FAQ: Graduate Program in Rhetoric & Composition Purdue University

Prospective applicants have asked these questions during the Fall 2025 semester.

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We have recently extended our application deadline to Friday, January 9, 2026.
(Purdue's online information may not reflect this; rest assured we'll accept applications past the original Dec 15 deadline.)

What funding opportunities are available?

Our funding is described here:
https://cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/gradstudies/financial1/index.html

And also in our graduate manual
https://cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/gradstudies/grad-student-manual25-26.docx

We only admit students we can fund. Students get five years of funding.

The standard teaching load is 1:1 in the first year and 2:1 in years following. At first, students teach introductory courses in composition, professional writing, and other areas. More advanced students may be able to teach courses focused on majors (e.g. students interested in professional writing, writing centers, or games studies).

We have many research assistant opportunities that require no teaching but instead require 20 hours of work per week (0.5 FTE). RA-ships offer opportunities to build on teaching — first year fellowships, dissertation fellowships, work with the writing programs, work in our Writing Lab. We seek to offer students experiences across all of these.

We are also very good at helping students earn university-level or external fellowships. All three of our RC PhD candidates who applied for dissertation fellowships in 2024–25 are currently on 100% release from teaching for 2025–26 (AAUW, Bilsland, Biggs & Crews).

Our current stipend is $28,250. Students in good standing can get about $5,500 more by teaching a summer course, though this is not required.

What about travel and research support?

Travel and research support funding is provided by the College of Liberal Arts through the PROMISE program (up to $2,000 annually). Many supplemental opportunities are available through the Department, such as the Sullivan, Lauer, and Crouse scholarships.

As with fellowships, we are very attuned to supporting students in pursuing funding for their academic work.

How many students will be admitted?

We expect to admit eight students for Fall 2026.

The Department is currently alternating between cohorts of students in rhetoric & composition, then literary, theory, & cultural studies. However, this approach may be replaced with a theme-based cohort beginning in Fall 2027.

Do I need to get a potential supervisor before applying?

It is not required. However, you should review our faculty research interests and ensure someone at Purdue looks like a good fit. We will be doing the same as part of the application process.

Please note that Prof. Johnson-Sheehan will be retiring in May 2028.

https://cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/gradstudies/rhetcomp/faculty-students.html

What are your facilities?

Our offices are in Stanley Coulter Hall, which we share with the School of Languages & Cultures, in the heart of the academic side of campus. The Writing Lab is in Krach Hall, surrounded by residence halls and other student services buildings.

Graduate students have offices in "Grad Hubs" in the ground floor of Stanley Coulter. Many work day to day in our lab spaces, the professional writing & gaming lab (SC 279), or the writing programs & research lab (SC 246).

How does the program support intellectual risk-taking or interdisciplinary research that doesn't fit neatly into traditional categories?

We work very well with other departments and programs at Purdue — the School of Languages & Cultures, Interdisciplinary Studies, Education, and the Polytechnic Institute. Graduate students are allowed to apply courses from other departments to their degree plans.

Our courses follow faculty interests and we try to accommodate students as well. At this time we have multiple courses which engage artificial intelligence, from both the RC and LTC side. Recently we've had the following:

- Writing on distributed teams

- Rhetorics of technology
- History of the book (LTC)
- Games & digital studio

See our core curriculum here:

https://cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/gradstudies/rhetcomp/phdmaprograms.html

This rhetorical foundation here is the engine of Purdue student's success.

How has the law concerning the cutting and/or consolidation of graduate programs by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education impact the department? What changes do you anticipate will unfold over the next five years?

We have not seen extensive impacts from the law. Only a handful of Purdue programs were impacted, and most of those had no students. The department leadership is keeping track of the numbers diligently and we are seeking ways to combine programs if that can be done without losing intellectually.

Unfortunately, predicting the future is simply not possible; things are too unstable now in American higher education.

What is the department's general stance on the use of artificial intelligence/large language models? How does the department's stance compare to university initiatives concerning AI use in the classroom?

The department does not have a specific policy on AI. This mirrors Purdue: there is no university-wide policy at this time, though one is under development.

Purdue recommends that instructors engage AI specifically on their syllabi. The department requires it: that is, instructors must say *something*. Our writing programs follow suit, recommending strongly against outright bans (which are simply ineffective) or over-encouragement (which does not help students on the long term).

We have quite a few folks actively engaged with AI. In fact, there was recently a conference sponsored in part by the department, with Katherine Hayles, Ted Underwood, and others.

Purdue's STEM context makes working with AI and people who do the same quite easy. Many of our faculty have made it part of their research and teaching (Salvo, Johnson-Sheehan, Rickert).