);
- Budget outline;
- Your completed portion of the GSAS Conference Matching Travel Fund application. This is a required step in securing Department funding.

Additionally, students may apply for the Arts and Sciences Graduate Council Student Travel Grant to receive $500 in funding.

10. Letterhead

Students are welcome to use the Department's official letterhead when applying for professional positions. Printed letterhead can be found in the supply closet in Philosophy 515. Electronic letterhead is also available. Please contact Benita Dace, Meritza Moss or Julie Stevens.

11. Printing and Scanning

You are welcome to use the printer/scanner in Philosophy 515 to print teaching- or research-related documents. The IP address can be found next to the machine. Color printers can be found in a few locations on campus, including Room 304 in Butler Library. If you are printing a long document (e.g., a dissertation draft), please avoid peak hours.

12. Glossary of Acronyms and Other Abbreviations

Here are some common acronyms and abbreviations used at Columbia:

AAADS = The Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies" (pronounced "triple A" "D" "S")

A.B.D. = "all but dissertation," i.e., the status acquired after having completed all requirements for the Ph.D. except the dissertation

CC = "Columbia College" or "Contemporary Civilization," depending on the context. Columbia College is the undergraduate college of Columbia University for traditional students. Other undergraduate colleges include Barnard College, General Studies, and the School of Engineering and Applied Science. Contemporary Civilization is the mandatory political philosophy and intellectual history course for second-year students in CC.

Core = the Core Curriculum of Columbia College, which includes Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization, among other classes

CPS = Counseling and Psychological Services

CUIT = Columbia University Information Technology, i.e., the people in charge of the computers in the classrooms in which you will teach

CTL = The Center for Teaching and Learning

DAAF = The Director of Academic Administration and Finance (pronounced "daf"), i.e., in French, Julie Stevens

DGS = Director of Graduate Studies

DUS = Director of Undergraduate

Studies

FGSA = The French Graduate Student Association

HiLi = The M.A. Program in History and Literature offered in Paris (pronounced "he" "lee")

ICLS = The Institute for Comparative Literature and Society

ISSG = The Institute for the Study of Sexuality and Gender (formerly known as "IRWGS," the Institute for Research on Women and Gender Studies")

ISSO = The International Students and Scholars Office, i.e., your go-to site for information about visas

IUDC = The Inter-University Doctoral Consortium (see below)

GS = "General Studies," the undergraduate college of Columbia University for "nontraditional" students or for students in dual-degree programs run by Columbia (e.g., Trinity College Dublin)

GSAS = The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Columbia University

LAIC = Latin American and Iberian Cultures ("lie" "eek")

Lit Hum = "Literature Humanities" (the "hum" pronounced as in the first syllable of "humming"). Literature Humanities is Columbia's mandatory great books survey for first-year students in CC.

Med/Ren = The Medieval and Renaissance Studies program

MESAAS = The Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies (pronounced "me" "sass")

ODS = Office of Disability Services

P/F = Pass/Fail (a modality of grading)

SEAS = "School of Engineering and Applied Science" (pronounced "sees"). One of the undergraduate colleges of Columbia University

SIPA = The School of International and Public Affairs (pronounced "see" "puh")

UNI = the combination of initials and numbers used to identify you at Columbia, also used as the beginning of your email address, i.e., [uni]@columbia.edu (pronounced "you" "knee")

UW = University Writing, one of the mandatory courses in Columbia College's Core Curriculum

II. ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

The Department of French admits students into five graduate degree-granting graduate programs:

- MA in French (New York)
- MA in History and Literature (also known as 'HiLi,' Paris)
- BA/MA in French (New York, Columbia undergraduates only)
- PhD in French (New York)
- PhD in French with a certificate in Comparative Literature (New York)

The MA is a standalone program which can be completed on a part-time or full-time basis. The program is often called "MAO" for "MA Only." This guide concerns the MAO program; PhD students should see the separate guide made for them.

1. MA in French, New York

A. Description

Earned by graduate-level work in French Studies, the MA in French trains students in French and Francophone literature, culture, and history. The program consists of eight graduate seminars (including both required and elective courses), typically completed in one year of coursework, and an MA essay. Excellent or near-native fluency in French is required for admission.

The MA can be pursued on a full-time or part-time basis. Full-time students generally complete coursework in two semesters, write their MA Essay over the summer, and receive the degree in the fall of Y2. No full-time student may take longer than four semesters. Part-time students may complete the degree in up to eight consecutive semesters. Leaves of absence that extend the time limit will only be granted in cases in which a student's other obligations conflict unavoidably with attendance at the University. The time limit may be extended by petition in special circumstances. For more information, see the GSAS website.

Limited financial aid is available to qualifying candidates. See the GSAS website for more information on financing the MA Eligible students should also apply to Columbia's M.A. Access program.

