

Graduate Program in Comparative and World Literature

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Graduate Student Handbook

(Revised 2007)

GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

The Program in Comparative and World Literature offers graduate programs leading to the degrees of master of arts and doctor of philosophy and is designed to provide a systematic study of subjects and problems common to several literatures and cultures. Its purpose is to enable students with the appropriate linguistic competence and preparation to explore individual national literatures as well as world literature; the theory of literature and criticism; the theory and practice of cross-cultural comparison; the interrelations of several literatures; the main currents, periods, and movements in literary history; the development of literary themes and types; and the relations between literature and the other arts.

The Graduate Advisor:

Each student must meet immediately and then regularly with the Graduate Advisor, who is responsible for making recommendations on the student's curriculum and other matters and will monitor the student's academic progress. The Graduate Advisor continues as the student's principal advisor throughout the M.A. Program and for the first year of the Ph.D. Program. The Graduate Advisor will address issues of concern to the student and, when necessary, will consult with other faculty or administrators about those issues. Student complaints and other problems are normally first handled by the Graduate Advisor, who will then advise a course of action.

Faculty in the student's areas of interest should also be consulted by the student. Indeed, that is recommended, as these professors will most likely become the student's principal mentors at some point.

The Director of the Program:

Each student – in both the M.A. and the Ph.D. programs – should meet at least once a year with the Director of the Program. The Director will monitor the student's progress, in consultation with the Graduate Advisor and – when the student is in the Ph.D. program – with the student's Major Advisor. The Director is the principal liaison between the Program and the Graduate College and therefore has direct responsibility for deciding on the appropriate level of financial support (fellowships, teaching assistantships, research

assistantships, and tuition and fee waivers) for each student. The Program Director is also helpful in obtaining teaching assistantships from other departments. In addition, the Director makes recommendations of support to the Graduate College.

MASTER OF ARTS

Admission:

All first-year students are admitted to the M.A. Program, regardless of previous undergraduate or graduate degrees.

The entering student should have an undergraduate major in Comparative Literature, English, Classics, or a foreign language. Majors in history, philosophy, or other humanistic areas who also present suitable linguistic and literary competence to pursue graduate study in Comparative and World Literature may also be granted admission by the Admissions Committee. Admission is highly competitive and depends on a number of factors: undergraduate or prior graduate study and grades in literary and humanistic fields; academic achievements and honors; scores on standardized examinations (GRE, TOEFL); letters of recommendation; statement of purpose; writing ability (a writing sample is required). The admitted student is expected to maintain a GPA of at least 3.25 (on a 4.0 scale) in order to be considered for admission to the Ph.D. Program. Each student's academic standing and performance in the classroom (both as students and, where relevant, as teaching assistants) are reviewed regularly by the faculty.

Languages:

The entering student should have a command of two languages besides English, one of which, at the M.A. level only, may be presented as a research language. Knowledge of the "literary" languages should be at a sufficiently advanced level so as to allow the student to take advanced courses in the respective literatures in other literature departments at UIUC. The languages presented by the student must coincide with the literatures chosen for the major and minor literatures.

There are several ways of certifying competence in a research language. In our Program, competence is normally defined as the equivalent of having completed two years of college study in that language (that is, through the 104 level). Competence may be certified by actually completing the fourth semester of language study at UIUC with a grade of B or better, or with "credit". Merely completing the 500 and 501 language sequence is not considered sufficient for research competence in the respective language. The student who chooses the 500-501 sequence must subsequently certify competence by passing the equivalent of the final exam in 104 with a grade of B.

For students majoring in European and/or American literatures before 1800, Latin is required either as a research language or as a literary field. Students concentrating on the earlier periods of a national literature (before 1500 in the case of European literatures; a

different chronology is applied in the case of other literatures) are responsible for the earlier forms of the respective language (which will not count as a separate language for the purposes of fulfilling the research language requirement). Students concentrating on the modern periods of their literatures are not required to know the linguistic history of their literatures but are encouraged to do so. The presentation of a classical language either as a field or as a research language relevant to the student's specializations is encouraged though not required. Classical languages are, for instance, Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Classical Chinese etc.

Applicants for whom English is not a native language should present one of the following TOEFL scores as a minimum: 103 on the TOEFL iBT exam; 257 on the computer-based TOEFL; or 613 on the paper-based TOEFL. Note that these scores are above those set by the Graduate College for general admission to a number of other fields. This minimum-score policy will be reviewed periodically and adjusted if necessary.

