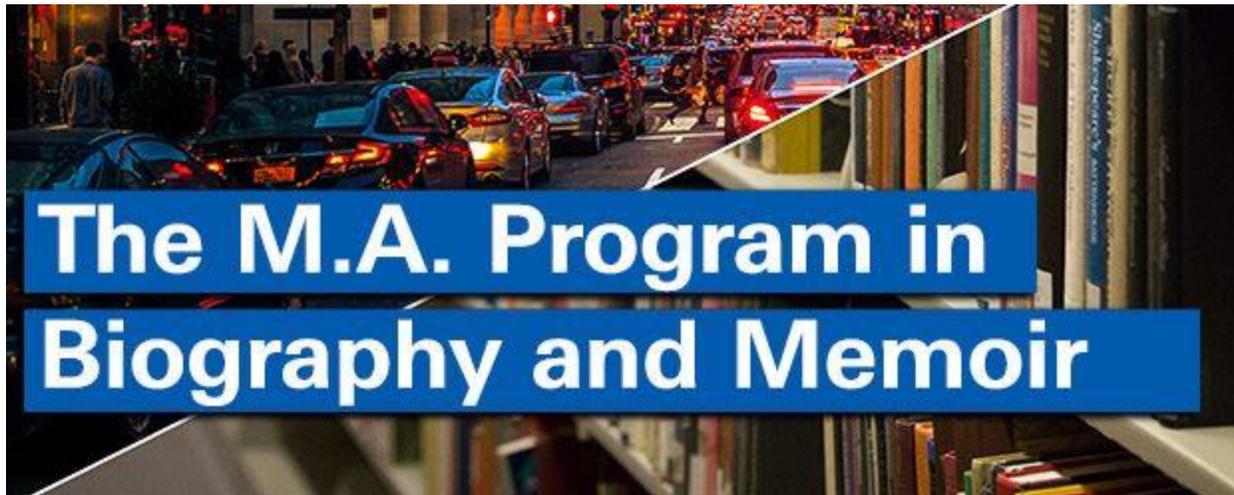# A Practical Guide for Students
in the M.A. Program in Biography and Memoir
(BAM)

Created September 2019, updated August 2021

With gratitude to the MALS program

Introduction

This practical guide is intended for students pursuing the Master of Arts in Biography and Memoir (BAM) at The Graduate Center, CUNY. Students should also peruse the Graduate Center (GC) *Student Handbook*. Students should feel free to ask Marilyn Weber [BAM@GC.cuny.edu], Assistant Program Officer (APO), or Dr. Sarah Covington [Sarah.Covington@QC.cuny.edu], Program Director.

Students are encouraged to check the following websites for announcements and information:
- BAM Program Website – official program business: courses, faculty, etc
- BAM Commons Events Site – a public site for interesting events
- BAM Commons Group – a private space for BAM discussions

Basic Information

M.A. Program in Biography and Memoir
The Graduate Center
> 365 Fifth Avenue, Rooms 5402 and 5114.03
> New York, NY 10016–4309
> Tel: (212) 817-8430
> Email: BAM@gc.cuny.edu

> The Program Officers and Staff

Officers, Staff	E-Mail	Room #
Sarah Covington **Program Director**	Sarah.Covington@QC.cuny.edu	5402
Marilyn Weber **Assistant Program Officer**	bam@GC.cuny.edu	

BAM has a small student lounge provided by the Leon Levy Center for Biography.

Prospective students should read the guidance on this page - https://www.gc.cuny.edu/bamApply/

BAM Overview

Advisement
The Program Director will provide individualized academic support to BAM students, guiding them in choosing courses, managing their workloads, meeting academic challenges, and enlisting faculty mentors to supervise their theses.
All students will have an advisement hold placed on their accounts before registration opens. They must attend an advising session with the Program Director in order to remove the hold so that they can register. These sessions will take place:

- In April for continuing students registering for the Fall term (registration opens in early May)
- in November for continuing students registering for the Spring term (registration opens in early December)
- in August for new students beginning in the Fall (registration opens in late August)

Coursework
Students are required to take the following **four core courses (12 credits)**, ideally in the first year of enrollment:

- **BAM 70100 – Forms of Life Writing**
- **BAM 70200 – Research and Methodology in Biography and Memoir**
- **BAM 70300 – Writing and Style in Biography and Memoir**
- **BAM 70400 – Ethical Problems in Biography and Memoir**

Please note - Students may not enroll in the same BAM core course multiple times for credit.
Each student is required to take a minimum of one required BAM course each semester unless given special permission by the Director.

