

**Comprehensive Examination & Ph.D. Qualifying Procedure**  
**The Program in Comparative Literature**  
**The University of Texas at Austin**

**INTRODUCTION**

Students in the Ph.D. program in Comparative Literature should begin the procedure to apply for Ph.D. Candidacy with the Graduate School as they near completion of their coursework. They must also have passed the Qualifying Examination and fulfilled area requirements for coursework.

In addition to completing all coursework, students must do four things to qualify for Ph.D. Candidacy:

1. Satisfy all foreign language requirements.
2. Organize and pass a Comprehensive Examination.
3. Write and present a Dissertation Prospectus.
4. Organize a Ph.D. Committee and submit the online application required by the Graduate School.

Each of these activities has its own purpose in preparing the student to undertake a dissertation and eventually to interview for academic positions.

*Students may not take the CE with incompletes from prior semesters on their academic record, unless those incompletes are permanent (e.g., cannot be completed and are not intended to fill any Ph.D. requirements).*

**REQUIREMENTS SCHEDULE**

***Timeline for Students Entering with BA. These students are expected to take the CE in the semester they complete 54 graduate hours or early in the next long semester at the latest.***

1<sup>st</sup> Year

- Fall Semester: CL 180K Proseminar + 9 hours (organized courses) = 10 hours
- Spring Semester: CL 385 Theory + 6 hours (organized courses) = 9 hours

2<sup>nd</sup> Year

- Fall Semester: CL 390 Theory + 6 hours (organized courses) = 9 hours
- **January: Qualifying Examination**
- Spring Semester: 9 hours (organized courses)
- **End of semester: submit Master's Thesis or Report (optional for Ph.D. students)**

3<sup>rd</sup> Year

- Fall Semester: 9 hours (organized courses)
- Spring Semester: 9 hours (usually organized courses)
- **End of semester: early Comprehensive Examination Date**

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Year

- Fall Semester: 9 hours (usually a mix of organized courses and conference courses)  
**End of semester: late Comprehensive Examination Date**
- Spring Semester: 9 hours (may be conference courses)  
**End of semester: Prospectus Presentation**

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Year

- Fall Semester: C L \_99R (one semester only)
- Spring Semester: C L \_399W (all subsequent semesters)

**\*NOTE:** Any substantial delays in progress may cause the student to exhaust his or her eligibility for most categories of financial support before completion of the dissertation.

***Timeline for Students Entering with MA. These students are expected to take the CE within one calendar year of passing the Qualifying Examination.***

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Year

- Fall Semester: CL 180K Proseminar + 9 hours (organized courses) = 10 hours
- Spring Semester: CL 385 Theory + 6 hours (organized courses) = 9 hours

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Year

- Fall Semester: CL 390 Theory + 6 hours (organized courses) = 9 hours  
January: Qualifying Examination
- Spring Semester: 9 hours (usually organized courses)  
End of semester: submit Master's Thesis or Report (optional for Ph.D. students)  
End of semester: early Comprehensive Examination date

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Year

- Fall Semester: 9 hours (may be conference courses)  
End of semester: late Comprehensive Examination Date
- Spring Semester: 9 hours (may be conference courses)  
End of semester: Prospectus Presentation

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Year

- Fall Semester: C L \_99R (one semester only)
- Spring Semester: C L \_399W (all subsequent semesters)

**\*NOTE:** this schedule presumes a strong MA in a relevant field (so that approximately 6 hours of coursework can be counted towards the UT Ph.D.), and two foreign languages in place. Students who enter without this background should follow the BA schedule above.

**\*NOTE:** For all students who enter the program with an MA already in place, completion of a second MA in the Program in Comparative Literature en route to the Ph.D. is optional.

*This schedule will allow most students to complete their Ph.D. dissertations within the normal maximum of 5-6 years of funding provided by most UT sources. Whether funded or not, students who do not follow this general pattern or who accumulate more class hours than are required for any degree program in the Graduate School (particularly in Conference Courses) run the risk of being considered "not in good standing," which may affect their status for certain grant competitions (e.g., professional development awards, Continuing University Fellowships), or for student loan eligibility.*

### **COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**

The Comprehensive Examination is to be taken when Ph.D. coursework is complete and may be taken in a semester when final requirements are being completed. In order to file for candidacy, all requirements, including language requirements, must already have been completed.

#### **CE is based on:**

1. A reading list comprising 3-4 areas compiled by students in consultation with their committee and the graduate advisor, which will form the basis for future teaching and research.
2. Demonstration of knowledge of the contexts and the relevant traditions (especially major critical literature and approaches) involved.

#### **CE will:**

1. Ascertain whether students possess the breadth of knowledge (outside the dissertation specialization) appropriate to a beginning assistant professor in an academic department.
2. Assess whether students have sufficient general knowledge of the chosen scholarly field to be able to develop a prospectus and write a dissertation.
3. Evaluate whether students have the breadth and depth of knowledge to participate in professional discussions, both in Comparative Literature and in a single national literature.

