Department of Comparative and World Literature

Graduate Handbook

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I. Applications and Admissions:

After the application deadline in December, the CWL Admissions Committee evaluates all applications. Factors considered include academic transcripts, personal statement, writing sample, GPA, English proficiency, competency level in other languages, reference letters, and the availability of faculty with expertise in the applicant's field. GRE scores are optional, but they may improve a candidate's chances of getting a fellowship. All admitted students enter the program at the MA level (Ph.D. Stage One).

II. Financial Support

Financial support for graduate students in CWL is available in various forms: fellowships at the university, college, school and department levels; Teaching Assistantships in CWL and/or other units; Research Assistantships with individual faculty members; and Graduate Assistantships in other units. However, these resources are limited, competitive, and depend on satisfactory progress toward the degree. Students must be proactive in pursuing funding opportunities outside the department.

III. Advising

The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) is the official advisor of all students in Stages One and Two of the program, up to and including the preliminary exams (prelims). The DGS meets with each student at least once a semester to monitor their progress and advise them on course selection. *Students should not make changes to their course selection without first consulting the DGS*. In Stage Three (the dissertation), the dissertation director becomes the student's primary advisor.

Students are also strongly encouraged to identify a faculty mentor by the end of their first year in the program, if not sooner. While not the official advisor, the mentor is the faculty member in the department with expertise in the student's primary field of study, which could be the major literature, geographic region, or theoretical orientation, and who can guide the student's intellectual and professional development in that field.

The students should also meet with the Head of the Department at least once a year to discuss their progress in the program. The Head works closely with the DGS and oversees every aspect of the graduate program.

IV. Language Competency

Students admitted to the program must possess advanced competency in at least the two languages of their major and first minor literatures, and at least intermediate competency in a third language, normally that of their second minor literature. By the end of their fourth semester in the program, the third language should be at the advanced level. Advanced competency is understood as fluent reading, writing, and speaking to a degree that allows the student to take graduate seminars in literature that are taught in those three languages and to read all primary texts in the original. Competency levels can be assessed by the faculty, by coursework, or by proficiency tests administered by the various language programs in SLCL.

Depending on the student's dissertation field, a fourth research language may be necessary. Students are responsible for acquiring the language skills necessary for their fields.

The literary and research languages presented by the student must be suitable for the combination of literatures and periods chosen. Earlier periods often require knowledge of classical languages (e.g. Sanskrit, Classical Chinese, Ancient Greek, Latin) and/or historical forms of modern languages (e.g. Old and Middle English). Historical forms do not count as separate languages; that is, Old French and modern French are considered one language for the purpose of fulfilling degree requirements.

V. Literatures and Periods

At the MA level (Ph.D. Stage One), students demonstrate in-depth knowledge of one literary tradition along its historical development (the Major literature), and equally in-depth knowledge of a second literary tradition during a particular period (the First Minor literature), both in their original languages. Reading knowledge of a third, research language is also required. At the Ph.D. level proper (Stage Two), students demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a third literary tradition during a particular period (Second Minor literature) in its original language. The Major and Minor literatures must be in different languages; that is, distinct literary traditions in the same language (e.g., Anglophone African, Australian, British, Irish, US, and US minority literatures) cannot be counted as separate literatures for the purpose of fulfilling degree requirements.

For Western literatures, periodization is typically understood as follows: classical, Medieval, Early Modern, 17th-18th centuries, and 19th century to the present. For example, if

the student's focus is on the 19th century in British, French, and German literatures, the student would be responsible for the Major literature from the Early Modern period to the present, and for both Minors from Romanticism to the present. If a student chooses a combination of Western and Asian and/or African traditions, or a set of Asian and/or African literatures, a suitable historical range would be determined in consultation with the DGS, the expert faculty, and the Head.

Each student constructs a field of study consisting of a coherent combination of languages, literatures, periods, and methods or approaches. Coherence can be achieved in a number of ways: a literary-historical approach (e.g., transnational Modernism); a cultural studies approach (e.g., postcolonialism, women and gender studies, race and ethnicity, indigeneity, minority literatures); an interdisciplinary approach (e.g., media and cinema studies, medical humanities, digital humanities, ecocriticism). Whatever the case, the student's field should be intellectually justifiable.

VI. Coursework

At each of the three stages of the program, students are required to take a minimum of eight graduate seminars, normally at the 500 level except in departments that offer graduate seminars at the 400 level. In such cases, the coursework is expected to be equivalent to that of 500-level courses, and students should register for the 1-Unit or 4-hour "G" (Graduate) section, not the 3-hour "U" (Undergraduate) section, of the course.