Students may also choose from **electives (12-15 credits)**:

- **BAM 70500 - Topics in Biography and Memoir**
  This course varies in topic each semester. Students may take BAM 70500 multiple times, from the first semester of matiiculation onwards.
- **BAM 71000 – Independent Study** This is by special advanced arrangement only, and is not available every semester. Permission of the department is required at least one month before registration
- **GC elective courses:** Available courses offered by the doctoral, master's, and certificate programs *at the Graduate Center.* If a course offered by another department is closed or has restrictions, interested students must get in touch with the instructor for permission to enroll. Please cc the APO on all requests.
- **Graduate courses at another CUNY campus**. *Starting in the student's third semester,* the student becomes eligible to take graduate courses throughout CUNY if (and only if) the Program Director and the course instructor approve. Please cc the APO on all requests. Written permission from both is required one month before registration. (Unfortunately, courses cannot be taken at non-CUNY campuses as part of the IUDC.)

The **final courses (6 credits)** are:
- **BAM 72000 – Writing Workshop for Thesis or Capstone Project**
  Students who enroll in this course are expected to be in their final or penultimate semester of coursework. Please note that this course is *optional*. It can only be taken once.
- **BAM 79000 – Thesis / Capstone Project Supervision**
  Students register for thesis advising during their final semester with a professor who will act as their advisor. This is a required course. Students may register for this course one semester only. Permission of the department is required.

Registration

Registration information, including course descriptions and other pertinent information, is posted on the BAM website prior to the start of each semester. All students should review the academic calendar for the registration dates. The latest course offerings are posted online on the CUNYFirst Class Search and on the BAM website. All student registrations are done online via CUNYFirst. Please note that not every course is offered each semester.

Students are required to be "in status" each term. This means that students must either be registered or be on an approved Leave of Absence. A leave may be taken for any semester. Please write to the APO and Program Director no later than two weeks before registration to enquire about the LOA.

Satisfactory Progress Holds
Students need to be in good standing to register. A student may have a hold on his/her account for several reasons:

Academic Holds
- Students' records are evaluated at the end of each semester. Students are considered to be making satisfactory progress towards their degree by maintaining a 3.0 (or B) average or better, having no more than 2 open grades (incompletes [INC] or no grades [NGR]), and by not exceeding the time to degree (a period of 8 semesters). If any of these conditions are not met, a student will have a satisfactory progress hold. Students are notified of satisfactory progress holds by the Vice President for Student Affairs via email.
- If a student has a satisfactory progress hold, they should contact the Program Director with detailed information about the steps taken to resolve the issue.
- The hold must be removed **BEFORE** students can register. Students should send the explanatory email *no later* then two weeks before registration.

Non-Academic Holds
- Various GC offices can place holds for different reasons (Admissions for missing transcripts, Bursar for payment issues, Wellness for immunization records, Library for late fees, etc.).

- **Note that the BAM program can only help resolve academic holds**.

Class Permissions
Registering for English or Comparative Literature Department Courses
The English and Comparative Literature departments offer a 2-credit pass/fail option for most of their courses, which is only available to doctoral students enrolled in those Ph.D. programs; **BAM students must choose the 4-credit option when registering for English or Comparative Literature courses**. When registering for variable-credit courses, the registration will be processed automatically for the lowest credit value available. BAM students must change this credit value by clicking on the credit number in the registration screen.

Add/Drop Period
During the first week of each semester, students have the option of adding courses to their initial program and of dropping courses. During the second and third weeks, students may freely drop courses. Adding courses during the second and third weeks of the semester requires the permission of the academic program and/or instructor. From the third to tenth week of the term, if a student elects to withdraw from a course, a [Course Withdrawal Form](#) should be submitted to the Registrar. A grade of "W'' will be assigned, and the student remains liable for tuition.

- NOTE: Dropping a course may result in a change to a student's financial aid. Please check with Financial Aid before dropping any courses if you receive financial aid.

