

GUIDE TO DOCTORAL STUDIES

PROGRAM IN COMPARATIVE LITERARY STUDIES

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Updated: December 2022

GENERAL INFORMATION:

The Graduate Program in Comparative Literary Studies at Northwestern provides students with rigorous training in a variety of literary traditions, critical theory, and the methodology of comparative literature.

All students admitted to the CLS Graduate Program at Northwestern have a “home” department. The purpose of placing students in a home department is twofold: the departments provide professional training and accreditation in widely recognized fields of scholarship, and they prepare comparative literature students for academic positions in these fields. Departments currently functioning as home departments for graduate students in CLS include: Asian Languages and Cultures, Classics, French and Italian, English, German, Slavic, Spanish and Portuguese, RTVF and Rhetoric and Public Culture.

The Program Director and the Director of Graduate Studies oversee the Graduate Program in Comparative Literary Studies. At the beginning of each year the Program Director names the Graduate Committee, which consists of the Program Director, the DGS and at least three additional members of the core faculty.

The graduate students elect a Representative to the Graduate Committee at the beginning of each academic year.

THE PH.D. PROGRAM:

Year 1: Your goal in the first year is to explore the range of options in literary study generally and the particular resources of the

Northwestern faculty as you approach the choice of your field of specialization. Specifically, you will take 3 courses each quarter, including the required theory sequence (COMP LIT 410, 411, 412). You are encouraged to start taking courses in your home department, in addition to courses in CLS.

In this first year, you should begin to work toward fulfilling the CLS Graduate Language Requirements. In consultation with the DGS, you will establish a plan for completing these requirements, which should be fulfilled by the end of your third year.

At the end of the year, you will undergo a First Year Review (lasting approximately 30-45 minutes).

Year 2: You are likely to be funded by a Graduate Assistantship beginning in your second year. As a graduate assistant, you hold an appointment in The Graduate School with duties assigned by the Department. In order to ease your workload, you will register for one unit of CLS 490 in the Fall, Winter, and Spring Quarters. Thus, your normal course load as a graduate assistant will consist of two courses in addition to CLS 490.

In September, you will complete the First-Year Theory Exam (written and oral). You will choose two lists on which to be examined. The examination lists are on the CLS Graduate Requirements website: <http://www.complit.northwestern.edu/graduate/requirements.html>.

During the second year, the student will select in consultation with the DGS a Qualifying

Exam committee consisting of three members of the graduate faculty, of whom at least two must be CLS faculty members. The QE committee will assist the student in the preparation of the exam lists.

Year 3: In the third year, you will fulfill the requirements necessary for advancement to candidacy, completing the Qualifying Exam no later than Winter Quarter. Also, you will work toward completing the dissertation proposal (prospectus), fulfill the language requirement, and give a public presentation of a comparative paper. Also, you will continue to serve as a graduate assistant and complete your coursework. Your dissertation proposal serves as the basis for your prospectus, in which both the structure and the general argument of the dissertation are made apparent. The prospectus is usually around 12-15 pages, along with a detailed bibliography.

To complete your prospectus, you will work in consultation with a dissertation committee of no less than three faculty members*. The chair of the committee must be CLS core faculty. If you wish to name a non-CLS faculty as the chair, you must seek approval from the DGS of CLS; in such cases, often a co-chair arrangement may be advisable.

*Please note, per TGS policy, a minimum of three individuals must serve on the prospectus committee. At least two members of this committee, including the chair, must be members of the Northwestern University Graduate Faculty.

Although the CLS program does not formally require the prospectus to be filed until the end of the fourth year (a requirement for satisfactory academic progress), students are strongly encouraged to complete it by the end of the summer of their third year.

TGS requires that all doctoral students advance to candidacy by the end of their third year.

Students not in candidacy at the beginning of their 4th year will immediately be placed on probation by TGS. This is a two-quarter grace period within which the student must complete all outstanding candidacy requirements. Anyone failing to do so will be excluded from TGS at the end of the probationary period, though the student can petition for an extension to the probation and for reconsideration of the exclusion decision (either option requires the program's support).

