

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
Department of Comparative Literature

EXAMINATION FOR PH.D. IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

GENERAL EXAMINATION

The General Examination for the Ph.D. degree is taken after all course work and foreign language requirements have been met. It consists of 2 sections: (1) three written examinations including: a period exam in the primary national literature, a comparative literary exam, and a comparative theory exam; and (2) an oral comprehensive examination. Students must complete the general examination within 3 quarters following completion of required course work. The three written exams are to be scheduled within a period of three weeks; the oral must follow within three weeks of the last of the written exams. Thus, all exams should be taken within a period of six weeks or less. Exam dates must be approved in advance by the entire committee; exams will not normally be scheduled during the summer.

By the end of the third quarter of Ph.D. coursework the Supervisory Committee must be selected. The Supervisory Committee consists of at least four members, with at least one from the Comparative Literature faculty. One serves as the Graduate School Representative and is selected in accordance with the current regulations of the Graduate School. The student is responsible for inviting the Supervisor and the regular members of the Supervisory Committee and reporting their agreement to the Graduate Program Asst., and should consult them concerning exam areas and reading lists. Because Supervisory Committee members in Comparative Literature come from many different departments, it is particularly important for students to consult them well in advance concerning their expectations for the Qualifying Examination.

The Written Examination is in 3 parts. Topics should be selected so as to avoid substantial overlap:

1. *Period Exam in the Primary National Literature.* This is a comprehensive exam testing knowledge of a particular literary period in the student's first national literature. Students will focus intensively upon and demonstrate their competence in a specific field such as British Renaissance, Russian nineteenth-century literature, German Modernism, or post-WWII Japanese literature.
2. *Comparative Literary Exam.* This is an exam dealing with a broadly comparative topic or problem, covering a range of primary texts in the original languages from two or more national literatures, and dealing with more than one literary period. Typical organizing categories include genre (French and British realist narrative), schools or movements (Romanticism across the nineteenth century, German and Italian twentieth-century avant-garde literatures), specific cross-cultural influences (the impact of French Symbolism upon British Modernism), or more general historical parallels (African and Caribbean postcolonial literatures).

3. *Comparative Theory Exam.* This exam will deal with a theoretical approach or tradition, covering theorists from more than one national tradition and demonstrating significant historical scope. Sample topics: Nietzsche's impact upon French poststructural theories, the emergence of a secular hermeneutic tradition out of Christian hermeneutics, French and American feminist theories, Neoplatonism's impact upon Romantic philosophical and literary theory, theories of lyric in Chinese and Anglo-American poetry.

During the quarter preceding exams, students must submit reading lists, approved by their committee, for each of the written exams. The student arranges a specific date for each of the written exams with the examiners. After consulting with other committee members, the chair forwards the exam questions to the Graduate Program Assistant who will administer the exams and return the completed examinations for evaluation.

The examination questions will be emailed to students at approximately 8 a.m. on the examination date and answers must be returned by email by approximately 5 p.m. The answers typically run about 5,000 words. The specific questions should not be discussed in advance. Sample Ph.D. exam questions are available for students to borrow in Padelford B-531. All members of the Committee will read, comment upon, and vote upon passage of each exam. Exams will be evaluated on a scale of honors, pass, fail. Faculty are expected to report evaluations of each exam within one week of administration. Two failing evaluations constitute failure of the exam; however, students will be deemed to have passed an examination if no failing evaluation is reported within 10 days. Any portion of the written exam that does not receive a passing grade must be retaken before the student can proceed to the oral exam. (Such retakes must be scheduled within one month). A repeat failure on any part of the exams will constitute failure of the exam process as a whole.

The Oral Comprehensive Examination lasts two hours and follows the successful completion of the first section of the examination. This will be a general examination based upon the preceding exams and also assessing the student's overall preparation for prospective dissertation work. Examiners' questions can revisit topics from any of the preceding examinations. After concluding the exam, the committee will evaluate the exams as a whole; passage of the separate parts does not guarantee passage of the entire examination. The committee may award honors for outstanding performance on the exams as a whole.