Course Requirements:

Students must complete a minimum of 32 credit hours (formerly, 8 units) which are to be distributed as follows:

- (a) CWL 501 and 502. These are usually taken in the first year of graduate study.
- (b) Two other CWL seminars from the core sequence 551, 561, 571, and 581.
- (c) One or two courses in the major literature.
- (d) At least one course in the minor literature
- (e) One or two courses from the above categories. A student may take one course in a non-literary field that will provide cultural and historical contexts for the study of the student's literatures.

At least five of the eight courses should be at the 500-level. Enrollment in all courses should be first discussed with the Graduate Advisor. Independent Study courses do not normally count toward the distribution requirements, though exceptions may be made in cases where instruction essential to the student's literature program is not regularly available in courses and seminars.

Students are strongly encouraged to take courses and seminars with professors in their major areas of study, as some of these professors may then serve on the student's examination committee and later sometimes on the thesis committee.

Examinations:

At the conclusion of course work, which usually occurs by the end of the 4th semester, the candidate for the M.A. degree sits for three exams. The chair of the examining committee must be a CWL core faculty member and is normally the professor responsible for the comparative literature and critical theory exam.

- (a) A comparative literature and critical theory exam based on the contents of CWL 501 and 502 as well as on a reading list of critical theory, chosen in consultation

with the examining professor. See the Program's web site for details about the list and the distribution of works within it. (3 hours)

- (b) A period exam in the major literature (2 hours)
- (c) A period exam in the minor literature (2 hours)

The period exams are each based on reading lists of a limited number of major works (10 to 12) and important criticism of those works. The lists are chosen in consultation with the faculty member administering the exam and with the Graduate Advisor. For the M.A. exams, the lists are not meant to be historically comprehensive but representative (note that this policy of period exams for "b" and "c" replaces previous practice in the Program).

Exams are normally given twice a year, for a three-week period each, beginning in the second week of September or the second week in April. It is the student's responsibility to assemble an examining committee in the semester before the date of the examination. Consultation on the procedures should first be sought from the Graduate Advisor. Examiners are recognized specialists in the literature(s) in question and must be approved by the Graduate Advisor and Program Director beforehand.

Each exam is made up by the faculty member responsible for its evaluation. The entire committee, however, reads and comments on every exam.

Exams are graded high-pass, pass, low pass, or fail. A passing grade on the M.A. exams does not guarantee admission to the Ph.D. Program. A standing committee of the faculty, in collaboration with the chair of the examining committee, will review each student's performance on the exams, the student's record in course work, and other relevant factors. Only then will the committee recommend to the faculty at large whether the student should receive a terminal M.A. or should be admitted to the Ph.D. Program.

A student may elect to receive a terminal M.A. In this case, the request must be made in writing prior to taking the first of the M.A. examinations. Otherwise, it is assumed that the student wishes to be considered for admission to the Ph.D. Program.

If a student fails one or more of the M.A. examinations, the student is given one more chance to take the examination(s) in question. A second failure results in no degree being granted and dismissal from the Program.

The M.A. equivalent exams:

The student who enters the Program with a recognized M.A. degree in a literary field may choose to take the M.A. equivalent exams rather than sit for another formal M.A. degree. The M.A. equivalent exams, which are normally taken at the end of the first year in residence, consist of two exams.

- (a) A comparative literature and critical theory exam based on the contents of CWL 501 and 502 as well as on a reading list of critical theory. See the Program's web site for details about the list and the distributions of works from it. (3 hours)
- (b) A period exam in a literary field which was NOT the major field of study for the previous M.A. degree. This exam is also based on a reading list chosen in consultation with the faculty member administering the exam and with the Graduate Advisor. (2 hours)

The M.A. equivalent exams are evaluated in the same manner as the regular M.A. exams. If the student has completed 32 credit hours prior to taking the M.A. equivalent exams but is denied admission to the Ph.D. Program, then that student receives a terminal M.A. degree. If 32 credit hours have not been completed, then the student is dismissed from the Program without an M.A. degree.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Admission:

Admission to the Ph.D. Program requires an M.A. in Comparative Literature from UIUC or the satisfactory completion of the M.A. equivalent examinations. In addition to considering the performance on the exams, the admissions committee reviews other factors, such as the student's record in course work, the performance as a teaching assistant, and the availability of UIUC faculty competent to direct a dissertation in the student's intended specialization.