B. Advising and Mentoring

First-year students are assigned an academic advisor from among the department's faculty. They also receive guidance from the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). They must meet with the DGS regularly, at least once per semester, to touch base on their completion of program requirements and their course selection. The DGS will share a Google Doc with each student in which their progress in the program is tracked. In the second semester of Y1, they choose an advisor from among the French faculty with whom they work on their MA Essay.

Incoming students will also be paired with an advanced current graduate student in the program, who will serve as an informal mentor.

C. Coursework

Courses that count for graduate credit at Columbia are at the 4000 level or higher.[2] 4000-level courses are open to both undergraduate students and graduate students, while classes at the 5000 level or higher are open only to graduate students. Students should consult the Directory of Classes to see current and past course offerings. They can also consult the Department website to see which courses are taught in French and which in English.

1. Course Requirements

Students must take a minimum of 30 credits comprised of eight graduate-level courses, seven of which must be taken for graded credit (one may be taken for R credit). GU 4000 (Proseminar / Theory of Literature I) counts towards these eight courses, but MA Essay Direction does not count.

Students are required to enroll in the following courses:

- **GU 4000 Proseminar/Theory of Literature I** (Fall of Y1, letter grade)
This course offers an introduction to literary theory, close reading, the *explication de texte* and fundamental research techniques.

- GR 8092 MA Essay Direction (Spring of Y1, letter grade)
This 6-point course is not a taught course. Instead, students should meet with their MA Essay advisor, agree upon a topic, and set up a schedule for research and writing. At the end of the semester, students will receive a grade of CP (credit pending) for the course. The grade will be overturned for a letter grade once the MA Essay is graded in the fall semester of Y2.

- GR 6020 French Lecture Series (all semesters of enrollment, P/F)
Open to members of the Department of French only, the lecture series exposes graduate students to new work in the field, including new methodologies and emerging areas of research and teaching.

2. Distribution requirement

MAO. students must take at least 1 pre-1800 course in the Department of French.

3. Courses outside the department

MAO. students may take 2 courses outside the Department.

4. R-credit courses

MAO. students may take 1 course for R credit. In this grading modality, credit is assigned but no qualitative grade is given.

5. Schedule of coursework

Full-time MAO students typically follow this schedule:

[2] Students may count one 3000-level language course (in a language other than French) towards the degree if they wish.

Year One	**Required Courses**	
Fall	1. GU 4000 Proseminar/Theory of Literature 1 2. Graduate seminar (4000-level or above) 3. Graduate seminar (4000-level or above) 4. Graduate seminar (4000-level or above) 5. GR 6020 French Lecture Series	
Spring	1. GR 8092 MA Essay Direction 2. Graduate seminar (4000-level or above) 3. Graduate seminar (4000-level or above) 4. Graduate seminar (4000-level or above) 6. Graduate seminar (4000-level or above) 7. GR 6020 French Lecture Series	Student chooses MA Essay advisor and begins to meet with them
Summer		Student writes draft of MA Essay
Year Two		
Fall		Student turns in first draft of MA Essay (October 1st) and then final draft of MA Essay (November 15th)

Other schedules are possible for part-time MAO students. Please consult the DGS.

6. Checklists

See Appendix 1 for a checklist of requirements for MAO students.

7. Registration and Degrees

You may register for courses on Vergil during your registration appointment period. Two Residence Units (RU) are required for the MA degree. For more information about Residence Units, click here.

Academic degrees are conferred three times a year, always in October, February, and May.

It is the responsibility of degree candidates to apply for degrees by the relevant deadlines. Benita Dace will assist in submitting the necessary forms. For the MA, see https://www.registrar.columbia.edu/content/application-degree-or-certificate

8. Credit Cap

Full-time students are allowed to register for a maximum of 20 credits per semester, per GSAS policy. Beyond 20 credits, students will be charged extra tuition per point.

9. Summer Tuition Credit

Students who have been admitted to GSAS to pursue an MAO degree, and who (with the approval of their departments) are taking summer courses that can be used to satisfy MA degree requirements should register for a quarter or a half Residence Unit (RU) depending on the number of courses taken. Fractional Residence Units from summer sessions count towards the two Residence Unit total required for conferral of the MA degree. Master's students *may not* register for a full Residence Unit in the summer. Students who are taking courses in the summer and have already completed two full Residence Units should register for Extended Residence (ER).

MA students taking *only* summer courses that do not count toward their specific degree requirements (e.g., language study for reading knowledge) should contact the GSAS Office of Student Affairs in person at 107 Low Library or by email at gsas-studentaffairs@columbia.edu for guidance on paying tuition according to the schedule on the Tuition and Fees page of the SPS website.

