

Instructions for Examiners (Prelim Exams in Comparative Literature)

In CWL (Comparative and World Literature), our students take exams at the end of their fourth year, consisting of Preliminary Exams that are written, and a Dissertation Prospectus (written) and Prospectus Defense that is oral. The exam is to consist of 4 questions, each written by one member of exam committee. Each question should address the dissertation project broadly, so the student will draw on multiple languages and cultural traditions in answering. (In words, it should *not* be the case that the French professor writes a question about French literature, the Japanese professor asks one about the Japanese tradition, and so on.) The Chair of the exam committee collects the questions from the three other examiners and assembles the exam. The student chooses only two questions, answering each of them in an essay of approximately 5-10 double spaced pages. In addition, there is a second written exam on the student's second minor literature, which should be written by the committee member from that area, but read and evaluated, as best as possible, by the entire committee. Exams are graded **high pass, pass, low pass, or fail**. The Committee Chair will try, as much as possible, to reach a consensus, if at all possible, for each portion of the exam, and will communicate the results of the exams to the DGS, the student and the rest of the committee within two weeks.

The prelims consist of:

1. Take-home exam on the dissertation field, including secondary sources, and related critical theory (approximately 50 titles). The exam is to consist of 4 questions, each written by one member of exam committee, each question addressing the dissertation broadly, so the student will draw on multiple languages and cultural traditions in answering. The Chair of the exam committee collects the questions from the three other examiners and assembles the exam. The student chooses only two questions, answering each of them in an essay of approximately 5-10 double spaced pages. Graduate Services will email the exam to the student as close to 9 AM as feasible, and the answers are due by 5:00 PM of the same day.
2. A period exam in the second minor literature (2 hours in length, to be completed in graduate student services in FLB), based on a reading list of 15-20 works. The exam consists of a passage in the original language, chosen by the examiner from any single work on the reading list, which the student explicates in no less than four double-spaced pages. The passage can be in the form of a short poem or a prose passage of about 500-700 words, and it should be sufficiently rich to allow for a nuanced analysis that draws out not only the specific features of the passage and the work to which it belongs, but also general characteristics of the period and the literary or cultural tradition in question, showing "the universe in a grain of sand."

The Prospectus Defense is typically scheduled within a month of the completion of the Prelims, and covers: (1) any areas from the written exam that need to be addressed, and (2) discussion of the student's dissertation prospectus (10-15 pp. in length), which should be received by the committee at least two weeks prior to the defense.