MA students may take no more than two upper-level undergraduate literature (not language) courses at the 400 level. Doctoral students may not take such courses for credit, except in departments where graduate courses are available only as G sections of 400-level courses.

Language and language pedagogy courses do not count toward fulfilling the eight-course requirement at each stage, although they count toward the minimum credit hours required to maintain visa status or financial aid.

Students who are on fellowship are expected to take four courses per semester. This may include a language course. Seminars taken beyond the required eight at the MA level during the student's first two years can be counted toward fulfilling Ph.D. requirements.

Independent studies cannot substitute for core courses (CWL 551, 561, 571, 581) and should neither duplicate existing courses nor be taken as a placeholder to prepare for exams. Independent studies can be taken in only two cases: to fulfill course requirements in major or minor literatures when no graduate seminars in that literature are offered, and

to investigate a topic of interest to the student and the instructor that is too specific for a seminar. In such cases, the student may sign up for a 500-level independent study with a faculty member who has the appropriate expertise, in lieu of a graduate seminar. *The approval of the DGS is required before the student registers for an independent study, and the student must complete the required SLCL independent study form, collect the signatures of the instructor and the DGS, and submit the form to the Graduate Services Office*.

VII. The MA (aka Ph.D. Stage One)

At the MA level, the required eight courses are distributed as follows:

CWL 501 and CWL 502

3 CWL core courses (CWL 551, 561, 571, 581)

1 or 2 courses in the major literature

1 or 2 courses in the minor literature

1 course in the major or minor literature or in a related field

VIII. MA Exams

*MA exams must be taken in **March** of the student's fourth semester in the program. All reading lists must be developed in consultation with the examiners and approved by the DGS no later than **November 1** during the student's third semester in the program*.

The student schedules all exams through the Graduate Services Office, which administers them on site. Exams are "closed book" and no electronic devices with internet access are allowed in the exam room. However, the student may bring one print copy of a language dictionary.

MA exam committees consist of three members. *The Chair of the committee must be a core CWL faculty member (i.e., not an affiliate)*. MA exams must all be taken in March during the student's second year (fourth semester) in the program. The exams consist of:

- Theory exam (4 hours), based on topics covered in CWL 501 and CWL 502. The reading list should contain at least twenty books; a number of articles or chapters from a particularly dense book can count as one entry. The books are divided equally among four categories or major critical approaches of the student's choice,

with the approval of the DGS and the theory examiner (e.g. Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, feminism and gender, postcolonialism, ecocriticism, translation, methods of Comparative Literature, etc.)

- Major literature exam (4 hours), consisting of two questions: an essay and a close reading of a passage quoted in the original language. The examiner will provide two unidentified passages from which the student chooses one to identify and explicate. The exam is based on a reading list of at least twenty-five primary texts—a "primary text" being understood as a full-length book or a substantial number of shorter works such as poems or short stories by a single author. See separate instructions sheet.
- Minor literature exam (4 hours), consisting of two questions: an essay and a close reading of a passage quoted in the original language. The examiner will provide two unidentified passages from which the student chooses one to identify and explicate. The exam is based on a reading list of at least twenty primary texts.

Each of the three examiners evaluates all three written exams. To ensure that the assessment of each exam is candid and independent, examiners should return their completed result sheets privately to the Graduate Services Office and not share them with other committee members. Exams are marked "High Pass," "Pass," "Low Pass," and "Fail."

Passing all three exams does not result in automatic admission to the Ph.D. program (Stage Two). This decision is made by faculty as a whole when they meet in late April or early May to review the performance of all students. This review covers coursework, teaching (if applicable), and exam results to assess each student's potential for doctoral studies. Students deemed by the faculty to be suitable for more advanced work will be admitted to the Ph.D. program (Stage Two).

After the faculty have reviewed the graduate students, the DGS notifies the students of the decision. The chair of the MA exam committee may then meet with each student to convey the gist of the examiners' comments orally or share the examiners' non-confidential comments.

A student who fails two exams will be dismissed from the program. A student who fails one exam will be allowed to retake it once. Failure a second time results in dismissal from the program. Passing the retaken exam would allow the student to exit the program with a terminal MA but not be admitted to the Stage Two.

IX. The Ph.D. program (Stage Two)

At the doctoral level (Stage Two), the required eight courses are distributed as follows:

2 CWL core courses (CWL 551, 561, 571, 581, 582)

1 or 2 courses in the major literature

1 or 2 courses in the first minor literature

1 or 2 courses in the second minor literature

1 or 2 courses in one of the above categories or in a related field

By the time coursework has been completed and before the prelims are taken, the student must have also completed any coursework or summer programs necessary to satisfy the research language requirement.