Year 4 and Beyond: Once you are admitted to candidacy and received approval of your prospectus by your faculty committee, your progress toward the degree will depend very much on your own pace and initiative.

You are expected to make significant progress toward completing your dissertation by the end of your fifth year. Beyond the fifth year, and to ensure that you are proceeding at an appropriate pace, it is vital that you work closely with your committee to set appropriate milestones during the writing phase of your dissertation.

PROGRAM MILESTONES:

First Year Review

The first year review is holistic rather than exam based. Taken during the spring quarter of the first-year, each student will meet with the DGS and Director to discuss a dossier that includes: course evaluations, a paper the student has written for a course, and a statement from the student (progress report). During or after the first-year review, the student will choose their first-year theory exam lists (2) and faculty examiners for each list. These lists and examiners are to be approved by the DGS.

First Year Theory Exam

Students complete the written and oral theory exam in September before the start of the

second-year. Students prepare for the exam through the theory course sequence (410, 411, 412).

The examination committee is composed of two faculty members, one for each of the lists. At least one member of the committee must be on the core faculty of CLS. Often, a faculty member from the home department (preferably also one who is CLS affiliated- or core faculty) is an especially appropriate second examiner. Students should meet with both faculty examiners to discuss which items from the respective lists might be exchanged or removed, receive suggestions for secondary readings, and any other feedback.

There are nine examination lists, most of which have 25 items:

1. Aesthetic and critical theory
2. Decolonial and postcolonial theory
3. Gender and sexuality studies
4. Nationalism and transnationalism
5. Phenomenology, structuralism, and deconstruction
6. Poetics
7. Psychoanalysis
8. Rhetoric, philology, and linguistics
9. Visual culture, sound studies, and media

Students choose two lists on which to be examined, typically selecting 20 of the 25 items on a given list. Students may substitute up to seven authors of their own choice, per list. (Please check each specific list for any explanatory headnotes). Students are free to choose or not to choose lists corresponding to the topics covered in CLS 410-412 in a given year.

The written exams are take-home. Students are given three days to submit their answers to the two questions. For example, for questions delivered to students on a Monday morning, exams must be returned by noon on Thursday. Each answer should be approximately 10

double-spaced pages.

The oral component will follow after the written exams are completed and the faculty examiners have had enough time to review. The student will meet with the members of the exam committee, collectively, to discuss the written portion of the exam. The exam committee members must write an assessment of the theory exam for the student's benefit. This assessment must be shared with the DGS.

Should a student fail the exam, the student should repeat the exam within three months. A DGS-designated third person must be present during the re-administered exam.

Qualifying Exam

New format (*required for students entering the program in fall 2020 or later; opt-in for students that entered the program in 2019 or earlier*): Qualifying exam no later than Winter Quarter of third year. During year two, students will select a committee of three members and will develop three distinctive lists in consultation with them; the QE exams consist of a written and oral portion organized using the three lists. The first list addresses the student's generally constructed teaching field. The second list addresses the student's specific area of expertise. The third list addresses the methodology or theoretical framework used by the student to engage with one or two sub-disciplines that are useful to the dissertation topic.

Old format (*for students that entered the program in 2019 or earlier and who do not choose to adopt the new format*): All students take an exam in their home department. Students need to consult with the DGS of their home department, as well as the DGS of CLS, about the scope and structure of the exam. The qualifying exam should be completed by the end of the third year. Students are admitted to candidacy after the qualifying exam and previous requirements are completed. At least one member of the

qualifying exam committee, and preferably the director, must be a CLS core faculty member. The home department will report the results of the exam to the DGS of CLS. A failed exam leads to the student's dismissal from the program. In extraordinary cases the student can appeal the dismissal and ask for a review by the Graduate Committee. **If a student has two home departments, the passing of one home department qualifying exam is needed to pass the qualifying exam milestone. The student still needs to complete the second home department exam.*

Public Presentation

Following the completion of the qualifying exam in the Winter Quarter of the third year and prior to advancing to candidacy, students will present a public paper related to their proposed dissertation project. This typically takes the form of an abbreviated presentation version of the dissertation prospectus. Students are expected to present in the Spring Quarter of the third year or Fall Quarter of the fourth year.