#### **Committee:**

1. 4 or 5 members of students' choosing in consultation with the graduate adviser or with the potential dissertation supervisor.
2. Usually are (but do not have to be) part of the dissertation committee
3. Supervisor *must* be a member of the Comparative Literature GSC.
4. Please note that the Graduate School requires that at least 3 members of the *dissertation committee* be members of the Comparative Literature GSC. Students should consider this requirement when choosing their CE committee members.

### **To schedule:**

1. Submit the "Comprehensive Examination Committee Form" (in CL office) with the signature of the committee supervisor to the Graduate Coordinator at least two weeks prior to the examination.
2. Submit a copy of the reading list to the Graduate Coordinator at least two weeks before the examination.
3. Ask the Graduate Coordinator to reserve a room for the exam after the approval/signature of the Graduate Adviser and the supervisor have been obtained.
4. Email a reminder to each committee member of the date, time, and location of the examination.

### **Reading Lists and Professional Profiles**

Students must compile the reading list in consultation with their chosen committee and secure their supervisor's approval for the list *at least one month* before the examination. Students then must circulate to the committee the final version of the reading list at least two weeks before the examination.

When assembling the examination reading list, students should identify at least three areas of literary study that together will constitute a viable professional profile for a beginning assistant professor.

Area criteria:

1. May each involve one or more languages
2. Must *together* represent works (both primary and secondary) drawn from at least *three different languages* selected by the student.

First area reading list:

1. Should be drawn from a single national literature whose broad contours students are expected to know (it will correspond to the expectations of an academic department in which the student might be able to fill a faculty position).
2. May be shaped so as to reflect the student's areas of concentration or special interests within the literature, but must still remain fairly wide in scope.
3. Is expected to have at least 40 titles (may have more depending on the genres and periods represented). Students are expected to prepare appropriate secondary scholarship for this list.

Two additional areas' reading lists:

1. Must be comparative in nature.
2. They may include texts drawn from any of the student's three languages.
3. Must include those languages not represented in the first list.
4. May involve both theoretical and literary texts and may focus on a period, genre, or theme.
5. Must remain independent (although the two lists may be related or complementary).

6. Are often representative of a particular genre or problem that cuts across more than one national literature.

Students are encouraged to consider presenting a *fourth area* on the examination, either a field within literary theory, or an extra-literary discipline (e.g., art history, musicology, folklore, cultural anthropology, linguistics). THE FOURTH AREA MAY NOT SUBSTITUTE FOR THE SECOND OR THIRD AREA, WITHOUT THE APPROVAL OF BOTH THE COMMITTEE SUPERVISOR AND THE GRADUATE ADVISER. If a fourth area is presented, the size and composition of the other three areas may be adjusted to compensate for the additional effort and preparation.

### **The Relationship between Areas and Languages**

1. An area of literary study may involve one or more languages. Students are responsible for developing a reading list comprising 3-4 areas, each of which covers an area of scholarly inquiry. Students are also responsible for ensuring that works *in the original* are included from *at least three different languages*.
2. The minimum total number of texts for the reading list is 100 texts. Although this number may be adjusted to reflect the areas chosen, the lists should include a balance of texts drawn from among students' three languages.
3. The three languages represented on the list may include the student's native language. Students may elect to include critical and theoretical texts in the original, but the expectation is that all primary texts will be included only in the original.

### **Format and Evaluation of the Examination**

The Comprehensive Examination is an approximately 2 hour oral exam conducted by student's committees and usually begins with a short statement by the student explaining the coherence of the reading list.

The CE Committee will:

1. Assess students as potential junior colleagues.
2. Look for evidence of student's abilities to discuss fundamental issues in literary and critical traditions, since such ability will qualify students to enter the critical debates of chosen specialties.

Examples of examiners' criteria:

1. Does the student have a solid command of the historical and literary-historical circumstances affecting her or his areas of study?
2. Does the student understand how theory and theoretical discussions affect these histories or construct alternative critical discourses?
3. Can the student state, exemplify, and defend a critical position adequately (even if that position is at odds with that of the examiner)?
4. Can the student establish thematic or morphological bridges between national literatures?

5. Can the student document and analyze affinities, correspondences, or direct influences?
6. Is the student able to refer accurately and with understanding to the texts studied?
7. Does the student speak of his or her fields in a spirit of keen and unprejudiced scholarly inquiry?

Students should expect to move beyond the list, to discuss it in the context of those texts with which a specialist in a national literature should be familiar. The ultimate goal of this examination is to assess whether students have sufficient general knowledge of the chosen scholarly field so as to be able to advance to the next stage, the development of a prospectus and the writing of a dissertation. Like an academic job interview, the examination assesses the student's achievements and forecasts future scholarly work and intellectual promise.

The Committee Supervisor should report the outcome of the examination on the Comprehensive Examination Results form to the Graduate Coordinator. Usual results are "pass with distinction," "pass," "fail, with recommendations," "fail."

### **AFTER THE CE: PROSPECTUS PRESENTATION**

Passing the CE starts students on a new "clock" for Ph.D. qualification. The exam sets the date for developing and presenting a dissertation prospectus and filing for Ph.D. candidacy. Students are expected to complete their Prospectus within one long semester of the date of the CE.