Languages:

The candidate for the Ph.D. must demonstrate a command of at least three languages besides English. Three of these four languages must coincide with the student's areas of specialization and with the dissertation field. Competence in the fourth language, designated as the research language, must be certified before the student takes the Ph.D. preliminary examination. The same standard is used here as is used for the research language at the M.A. level. The level of linguistic competence in the student's major literature must be equivalent to that required by the respective literature department for its own graduate students. The linguistic competence in the student's minor literatures must be sufficient so as to allow taking and completing graduate seminars in the respective literatures.

The Program:

Once admitted to the Ph.D. Program, the student must maintain a 3.5 GPA (on a 4.0 scale) and must fulfill the general requirements of the Graduate College. Every student's academic progress will be reviewed annually by the faculty. Satisfactory progress is expected. Absent that progress, the faculty may recommend dismissal from the Program and the University.

A total of 64 credit hours (previously 16 units) are required beyond the M.A. degree or beyond the M.A. equivalent examinations. This is a minimum, not a maximum, requirement. If a student has taken more than 32 credit hours while in the M.A. Program, some of those credit hours may be applied toward the residency requirement in the Ph.D. Program. The use of those extra hours in this manner is not automatic, however, and the final determination is made by the Graduate Advisor. The 64 credit hours are normally divided equally between courses and dissertation research. A student must be enrolled in graduate seminars until the preliminary examinations are taken and passed. It is not unusual a student to take more than the required 32 credit hours of coursework. In these cases, it is permitted for the student to take 24 credit hours of dissertation research rather than the normal 32.

The *Graduate Advisor* – who has advised the student in the M.A. Program – continues as the principal advisor of the student in the Ph.D. Program through the end of the second semester in residence. At that time, in consultation with the Graduate Advisor, the student should formally declare fields of specialization (major literature, two minor literatures, and the appropriate literary periods) and request his or her *Major Advisor*. This *Major Advisor* will normally be the director of that student’s dissertation and will oversee the student’s progress through the remainder of the coursework, the preliminary examinations, and the dissertation itself.

Course requirements:

The student must take a minimum of 32 credit hours before sitting for the preliminary examinations. The student must enroll in graduate seminars until the preliminary examinations are passed, so it is to the student’s benefit not to delay taking the prelims. The minimum distribution of the courses is as follows:

- (a) CWL 582 (on the discipline of Comparative Literature)
- (b) Three CWL core courses (551, 561, 571, and 581), of which one course must be cross-cultural.
- (c) Two courses in the major literature *beyond* the work at the M.A. level. A course outside the period of specialization is recommended.
- (d) One course in *each* of the minor literatures of specialization.

Certificates and Graduate Minors:

The acquisition of a “certificate” or graduate minor relevant to the student’s professional interests is encouraged. Graduate certificates or graduate minors may be earned in fields including Critical and Interpretive Theory, Gender and Women’s Studies, Cinema Studies, Art History, and Music History. The requirements for obtaining those certificates or graduate minors are set by the Program in question. Work done to fulfill those requirements is *in addition* to work required by the Program in Comparative and World Literature for the Ph.D. degree. It is recommended though not required that the student earn a certificate or a

minor (it becomes part of the student's official record), as these additions to the usual program of study often tip the balance in the job market.

The Preliminary Examinations:

The preliminary examinations are overseen by the student's *Major Advisor*, who is usually but not always also the director of the student's dissertation. The *Major Advisor* is the chair of the examining committee. In some cases, a director or co-director of the dissertation from outside the Program's core faculty may be appointed. That director or co-director need not be officially involved in the examination process, though he or she usually is, most often as an examiner of one of the student's literatures.

The preliminary examinations should be taken at the conclusion of 32 credit hours of coursework or as soon as possible thereafter. These examinations are of two kinds: written and orals. The written examinations – which should be completed within a three-week period – are based on reading lists which should be deposited in the Program office no later than the semester before the examination is to take place.