Incomplete Grades
To resolve incomplete grades, students must fulfill their obligations within one calendar year after completion of the course. After one year, an incomplete ("INC'') will automatically become a permanent incomplete; extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances upon written application and with the permission of the faculty member, the Executive Officer, and the Vice President for Student Affairs. BAM can only help to resolve incompletes in courses that are offered by BAM. Permanent incompletes will accrue no credit.

Students with more than two incomplete courses will be brought to the attention of their Executive Officer to determine whether or not they are making satisfactory progress. Students will not normally be regarded as making satisfactory progress toward their degrees if they have more than two "INC"s on their records. (Please see the section on Satisfactory Progress Holds above).

Maintenance of Matriculation
Students who have completed the credits for the degree, but who need an additional semester to complete the thesis should register for "Maintenance of Matriculation." If a student is not taking a course during a semester but would like to maintain their email and library privileges they should also register for "Maintenance of Matriculation."

Applying for Readmission
A student who is not registered for courses or Maintenance of Matriculation and is not on an approved Leave of Absence will be withdrawn from the program.

Readmission following a withdrawal is at the discretion of the BAM Program Director. The Application for Readmission form must be submitted to the APO and Program Director at least one month before registration with an explanation. Course work more than 3 years old cannot count toward the degree. The readmission form must be filed December 1 for Spring readmission, June 15 for Fall readmission.

About the Master's Thesis/Capstone Project

The thesis/capstone project is the culmination of the Master of Arts in Biography and Memoir degree. Students should start planning their thesis/capstone project halfway through the Program (15 - 18 credits).

Who is Eligible to Advise?
Thesis and capstone project advisors must be members of the GC faculty. (Please note that this does not include Kai Bird, Annalyn Swan and Brenda Wineapple.) Students should try to find advisors through their coursework. Students should consult with the APO and Program Director before deciding to approach any faculty members about serving as an advisor. This must be done well before any relevant deadlines and with a clear idea of what the thesis/capstone project is about.

The Thesis
The thesis should develop the interests students have explored in their course work. Some students develop a paper written for a course—or a couple of papers—into their thesis. The thesis should be 50–60 pages long (this page range does not include the bibliography, appendix, or endnotes)—in other words, as long as two or three term papers. It is sometimes useful to think in terms of two or three chapters.

The Capstone Project
The capstone project will enable students to integrate and synthesize the knowledge that they have developed during their MA coursework into a culminating project. Such works might include, but would not be limited to, an artistic or documentary video, archive finding aid, artistic performance (live or recorded), exhibition, journalistic report, digital project, or software tool, accompanied by a paper explaining the project, its methodology, technologies used, process or other relevant information.The parameters of the project must be determined in consultation with the Program Director and the student's advisor before the student begins the project.

Approval Process for the Thesis:
BAM theses need to be approved by both the faculty advisor and the Program Director. Students must submit the thesis to the faculty advisor at least two weeks before the department submission date (listed below) so that the faculty advisor can read, comment, and if appropriate,

ask for revisions before approving the thesis. The approved thesis should be submitted to the program at least two weeks in advance of the library deposit deadlines (see chart below).

Students should consult and follow the Mina Rees Library's instructions for preparing and depositing theses. The Library's Text Format Guidelines include sample MA Thesis approval and title pages. Please visit http://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/dissertations for more information.

Approval Process for the Capstone Project:
BAM capstone projects need to be approved by both the faculty advisor and the BAM Program Director. Students must send a detailed description of the capstone project to the submit the the faculty advisor and the BAM Program Director early in the semester, begore embarking on the bulk of the project. The twenty-page whitepaper and any supporting material should be submitted to the faculty advisor at least two weeks before the department submission date (listed below) so that the faculty advisor can read, comment, and if appropriate, ask for revisions before approving it

Once the thesis or project is approved, the department will certify that the student has completed all of the requirements for graduation. The student will graduate at the degree date following their submission (fall, winter, or spring).

Students who need an additional semester to complete the thesis or capstone should register for "Maintenance of Matriculation" (0 credits, reduced tuition). It is historically been the case that most students will need this extra time.

.

Submission and Deposit Deadlines

For Degree	Enrollment Required	Submit Advisor-Approved Final Project to BAM APO and Program Director By	Library Deposit Required By
February 1	Preceding Fall term	December 1	Mid-January
June 2021	Spring 2021 term	April 15	May 14
October 1	Preceding Spring term	August 1	Mid-September

For more information on depositing the thesis, see the Library website Dissertations & Theses deposit guide.