Students will not be expected to present a completed project, but should be able to explain the approach to the project being taken (in terms of existing scholarship and methodology, for example).

In order for students to proceed to candidacy, the committee will need to approve the prospectus and recommend to the Graduate Advisor that students be advanced. *Only after a successful presentation* can students expect a faculty member to "sign on" to a dissertation committee.

Within one week after the successful prospectus defense, students should confirm the dissertation committee's willingness to serve and apply for candidacy with the Graduate School.

### **Details:**

1. Presentation is open to the public.
2. The Program in Comparative Literature may circulate copies to students seeking examples.
3. The presentation is a work-in-progress seminar, intended to be diagnostic and constructive, and all present should be encouraged to question and comment in that vein.
4. The presentation is usually one hour in length.
5. The presentation will start with the student's introducing and outlining the dissertation orally (15-20 minutes), followed with a question-and-answer session.

### **Prospectus will consist of:**

1. 10 to 20 pages in length
2. A detailed working outline for the dissertation

3. An introduction that indicates:
  - a. The student's methodology or approach
  - b. A brief review of the literature
  - c. An explanation of why this project is significant
  - d. A description of the materials and problems to be discussed and the kind of conclusions expected
4. Brief descriptions of each chapter
5. A core bibliography of both primary and secondary works.

**Prospectus will:**

1. Represent the student's abilities to undertake work on a topic in depth within the context of existing scholarship and critical methodologies.
2. Demonstrate a student's ability to apply a breadth of knowledge to a project leading to future scholarly and teaching specializations.
3. Be considered successful if the student can offer a coherent project focus and strategy for writing and can answer possible fundamental questions or objections to that strategy or focus.

**Prospectus goals:**

1. Solicit questions and ideas from all members of the audience to help students gauge the feasibility of the project, to gain information about sources and resources, to find problems in the intellectual strategy or the means of presentation of the topic early in the writing process
2. Aid students in formulating a plan of work and project model (which, may be modified later) that will enable a timely completion of the project
3. Allow *all* faculty on a dissertation committee, not just the director, to have input into the project's formulation
4. Allow faculty members to decide if they wish to be part of the student's dissertation committee
5. Create a pool of possible replacement committee members (since more faculty will be familiar with the work), should a committee member be unable to serve
6. Give students practice in presenting work orally, well in advance of needing to do so at professional interviews

**Other requirements:**

1. Contact the graduate coordinator with the date and time of presentation to reserve room.
2. Provide dissertation committee AND the graduate coordinator with a copy of the prospectus at least one week prior

**Choosing a dissertation committee**

The graduate school requires that committees contain 5 faculty members with a maximum of 6. The supervisor and at least 2 other members must be part of the Comparative Literature GSC. A sixth committee member is always possible (and may even be desirable, since a minimum of four members must be present at the defense). A co-supervisor (in the case of a dissertation advised by two faculty members) may be drawn from another program or even (though this is not recommended) another institution.

In the event that a member is drawn from another institution, delivery to Graduate School Degree Evaluators of a curriculum vita and a [letter stating the member's willingness to serve at no expense to the university](#) (.pdf) is required. Curriculum vitae and no-expense letters may be delivered to the Graduate School Degree Evaluators in person in Main Building 101; via campus mail at mail code G0400; or via fax at 512-475-8851. This statement is also found in .pdf form at the [Graduate School's website](#).

### **APPLYING TO CANDIDACY**

Admission to Ph.D. Candidacy requires the student to fill out a form online through the Office of Graduate Studies. The application requires a dissertation abstract (not to exceed 60 lines) and a list of committee members. Once completed, the forms will be routed electronically to the dissertation adviser(s), the GSC chair, and Graduate Adviser for approvals. A student may not register for dissertation hours (C L \_99R) until candidacy has been approved. If these forms are filed in the first week of a semester, the student can often make the add-drop deadline to convert conference course hours into dissertation hours. *This conversion must be completed by the official 12<sup>th</sup> class day and students should allow sufficient time for that process.* The presence of dissertation hours rather than conference courses on an academic record may be helpful in communicating to prospective employers and granting agencies that the project is substantially underway.

Once a dissertation candidate, the student must be continuously registered for dissertation hours during all subsequent long semesters until graduation. Moreover, candidacy is in effect only for three calendar years from the date of admission to candidacy. After that date, the Program must petition the Graduate School *every semester* for an extension of the dissertation due date. The Program will do so only with evidence of progress.

Committees may be changed with a [one-page form](#) and appropriate signatures as late as four weeks before a defense.

The dissertation defense may be scheduled no sooner than during the second semester after the student enters candidacy. The minimum doctoral hour registration requirement from OGS for graduation is C L \_99R and C L \_99W in two successive semesters. Note, too, that a dissertation can only be submitted during a semester in which the student is enrolled. Dissertations may be defended during the summer session providing that the student has registered for doctoral hours.

In order to schedule the defense, [the appropriate form](#) and an abstract must be filed at least two weeks in advance of the proposed date with OGS. Full instructions for filling out the form and deadlines can be found [here](#).

[Current formatting requirements](#) and a [template for the dissertation](#) are available online from the Graduate School.