The written examinations consist of four parts:

- (1) A Comparative Literature examination (4 hours total) covering two areas (2 hours each). This exam is made up by the director of the student's dissertation.
 - a. The literary theory and criticism relevant to the dissertation topic. This exam will be based on a reading list arrived at in consultation with the director of the dissertation.
 - b. A comparative analysis and *explication de texte* of three passages, quoted in the original, drawn from important works of each of the student's three literatures. The three passages will be drawn from the student's literature reading lists but will not be made available to the student before the exam.
- (2) An exam on the history of the major literature (4 hours). Normally, this exam will not cover the entire history of the literature in question, but it should cover several successive periods. This exam will be based on a reading list agreed upon by the student, the student's Major Advisor, and the faculty member giving the exam. Though the list need not be comprehensive, it should be substantial, as the successful Ph.D. recipient will most likely be hired by a department interested in having this particular literature taught.
- (3) A period exam in the first minor literature (2 hours). This exam will be based on a reading list agreed upon by the student, the student's Major Advisor, and the faculty member giving this exam.
- (4) A period exam in the second minor literature (2 hours). This exam will be based on a reading list agreed upon by the student, the student's Major Advisor, and the faculty member giving this exam.

The literatures and periods chosen should have a coherent rationale within the field of Comparative Literature. In the case of European and American literatures, both minor literatures should cover similar periods (for instance, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance through the Enlightenment, Romanticism through the 19th century, or the 20th century). If

one or two classical literatures are combined with more modern literatures, then the requirement of similar periods for both minor literatures may not apply. In the case of other literary traditions, a different periodicity may apply. If the student's work crosses rather different cultures and civilizations, then other criteria of comparativity must be established. Students are urged from the start of their graduate careers to enter into a conversation with the Graduate Advisor and then with the Major Advisor on which combinations of literatures and periods make the best professional sense in light of their interests.

The oral examination (2 hours) normally occurs about 10 days after the successful completion of the student's last examination. This exam covers two areas:

- (a) The written examinations, revisited. The student may be asked to address the answers given in the written examinations. In order to review for this part of the orals, the student shall be given copies of the questions and the student's answers on the written examinations. Comments and evaluations by the professors, however, will remain confidential.
- (b) The dissertation proposal. The proposal shall be submitted to all the members of the committee at least two weeks before the date of the orals. A suitable proposal is generally about 10 pages long, those pages covering several areas: a statement of the topic itself, giving the grounds for comparison as well as the critical approach(es) to be used, and detailing what the student expects to find or to prove (5 or 6 pages, single-spaced); a topical outline (no more than 2 pages, single-spaced) giving a firm sense of the structure of the dissertation and its argument; a bibliography (no more than 2 pages, single-spaced) of the most relevant primary and secondary works.

In the case of failure in one or more of the written examinations, the oral examination is postponed. The student is given one more chance to pass the examination(s) in question. A second failure results in dismissal from the Program. The oral examination will then not be necessary. In the case of failure in the oral examination, the student is given one more chance to pass it. A second failure in the oral examination results in dismissal from the Program.

The Dissertation:

The successful completion of the written and oral examinations results in formal admission to the dissertation stage. The student's dissertation committee is generally but not always composed of the professors on the student's preliminary examination committee. At the discretion of the director of the dissertation, members may be added to the committee or dropped from it in search of the most suitable fit for the topic and for the student's professional interests. The committee must be composed of at least four professors, three of whom must be members of the Graduate Faculty. Outside readers may be invited to be on the committee, but their suitability must be approved by the Graduate College.

At the dissertation stage, students no longer have to take any seminars, courses, or independent studies. Instead they sign up for at least 24 and preferably 32 credits of CWL

599 (thesis credits). The 599s are graded as deferred (DF) until the dissertation is completed and has been successfully defended.

A student who has left the University for whatever reason shall comply with the Graduate College's regulations upon returning for the dissertation defense.

It is assumed that all members of the student's dissertation committee will have read at least one draft of each major chapter prior to being given the defense copy.

The final steps in this process are the dissertation defense and the deposit. Upon completion, a clean copy of the entire dissertation shall be submitted to each member of the dissertation committee at least three weeks before the date of the scheduled defense. The defense itself is open to the public. The deposit copy of the dissertation shall reflect the revisions recommended by the dissertation committee. Almost all dissertations are revised after the defense. The student is urged to become thoroughly familiar with the requirements of the Graduate College concerning the proper format of the deposit cop(ies) of dissertation and to use that format for the defense copy.

The director of the dissertation is the chair of the defense committee and is responsible for seeing that the requested revisions are carried through. In rare cases, the director may request a second joint meeting of the student with the committee in order to discuss the revisions made before the final version is copied and deposited. The deposit copies require the assenting signatures of the dissertation committee as well as the Director of the Program in Comparative and World Literature.

For further information:

Please see the Program's website: <http://www.complit.uiuc.edu/Welcome.html>

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