

Instructions for Qualifying Exam in Comparative Literary Studies PhD

Exam Structure

Two hours should be allotted for the examination. The examination begins with an oral presentation by the student of approximately 10 minutes. This presentation will elucidate the student's driving questions. The presentation parameters can be determined at a meeting with the examination committee chairperson no less than two weeks prior to the exam date. Commonly, the three examiners will each take turns interviewing the candidate for approximately 20 minutes on any text or topic related to the examination lists or to the presentation. Finally, the exam will open up to **50 minutes** of collective conversation. However, the precise format of the examination is subject to the determination of the committee chair in consultation with the committee. Students can expect that questions will emphasize the teaching, research, and theory/methodology components of the exam with some degree of parity. For the majority of the exam, students can expect a ranging conversation on distinct topics; ideally, the exam will also include some explicit thought toward dissertation prospectus development.

The Qualifying Exam

The goal of the qualifying exam is to demonstrate your facility in a teaching field, a research field, and in a theoretical or topical disposition, as you begin to define these in relation to a possible dissertation project. It is designed to encourage you to elaborate positions and claims that reflect your most vital intellectual interests in one or two distinct fields of literary inquiry (whether national, regional or trans-regional), engaging with a theoretical or topical commitment conducive to scholarly conversation beyond that field.

Teaching Field (40 books)

Research Field (40 books)

Genres, Theories, and Methodologies (30 books)

Reading Lists

Students develop three reading lists in close consultation with their exam committee. These lists include a *teaching field* (40 texts), a *research field* (40 texts), and a *theory and Methodologies* (30 texts). A "text" usually refers to a book-length work (e.g. novel, collection of essays or stories, volume or selection of poems, academic monograph, or film). The students

should *begin* to discuss the rubrics for these three fields with *at least one* committee member no later than December 1 in FQ of the second year. The full committee of three faculty members should be selected and a first draft of the lists turned into the committee by **April 1 in WQ** of the second year. No later than **June 1 in SQ** of the second year, a final draft of the lists should be submitted along with a brief rationale (~750 words). At this time, the student should nominate one of the examiners as committee chair. Upon approval of the lists, student research interests on the department website will be changed to express the student's professional interests according to the list titles. An examination date will normally be set **during Reading Week of FQ of the student's third year and no later than Reading Week of the WQ of the student's third year.**

1. Teaching Field

A representative group of 40 canonical texts in the student's primary teaching "field." The field designation ought to encompass a significant area of expertise sought by universities and colleges. It might define a common historical field, such as "Early modern/Renaissance" or "Postcolonial Francophone Literature and Film," or it might encompass a broader historical frame such as "Transamerican Latinx Literature (origins to present)" or "Japanese Literature (origins to the present)." Most commonly, the list will reflect the major genres of literary and visual production (dramatic, narrative, poetic, critical, film). The field designation should be a relatively capacious and recognizable category, arrived at in close consultation with the committee in view of the student's intellectual interests and desired area of teaching expertise.

The program does not maintain an exhaustive list of fields or of texts regarded as representative within them; the shape of established fields changes over time and new fields continue to emerge or find recognition.

2. Research Field

The research field includes an original corpus of 40 texts (generally a mixture of primary and scholarly literature, with an emphasis on primary sources). The research field should outline a focused area of research that hopes to form the basis of a dissertation prospectus bibliography. The list may be organized around a specific historical criterion (e.g. literatures of the French Revolution); it might be composed around a topic (e.g. early modern fictions of Utopia); or it might represent a

specific genre and its context (e.g. East Asian speculative fiction, 1973-present, or interwar lyric poetry in Germany and France). **In all three cases, the student can emphasize a comparatist dimension, including more than one national literature or different geopolitical areas.** In general, the work of finding and selecting the corpus should involve a significant act of original assembly.

3. Genres, Theories and Topics (Developed in relation to the research field and/or as a second teaching field)

A group of 30 texts that represent a topical or theoretical approach related to the proposed research area. This open-ended component might include affect theory, theory of the novel, disability studies, poetics, animal studies, new philology, environmental studies, postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, theory of translation, feminist theory, and so on. In general, the theory/topic list ought not to be narrowly construed as a list of period-focused scholarship or criticism but should aim for an ambitious intellectual thread that is articulated across areas or periods. (For example, a student interested in the processes of 19th century U.S. settler-colonialism might be expected to link a few texts on this topic to theories and critiques of coloniality from the Transatlantic Renaissance to the era of decolonization).

Sample list trios from an Early Modern perspective:

Teaching Field: European drama, 1450-1650

Research Field: Theatrical representations of the body in Elizabethan and French neoclassic performance

Theories and Topics: Gender, queer, and/or disability studies.

Teaching Field: Renaissance/early modern literature, 1500-1650

Research Field: Sixteenth C intellectual texts and the genealogy of republicanism

Theories and Topics: Political theory or religious studies or media studies

Sample list trios from Modern/Contemporary Perspective:

Teaching Field: Multiethnic American Literatures, 1900-present

Research Field: Geopolitical Imaginaries in Latinx Literature since NAFTA (1990-2016)

Theories and Topics: Hemispheric Studies (origins to present)

Teaching Field: Transnational/Global Anglophone Literatures, 1880-1989

Research Field: Modernization and Decolonization in African Literature (1945-1989)

Theories and Topics: Postcolonial Studies, emphasis on Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Teaching Field: Modern and Contemporary Francophone Literature

Research Field: Autobiography and Autofiction in Francophone novels

Theories and Topics: Affect Studies

Teaching Field: 20th-21st Century Arabic Narrative

Research Field: Multilingual Arab Literatures

Theories and Topics: Translation Theory, transnational approaches to literary study

Teaching Field: Ancient Greek and Roman drama and its contemporary reception

Research Field: Ancient Greek Drama in North America, 1990-2020

Theories and Topics: Theories of translation; performance studies

Teaching Field: Ancient Greek and Roman Epic

Research Field: The reception of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 1600-2020

Theories and Topics: Animal, feminist, and queer studies

Teaching Field: Modern and Contemporary Sinophone Literature (1911-present)

Research Field: Language and literature reform pre-1949 OR Literary and intellectual debate in the post-Reform period OR Diasporic literary networks in the Sinophone world

Theories and Topics: Modernism, trauma studies OR theories of post-socialism, postmodernism OR Sinophone studies

Teaching Field: Modern and Contemporary Sinophone Cinema and Visual Culture

Research Field: Vernacular modernism in early Chinese cinema and visual culture OR nation, landscape, environment in post-reform visual culture

Theories and Topics: Film and media theory OR environmental humanities (possibly encompassing works from eco-media studies, landscape studies, geography)

Teaching Field: Transnational East Asian Literatures

Research Field: Japanese language literature in colonial-era Taiwan and Korea

Theories and Topics: Sinophone Studies and Postcolonial Studies

Teaching Field: East Asian Cinema and Visual Culture

Research Field: Soft power and post-war cinematic cultures in Japan and Korea

Theories and Topics: Film and media theory OR globalization theory OR popular culture