Language Requirement

CLS graduates should begin to work toward fulfilling the language requirement in their first year by creating a plan in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies. Students have to show proficiency in two languages other than their native language. A primary foreign language requires two levels of examination (reading and writing; advanced reading is needed for no-longer-spoken languages). This requirement is normally met through graduate level course work or TA-ship in a language course. A secondary language requires only a single level of examination; this requirement is met through a reading exam, administered by the language department.

Students should fulfill the language requirement by the end of their third year. An exception may be requested if a student requires language training resources beyond

those available at Northwestern. The student must (by the third year) request an extension in consultation with the DGS, and complete the examination no later than by the end of the fourth year.

For additional ways to fulfill the language requirement, please consult the Director of Graduate Studies.

The Prospectus

Before qualifying to write their dissertation, students are expected to develop a dissertation proposal of about 8-10 pages, in close consultation with a dissertation committee of no less than three faculty members*. The chair of the committee must be CLS core faculty. If a student wishes to name a non-CLS faculty as the chair, they must seek approval from the DGS of CLS; in such cases, often a co-chair arrangement may be advisable.

*Please note, per TGS policy, a minimum of three individuals must serve on the prospectus committee. At least two members of this committee, including the chair, must be members of the Northwestern University Graduate Faculty.

This proposal serves as the basis for the student's prospectus, in which both the structure and the general argument of the dissertation are made apparent. The prospectus is usually around 12-15 pages, along with a detailed bibliography. Although the CLS program does not formally require the prospectus to be filed until the end of the fourth year (a requirement for satisfactory academic progress), students are strongly encouraged to complete it by the end of the summer of their third year.

The prospectus is submitted to the student's faculty committee for review and approval. The approved prospectus should be sent to the CLS administrator for the student's file.

Completion

Your last examination as a degree candidate will be the dissertation defense. The PhD final exam must be approved by a faculty committee. A minimum of three faculty members must serve on the dissertation committee. The chair of the committee must be CLS core faculty. If a student wishes to name a non-CLS faculty as the chair, they must seek approval from the DGS of CLS; in such cases, often a co-chair arrangement may be advisable.

*Please note, per TGS policy, a minimum of three individuals must serve on the dissertation committee. At least two members of this committee, including the chair, must be members of the Northwestern University Graduate Faculty.

After this examination, your committee will comment on your dissertation, assessing in reasonable detail its strengths and weaknesses, making recommendations concerning possible publication, and, of most immediate concern, recommending whatever final editing needs to be done prior to submission of the dissertation to TGS. In either case, submission of the fully edited dissertation to TGS is the final requirement that must be fulfilled before you are eligible to graduate. Though specific dates will vary from year to year, you should be prepared to submit the finalized dissertation to The Graduate School at least six weeks prior to the graduation date in question. Spring graduation (including the hooding ceremony) is held in mid-June, while Fall degrees are awarded at the end of December. Students earning a fall degree may walk in the ceremony the following spring if they so desire.

The Graduate School requires that PhD students complete all degree requirements including the defense before the end of the 9th year of study.

Funding

University Fellowships and Graduate Assistantships are available only to students admitted to the doctoral program. CLS provides support through the fifth year for every doctoral student who has been continued into the second year and who remains in good standing in subsequent years. Additionally, funding will be provided in your first five summers, under the same restrictions as are listed above. Funding between the second and fourth years will take the form of Graduate Assistantships, while your fifth year is covered by a University Fellowship (as in your first year). This leaves you free of department responsibilities in the fifth year, affording you more time to dedicate to the writing of your dissertation.