Scheduling of the oral exam, through the Graduate Program Assistant, should begin 4 weeks in advance of the starting date. The Graduate School must receive notice of the exam at least 3 weeks in advance.

Students must register for at least 2 credits during the examination quarter.

GUIDELINES

Given the many variables of comparative literature study, it is not possible to establish fixed rules for examination focus and coverage. Students should work with their supervisors and committees to establish a spectrum of areas that will be of greatest benefit. There are, however, general principles. Examinations serve both as preparation for the dissertation and as complementary coverage. The written exams should aim at breadth, while the oral often focuses in toward the dissertation. The areas for the written exam should be fields of study and of teaching, not special topics for research. Each of the three areas should ground your familiarity with a subject you might teach, preferably in a range of more and less specialized courses. Exam areas typically abut one another, but overlap should be limited.

It is likewise not possible to give rules for reading lists. Reading lists are goals, not contracts. You should be familiar with the works on your list, but you will not have mastered each title equally, and, conversely, your reading should never be limited by the list. The general principle is that you should be aware of the range of books and influential critical studies in your area and should be able to discuss enough individual works to demonstrate your facility at handling texts and approaches. An average list might contain 60 works per area, but some might contain fewer and others a lot more. Each area should be prefaced with a paragraph of 100-250 words explaining the rationale for the selection and identifying perspectives of particular interest.

Written examination format and questions also vary widely. The most typical format is three or four broadly defined questions from which you select two. Answers should have a shape and an argument with supporting evidence, and they should demonstrate specific knowledge of a range of texts.

THE DISSERTATION: PROSPECTUS, WRITING AND FINAL EXAMINATION (DEFENSE)

The student must select a Supervisor and a Reading Committee of two (occasionally three) additional members no later than the end of the first month of the quarter following completion of the General Examination. The dissertation committee may or may not be the same as the Supervisory Committee for the General Examination: At least one member of the committee must be on the Comparative Literature faculty. The student should approach prospective committee members and report their agreement to the Graduate Program Assistant, who will inform members of the General Examination Committee who will not be on the Reading Committee. A Graduate School Representative must also be selected in accordance with the current regulations of the Graduate School. A dissertation prospectus following the prospectus guidelines must be approved by all members of the committee by the end of the quarter following the General Examination. Students who take the General Examination in the spring are strongly encouraged to complete the prospectus by the end of summer but are not required to complete it before the end of fall quarter.

The dissertation supervisor will follow the development of the dissertation as it progresses. The other two members of the Reading Committee may read the dissertation chapter

by chapter, or they may judge the whole product; this decision is left to the student and the dissertation supervisor. In any case, before the Final Examination may be scheduled, the Reading Committee must be satisfied that, except for minor alterations, the dissertation is ready for presentation at the defense.

Draft copies of the dissertation must be submitted to the Reading Committee at least 5 weeks before the proposed defense. At least 3 weeks before the date of the defense, the Reading Committee, by signing the Request for Final Examination, recommends to the Graduate School that the defense be scheduled.

Students must have registered for a minimum of 27 credits of CLIT 800 by the time of the defense. These dissertation credits must be spread over three quarters or more, according to Graduate School regulations, and the student must register for a minimum of 2 credits during the quarter of the Final Examination (defense).

Rules for conduct of the Final Examination are issued by the Graduate School. The Final Examination concentrates on aspects of the student's doctoral dissertation and usually lasts about 1 ½ hours. The supervising committee can, at its discretion, designate the dissertation as honors work. The Committee may, at this time, request further revision of the dissertation.

The student must be registered for at least 2 credits during the quarter of the defense and during the quarter in which the dissertation is submitted to the Graduate School and the degree is awarded.

The dissertation must be submitted to the Graduate School within 60 days of the date of the defense. Format of the dissertation is regulated by the Graduate School and described in a style and policy manual available both in the Graduate School and in the Comparative Literature office.