10. Transfer Credit

A maximum of two courses can be transferred from previous graduate-level study. These must meet the following criteria:

1) They must be at the graduate level;
2) They must be seminars rather than lectures;
3) The scope of the course and written assignments must be similar to those of a Columbia French graduate course;
4) They cannot have already counted towards any prior degree received.

Students who wish to transfer credits must apply to do so *in their first semester* at Columbia. They should submit syllabi and copies of written assignments to the DGS, as well as the GSAS Application for Transfer Credit. The decision of whether or not to accept the transfer credits ultimately resides with the DGS and with the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS).

11. Incompletes

Per GSAS policy, to remain in good academic standing, a student may carry only one grade of incomplete at a time. The grade should be requested via email from the instructor with the DGS CCed.

12. Good Standing

To remain in good standing:

- Students must maintain at least a B+ average;
- Students may carry only one grade of incomplete;
- Students must consult with the DGS at the beginning of each semester to review their program;
- Students must remain in regular contact with their advisors.

D. Requirements Beyond Coursework

1. MA Essay

The essay can take several different forms, although it is typically an expanded version of a seminar paper written for a course in the Department. It can offer an original analysis of a single work or treat a question or theme across several works. Though typically written in French, the MA Essay can be written in English if there are compelling reasons (this decision must be approved by the advisor). The essay must include a bibliography and footnotes and should reflect the consultation of critical, historical and/or theoretical sources appropriate to the project. It is written under the direction of an advisor from the Department of French. The minimum length is 25 pages, excluding the bibliography and any appendices. Students may use either MLA or Chicago format.

Students choose either to defend the thesis in a one-hour examination to a committee consisting of the advisor and a second faculty member, in which case both assign the letter grade in consultation with each other, or they can simply submit the thesis to the advisor, who assigns the letter grade.

For full-time MAO students, the first draft is due by **October 1st** of Y2 and the final draft by **November 15th** of Y2. If students choose the defense option, the defense should be held by the end of the fall semester of Y2. Part-time students may also choose to take MA Essay Direction in a fall semester, in which case the first draft of the thesis is due by February 1st of the following spring semester and the second draft by March 15. In this case, the MA degree will be conferred in May.

E. Convocation and Commencement

MA students are allowed to participate in Convocation and Commencement in May if one of the following conditions is met:

- Their degree was conferred in October or February of the academic year preceding the ceremony OR
- They are on track to have their degree conferred in October of the semester following the ceremony and submit a program-approved Graduation Ceremonies Participation Petition to the GSAS Office of Student Affairs.

See here for more information.

F. Job Placement

Students should seek assistance from the Placement Officer and are also strongly encouraged to participate in career workshops and programs organized by GSAS, including GSAS COMPASS.

III. GETTING INVOLVED

There are multiple opportunities for graduate students to get involved in academic life in the Department and beyond.

1. French Graduate Student Association (FGSA)

The FGSA organizes occasional workshops, typically run by the DGS, of interest to graduate students. Recent topics have included archival research, external fellowships, and conferences. Each year, the MAO students appoint at least one representative to the FGSA. This student serves as a liaison between the MAO student body and the faculty.

2. Arts and Sciences Graduate Council (ASGC)

The Arts and Sciences Graduate Council is Columbia University's student government representing MA and PhD students in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) and affiliated programs. French must send one representative for MAO students and one representative for PhD students each year.

The role of the departmental representatives involves serving as a bridge between the department and the ASGC, ensuring that the needs and concerns of students are communicated effectively. Additionally, the representative is responsible for sharing information about resources, which can be disseminated through monthly newsletters or similar communications.

Please note that this position requires the representative to be physically present at the monthly plenary meetings, the time of which varies from year to year.

If the Department does not send representatives, students from French will not be eligible to receive ASGC grants.

3. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the Department of French

The French Department's Standing Committee on Diversity and Inclusion advises the Department on policies and practices in addition to proposing initiatives to promote diversity and inclusiveness. It includes representatives from the professorial faculty, lecturers and PhD and MA student bodies. If you are interested in joining, please contact the Chair.

4. University Seminars

The University hosts many "University Seminars," extracurricular and cross-departmental groups that meet periodically to hear papers on a particular topic. Each seminar is chaired by one or two faculty members.

Some University Seminars of possible interest to students in French:

- University Seminar in Affect Studies;
- University Seminar in Arabic Studies;
- University Seminar "Beyond France";
- University Seminar in Cinema and Interdisciplinary Interpretation;
- University Seminar in Classical Civilization;
- University Seminar in Comics and Graphic Albums;
- University Seminar in Human-Animal Studies;
- University Seminar in Human Rights;
- University Seminar in Literary Theory
- University Seminar in Material Texts;
- University Seminar in Medieval Studies;
- University Seminar in the Renaissance;
- University Seminar in Studies in Contemporary Africa;
- University Seminar in the Theory and History of Media;
- University Seminar in Women and Society

This list is not extensive. Students should consult the University Seminars website.