X. The Preliminary Examinations (Prelims)

The written prelims must be taken no later than April during the student's fourth year (eighth semester) in the program. The oral exam should be scheduled within two weeks after the written exams but no later than mid-May.

The prelims committee consists of four members. *The committee chair must be a core CWL faculty member*, normally the professor who will become the dissertation director. The exams consist of:

- Second minor literature exam, or whichever literature that was not tested at the MA level (4 hours), consisting of an essay and a close reading of a passage quoted in the original language. The examiner will provide two unidentified passages from which the student chooses one to identify and explicate. The exam is based on a reading list of at least twenty primary texts.
- Dissertation field exam (4 hours), consisting of four questions, each written by a member of the preliminary exams committee. The questions are based on the dissertation proposal and a bibliography. Examiners send their questions to the chair of the committee, who assembles the exam. The student answers two of the four questions in an essay of not less than five pages each. See separate instructions sheet.
- Oral exam (2 hours) covering the written exams and the dissertation proposal.

All reading lists must be developed in consultation with the examiner and approved by the DGS.

A student who fails two of the three exams (written and oral) will be dismissed from the program. A student who fails one exam will be allowed to retake it once. Failure a second time results in dismissal from the program.

XI. The Dissertation Proposal

The Dissertation Field exam and the oral exam are based on a dissertation proposal and a reading list. At the end of their third year in the program, students should begin developing a dissertation proposal in close consultation with the dissertation director, so that it is ready to submit to the prelims committee by the end of the fall semester of the fourth year.

Roughly fifteen-pages long, the proposal should state the research questions, the tentative argument of the dissertation, situate the project in relation to existing scholarship, explain the dissertation's contribution to the field, identify and justify the corpus of primary texts, describe and justify the analytical approach or method, and provide a chapter-by-chapter summary.

The proposal should be accompanied by a bibliography of at least fifty sources, including primary texts, scholarship in the field, and relevant theoretical works. The bibliography serves as the reading list for the dissertation field exam.

XII. The Dissertation (Stage Three)

The student who passes the prelims reaches the dissertation stage and becomes a "doctoral candidate" (aka, All-But-Dissertation, or ABD). At this point, the dissertation director replaces the DGS as the student's official advisor. However, the student should continue to meet with the DGS and the Head as before, both for advice and to discuss funding, fellowship nominations, job prospects, search strategies, and other aspects of professionalization.

The dissertation committee consists of four or five members. In most cases, the preliminary exams committee becomes the dissertation committee. However, these are two separate committees, and members can be substituted or added to the dissertation committee. Faculty at other universities with appropriate expertise not available at UIUC may be invited to join the prelim and dissertation committees with the approval of the committee chair, the DGS, and the Head.

The chair of the dissertation committee and the student's advisor must be a core CWL faculty member. Normally, the chair also serves as the dissertation director. However, in rare cases, with the approval of the committee chair, the DGS, and the Head, the dissertation director may be a faculty member in another UIUC department but not at another university. In such cases, the dissertation director serves as the supervisor of research, but for administrative purposes the student's official advisor remains the chair of the committee.

Doctoral candidates must register for eight credit hours of CWL 599 each semester with the chair of the dissertation committee (not the supervisor of research, if different). The Chair enters a grade of Satisfactory (S) or Unsatisfactory (U) at the end of each semester.

Once the dissertation has been cleared by the dissertation director (and the committee chair, if different), the candidate distributes it to the committee members at least one month before the date of the oral exam (dissertation defense).

XIII. Dissertation Defense

The dissertation defense is a two-hour oral exam that is open to the public, but the committee deliberates in private before and after the exam. The candidate may be asked to give a fifteen-minute overview of the dissertation, followed by questions from the committee. At the end of the defense, the committee selects one of three options: "Pass with no revisions," "Pass with revisions," and "Fail." Revisions must be approved by the committee before the dissertation can be deposited. The deposit is the final requirement for the award of the Ph.D. degree. A candidate who fails the defense may be allowed to repeat it once.

XIV. Time to Degree

MA requirements are expected to be completed within two years of admission, with exams taken no later than March of the student's fourth semester in the program. Prelims are taken no later than the fourth year. The dissertation defense is expected to take place at the end of the sixth year. See Graduate College policies for extenuating circumstances that may allow for modifications to the time-to-degree policy.