Though students are guaranteed a second year of fellowship, they are also required to apply for external grants no later than the fourth year of their PhD program. This requirement applies to all students who receive more than two years of guaranteed University appropriated funding (as opposed to funding from sponsored projects).

Graduate Assistantships: Being a Teaching or Research Assistant

Teaching is an essential element of the education and training of Ph.D. students in CLS. The typical teaching assignment begins in the fall quarter of the student's second year and extends through the spring quarter of their fourth year. CLS is committed to assigning no more than two quarters of TA-ships per year for a total of six teaching quarters over three years, with the additional provision that the two assignments cannot be concurrent during the same quarter. (Please note that teaching assignments and timing can vary if students get internal or external fellowships.)

CLS assigns TA-ships at the end of each year with the goal of creating the best teaching

portfolio for each student, though given the composite structure of the program, we cannot guarantee teaching assignments in the student's home department. Students generally TA for language courses or literature/culture lecture courses (GA) or serve as research assistants (RA), though in exceptional cases, advanced students may be allowed to teach a course of their own design. Depending on their area of study, CLS encourages some students to acquire expert training in foreign language pedagogy in their respective home departments focused on basic principles of second language acquisition and language teaching methodology.

While it is the responsibility of the professor of instruction to outline expectations and responsibilities for TA and RA appointments, all parties should pay careful attention to TGS ["Guidelines and Best Practices for Graduate and Teaching Assistantships."](#) CLS is committed to offering quarterly pedagogical workshops on topics selected based on the needs and interests of current students.

Good Standing and Evaluations

Students' funding depends on maintaining "good academic standing," as defined by TGS: Students cannot carry more than 2 incompletes in any given quarter and must clear all incompletes before they can advance to candidacy. They must advance to candidacy no later than the end of their 3rd year.

The DGS evaluates students' progress every year. The first-year review (Spring of first-year), first-year theory exam (September of second-year), the home department exam (typically in the third year) and the public presentation of a comparative paper (in the third year) are all occasions for evaluating students' performance. In all other years, students are required to fill out a progress report (available online) and have them approved and signed by their advisor and the DGS.

OTHER CLS GRADUATE PROGRAMS:

Double Degree

"Co-tutelle de thèse" is an ad hoc agreement that allows outstanding students with specific interests and needs to have their PhD dissertation supervised by scholars from both their home institution and a French or German university. The student then receives a "doctorat" from the French or German university in addition to their Ph.D. from Northwestern.

BA/MA Program

The program in Comparative Literary Studies offers a combined BA/MA program in Comparative Literature for outstanding undergraduate majors. Exceptional undergraduates may be able to earn both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in less than the usual period of time.

CLS majors interested in pursuing this option are encouraged to discuss it with the Director of Undergraduate Studies before applying. In order to apply, students submit a statement of purpose explaining their interest in this option and proposed course of study. Students are selected on the basis of the statement of purpose, overall performance in CLS courses, and the recommendation of two CLS faculty members. The selection by the program is a recommendation to the Graduate School for admission. Students are officially admitted to the Graduate School only after their credentials have been thoroughly reviewed and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

CLS offers two paths to receive the MA. Either students may complete the degree requirements for the bachelor's and master's degree within four years, or they can complete the bachelor's and master's degrees in an extra fifth year. Students can receive their undergraduate degree before completing their

master's degree but cannot receive the master's degree ahead of their bachelor's degree.

Neither the Program in Comparative Literary Studies, Weinberg College, nor The Graduate School can guarantee funding for the fifth year. Students are encouraged to apply for outside funding.

Students who decide to pursue a concurrent BA/MA must enroll in the senior seminar in their junior year in order to free the senior year for writing the MA thesis. Neither the senior seminar paper, nor the expanded Honors Thesis can replace the Master's Thesis. All students receiving a BA/MA in CLS must write both the senior seminar paper and a Master's thesis. Those students who wish to pursue both degrees within four-years must write their senior seminar paper in the junior year and an MA thesis in the senior year. To be eligible for enrollment in the senior seminar in the junior year, students need to have completed all other CLS undergraduate course requirements by the end of the sophomore year. Students who pursue the five-year option need to apply to the BA/MA program no later than winter quarter of the junior year.