5. The GSAS Writing Studio

The GSAS Writing Studio is dedicated to supporting Arts and Sciences graduate students in the process of writing dissertations and MA theses.

The Studio offers workshops, writing groups, retreats, structured co-working time, and quiet writing stations on the third floor of Lehman Library. Additional meeting rooms, including a downstairs Seminar Room, are available by reservation for dissertation-related group work. All GSAS Writing Studio programs are restricted for use to GSAS graduate students in these Arts and Sciences departments; some, including use of the Studio's physical space, are also restricted to students in the dissertation writing phase of the Ph.D.

If you have questions regarding accessibility or accommodations, please contact: gsas-writingstudio@columbia.edu.

6. Mailing Lists

Students are encouraged to join mailing lists both of nearby French cultural sites and of the profession more broadly. Invitations to participate in conferences are typically disseminated via these mailing lists. Some mailing lists you might join:

- Columbia Maison française;

- NYU Maison française;
- H-France;
- Francofil
- Period-specific lists like that of the Medieval Academy of America

IV. DEPARTMENTAL CULTURE AND POLICIES

1. General

The Department of French is committed to providing a learning and working environment that is free from bias and discrimination. We seek to foster a community that is inclusive and respectful of diversity, consistent with the broader values of Columbia University. Our understanding of diversity is ample: it includes but is not confined to considerations of race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic background, family history of higher-educational opportunity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, life experience or age, and veteran status.

We encourage undergraduate and graduate students from all backgrounds to enroll in our courses and to apply to our programs. Our faculty strives to create classroom environments that are supportive and inclusive, and we seek to provide each student with the resources they need to thrive.

As a Department of French, our scholarship, teaching, and programming engages in particular with the rich diversity and pluralism of the Francophone world in which what is held in common—the French language—supports a vibrant intellectual community.

2. Harassment

We as a department understand that any commitment to inclusion and equity must be in keeping with ongoing efforts to combat discrimination and harassment, sexual or otherwise, within the Department, the discipline, and the wider academic community. Students who wish to report an incident involving an alleged violation should contact the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE). If there is an immediate risk to a student's health or safety, please contact Columbia Public Safety at 212-854-5555.

3. Leaves of Absence

Follow this link to learn more about Leaves of Absence.

4. Mental Health

The Department aims to cultivate an environment that is emotionally and psychologically supportive for students. While we understand that various stages of the program can be intense and at times stressful, we aim to be available for strategizing and locating resources for students in need of counseling. You may also wish to seek help from Counseling and Psychological Services.

5. Office of Disability Services (ODS)

For disability services and accommodations, see https://www.health.columbia.edu/content/disabilityservices.

6. Further Health Services Resources

http://www.health.columbia.edu/
Gender-neutral restrooms: https://visit.columbia.edu/content/maps-and-directions-update
Lactation rooms: https://worklife.columbia.edu/lactation-room-access#!#text-1841
Back-up child and elder care: https://worklife.columbia.edu/backupcare

7. Use of A.I., Language Assistance, and Plagiarism

A.I.

Absent a clear, written statement from a course instructor granting permission, the use of A.I. tools to complete an assignment is prohibited. The unauthorized use of A.I. shall be treated similarly to unauthorized assistance and/or plagiarism.

Language Assistance

Students are welcome to use print or online dictionaries. They are not, however, permitted to use Google Translate or any similar tool in order to write papers or complete assignments. Students are not permitted to seek help or feedback with issues of content in their written work. The only exception is the use of Columbia's Writing Center. Absent a clear, written statement from a course instructor, students should assume that they may *not* seek linguistic help from a native speaker or French or any other individual.

Plagiarism

The use of words, phrases, or ideas that do not belong to the student, without properly citing or acknowledging the source, is prohibited.

Self-plagiarism, i.e., the use of any part of an assignment to fulfill the requirements of more than one course, is also prohibited (except with instructor permission).

Appendix 1: Checklist for MAO Students (assuming full-time enrollment)

Reminders:

- Courses counted as graduate seminars must be at the 4000 level or higher.
- You may count ONE language course outside the Department as long as it is at the 3000 level or higher.
- You may take ONE elective graduate seminar for R credit.
- You must take ONE pre-1800 course.
- MAO students may take up to TWO courses outside the Department.

Year 1

Course	**Course #**	**Fall**	**Spring**	**Grade**	**Pre-1800?**	**Outside department?**
Theory of Literature I	GU 4000	X				
MA Essay Direction	GR 8092		X			
French Lecture Series	GR 6020	X	X			
7 graduate seminars						
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						
7.						

Summer between Y1 and Y2 (MA Essay)

MA Essay Title	**MA Essay Advisor**	**Grade**

Submit first draft by October 1st of Y2, final draft by November 15th of Y2