

## **Guidelines for Marking Essays in the Public Texts Program**

### **General Expectations**

- Graduate essays are expected to display a level of competence in style, grammar, organization, citation of sources, etc., comparable to that of the best undergraduate essays.
- In addition, graduate essays are expected to display a familiarity with the critical discourse relevant to the topic beyond what is expected in even the best undergraduate essays. They should identify the key issues, and the positions which the critics cited take on these issues; and they should clearly formulate the position which the writer of the essay is taking. In other words, it is not enough that a graduate essay is intelligent and well written. It must also comprise a reasoned contribution to an ongoing critical discussion.
- The lowest passing grade for a graduate essay is 70%. Students who receive a final grade below 70% in an elective course may take one other elective course in its place. Students who receive a final grade below 70% in a core course are required to withdraw from the Program.
- Marks in the 90s should be assigned sparingly. Seminars will, of course, differ but it is not at all uncommon, even in very successful seminars, for no essay grades in the 90s to be assigned. It is not in the best interest of our program's reputation for there to be unreasonably high grades on our students' transcripts; and it is not in the interest of our students to have graduated from a program with a reputation for easy marking.
- While we recognize that not all students will go on to do a PhD, we thought it would be useful, in the comments that follow, to characterize essays in terms of our expectations for students who may be intending to do so.

### **Specific Expectations**

**90 and above: An excellent paper, of publishable quality. On the evidence of this paper, the student is capable of doing very well in a PhD program.**

Content: The argument is sophisticated and pushes the boundaries of the scholarship in the area.

Research: The research is substantial and demonstrates an outstanding grasp of the literary, theoretical and historical material.

Presentation: The argument is compelling and presented in an impressive scholarly manner. There are no errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar or format.

**85-89: A very good paper, possibly of publishable quality. On the evidence of this paper, the student is capable of doing well in a PhD program.**

Content: The argument is intelligent and offers new perspectives on the subject.

Research: The research is substantial and demonstrates a very good grasp of the literary, theoretical and historical material.

Presentation: The argument is very well presented and persuasive and in an appropriate scholarly style. There are no errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar or format.

**80-84: A good paper, though not of publishable quality. On the evidence of this paper, the student could possibly do well in a PhD program.**

Content: The argument is intelligent but not strikingly original.

Research: The research is substantial and demonstrates a good grasp of the literary, theoretical and historical material.

Presentation: The argument is well presented in an appropriate scholarly style. There may be a few minor errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar or format.

**75-79: A solid paper. On the evidence of this paper, the student is unlikely to do well in a PhD program.**

Content: The argument is competent and presents a generally convincing account of the material.

Research: The research is solid and demonstrates an adequate grasp of the literary, theoretical and historical material.

Presentation: The argument is solidly presented in a coherent manner and adequate scholarly style. There may be a few errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar or format.

**70-74: An acceptable paper. On the evidence of this paper, the student will not do well in a PhD program.**

Content: The argument is barely competent and presents a less than convincing account of the material.

Research: The research is barely adequate and demonstrates a barely adequate grasp of the literary, theoretical and historical material.

Presentation: The argument is adequately presented in a generally coherent manner in an adequate scholarly style. There may be several errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar or format.

**below 70: The paper is not of Master's quality. The student should withdraw from the program if this is typical of his or her work.**

Content: The argument is not competent and presents an unconvincing account of the material.

Research: The research is inadequate and demonstrates a poor grasp of the literary, theoretical and historical material.

Presentation: There are problems with the presentation of the argument and there are errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar or format.