Requirements for the BA/MA program

Nine graduate courses, taken in CLS, the student's first and/or second literature, and/or another discipline (such as Philosophy, Film Studies) according to the student's interests, and in consultation with the DGS. One of the nine courses must be CLS 410. Students can also take one unit of 499 with the permission of the DGS. The general guidelines for the Master's thesis are the same as for the Honors thesis except for length. The Master's thesis can be a substantial development of the student's Honor's thesis (or senior essay, if the student did not do Honors in CLS). We suggest a minimum of 50 pages, but length should be determined in consultation with the thesis director and the chair or DGS of CLS.

The student's faculty advisor and CLS core faculty read and evaluate the thesis.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS:

The Presidential Fellowship

On an annual basis, the Graduate School conducts a university-wide competition open only to students who are (or will be in the following year) in candidacy for the Presidential Fellowship, the most prestigious graduate award given at Northwestern.

The Department nominates one student each year for the award, based on the applications and supporting letters submitted to the Graduate Committee. Applications for the Presidential Fellowship must be submitted to your committee by the beginning of the academic year in the fall quarter.

Over the summer, students should work with their committees on their applications, which must be submitted to the DGS Graduate Committee for review. The Graduate Committee may only nominate one student for the award, and the Graduate Committee must select the department's official nominee.

The Comparative Literary Studies Best Paper Award

Each year CLS awards a prize for best the best seminar paper. All students in coursework are eligible and encouraged to submit a paper. The submission deadline is May 15. The Graduate Committee reviews the submissions and announces the winner and awards the prize.

The Comparative Literary Studies Outstanding Dissertation Award

CLS awards an Outstanding Dissertation award. Eligible students may be nominated by the chair or another member of the dissertation committee, but self-nominations are not accepted. The Graduate Committee reviews the nominations and awards the prize.

The Comparative Literary Studies Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award

Each year CLS awards a prize to an outstanding teaching assistant. Eligible

students may be nominated by undergraduates from their sections or the lead professor for the course; self-nominations are not accepted. The Graduate Committee reviews the nominations and awards the prize.

NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT:

Northwestern University does not discriminate or permit discrimination by any member of its community against any individual on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship status, veteran status, genetic information, reproductive health decision making, or any other classification protected by law in matters of admissions, employment, housing, or services or in the educational programs or activities it operates. Harassment, whether verbal, physical, or visual, that is based on any of these characteristics is a form of discrimination. Further prohibited by law is discrimination against any employee and/or job applicant who chooses to inquire about, discuss, or disclose their own compensation or the compensation of another employee or applicant.

Northwestern University complies with federal and state laws that prohibit discrimination based on the protected categories listed above, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX requires educational institutions, such as Northwestern, to prohibit discrimination based on sex (including sexual harassment) in the University's educational programs and activities, including in matters of employment and admissions. In addition, Northwestern provides reasonable accommodations to qualified applicants, students, and employees with disabilities and to individuals who are pregnant.

Any alleged violations of this policy or questions with respect to nondiscrimination or reasonable accommodations should be directed to Northwestern's Office of Equity, 1800 Sherman Avenue, Suite 4-500, Evanston, Illinois 60208, 847-467-6165, equity@northwestern.edu.

Questions specific to sex discrimination (including sexual misconduct and sexual harassment) should be directed to Northwestern's Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equity, 1800 Sherman Avenue, Suite 4-500, Evanston, Illinois 60208, 847-467-6165, TitleIXCoordinator@northwestern.edu.

A person may also file a complaint with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights regarding an alleged violation of Title IX by visiting www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html or calling 800-421-3481. Inquiries about the application of Title IX to Northwestern may be referred to Northwestern's Title IX Coordinator, the United States Department of Education's Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, or both.