

Graduate Handbook for students in the Program in Comparative Literature & Literary Theory at the University of Pennsylvania

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Graduate Handbook for Students in the Program in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory

This handbook is an introduction to the Graduate Program in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Pennsylvania and a gathering of procedural regulations and miscellaneous information regarding studies in the Program. For official amplification, clarification, and possible revisions, consult the Program's Chair, members of its Executive Committee and/or individual faculty advisers.

INTRODUCTION

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The Program in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at Penn offers the study of literature as artistic production and cultural institution across a diversity of languages and traditions. As its name suggests, the Program features literary theory as a core component of the curriculum, thereby encouraging a broad interdisciplinary range of research across philosophy and aesthetics, material and intellectual history, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and other relevant fields. The Program at Penn gives its students the opportunity to design courses of study that reflect their individual interests in light of emerging fields of research within literary and cultural studies and related disciplines. Its degree requirements have been designed to insure that its students are well prepared for academic careers and fully responsive to the intellectual expansions and changes within their chosen disciplines.

GENERAL DESIGN OF THE PROGRAM

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The main components of the Program are as follows:

a. **Literary Theory**

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Students in the Program are expected to become aware of the major questions informing current theoretical discussions in literary and cultural studies, and as their studies progress, to become conversant with particular intellectual formations, key concepts, and critical junctures. There are particular strengths in the teaching of theory at Penn, including postcolonial theory and globalization studies, studies in race and class, diaspora studies, feminist theory, queer theory, gender studies, narratology, poststructuralism and postmodernist thought, semiotics, psychoanalysis, film studies, and the history of material texts. Two required courses in theory taken during the first year of study in the Program lead to the [MA exam](#) at the end of the year. The study of theory during the first year has a strong historical component, so that students will appreciate current critical discourses by also understanding how certain concepts have been shaped and transformed through debates in philosophy, aesthetics, political and social thought, and theories of knowledge. [\[click here to see MA the exam reading list\]](#)

b. **Principal Literature**

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All students in the Program must acquire a strong knowledge of at least one national literature, which is understood to include any linguistically, historically, or culturally coherent literary tradition, as well as national literary traditions. Students organize their studies of the principal literature according to a diachronic model, while also bringing their developing theoretical and field interests to bear on the material. In view of the current organization of academic departments, it is necessary that graduates in comparative literary studies be very well prepared in an individual linguistic/national tradition, and our program is designed to insure this level of expertise. Penn has extensive course offerings in English, American, French, Peninsular Spanish, Latin American, Italian, German, and

Slavic literatures, as well as graduate programs in Classical, Middle Eastern, East Asian, and South Asian languages.

c. **Special Field**

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The third component of the Program is the special field, an area of special interest that students develop which is intended to allow students to draw together their theoretical, historical, and disciplinary interests towards a formulation of research objectives. It can represent a thematic, disciplinary, critical, or historical specialization that can draw on the principal literature but also incorporate other interests. The special field may involve the study of a second linguistic/literary tradition; a specific literary-historical field, literary movement or genre; a related discipline or field of production (such as film, linguistics, philosophy, political thought); or any other well-defined area of study (e.g., medieval studies, modern European intellectual history, popular culture, art history. This last can also include particular areas of critical theory, such as Marxist thought, gender theory, or psychoanalysis. Reading in the special field will provide the context for work on the dissertation, and leads to the composition of a field exam and its rationale, which is the exam to establish the grounds for dissertation research.

ADMISSIONS [table of contents](#) | [close window](#)

To apply to the program in Comparative Literature use the [online form](#) or request a [paper application](#). For further general information regarding graduate studies at the University, consult the Graduate Admissions catalog. **Please note that the application deadline for the fall semester is DECEMBER 15.**

Only Ph.D. candidates can be admitted to the Program. A terminal M.A. degree will be awarded to qualifying students who transfer to another university or who, for whatever reason, cannot continue their course of study. Admissions are only for the fall semester. No student will be admitted to begin in the spring semester. Students who enter the Program with an M.A. from another university must fulfill all the Program's requirements, including the mandatory course in literary theory, but are eligible for transfer credits (see below). All students, upon admission, are expected to have proficiency in English and **at least one other language** relevant to their course of study. Non-native speakers are required to submit their scores on the TOEFL examination to demonstrate their competence to engage in graduate studies conducted in the English language. Non-native speakers who have passed courses at English-language universities need not take the TOEFL exam again. Applicants should take the GRE exams in time for the scores to reach the Program office by December 15. **A subject test is not required.**

With their application they should submit **a sample of their critical writing** no more than 30 pages long.

FELLOWSHIPS

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All applicants will automatically be considered for fellowship awards. No special forms need be submitted. The Program supports all students in good standing for five years. Successful applicants will be awarded either the Benjamin Franklin fellowship or the Fontaine Fellowship (for outstanding minority students). These prestigious fellowships pay tuition and a sizeable stipend (\$23,700 for 2012-2013) for five years. Years two and three are teaching fellowship years. First year students without an M.A. normally will not be expected to teach. In subsequent years, support will take the form of a TF in one of the literature departments or the Women's Studies Program. A variable number of research assistantships (RA's) are also available. Both TF's and RA's provide tuition and a stipend. Advanced students will be eligible to be considered for

summer teaching in the College of General Studies. A number of agencies in this country and abroad offer financial aid and fellowships for students doing dissertation research in Europe.

ADVISING

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The Chair is principal adviser during the student's first year in the Program. The Chair appoints a second adviser on the basis of the student's interests. At the outset of the second year, the student chooses, in consultation with the Chair, a committee of one principal and two secondary advisers. These may or may not be changed as the student approaches the dissertation stage. Each semester, the student's choice of courses must be discussed with his or her principal adviser, who must indicate approval by signing the student's course record form. Full time students are expected to take four courses per semester. Students receiving a TF or RA take three courses per semester.

TRANSFER OF CREDIT

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Students may request the transfer of up to four credits toward the M.A. and up to eight credits toward the Ph.D. for work done at another university. After the student has completed at least six courses in the Program, credit transfers are submitted by the Chair to the Dean of the Graduate School for approval.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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- I. Master of Arts Degree - 8 course units required, distributed as follows:
 - A. Four courses from the Comp. Lit. offerings, including 501 and 999.040 Reading for the M.A. Exam.
 - B. Three courses in a national literature, appropriately balanced with regard to periods and genres.
 - C. One course in an area of special interest.
Of these eight courses, only one may be an independent study (998 or 999).
- II. Doctor of Philosophy Degree - 12 course units beyond those required for the M.A., distributed as follows:
 - A. Five courses from the Comp. Lit. offerings, including 999.041 Reading for the 50-Book Exam, 999.042 Reading for the Field Exam, and 999.043 Dissertation Proposal.
 - B. Four courses in the national literature, appropriately balanced with regard to periods and genres.
 - C. Three courses in an area of special interest.
Of these twelve courses, a maximum of two may be taken as independent studies (998 or 999).

M.A. EXAMINATION

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A 2-hour oral exam must be taken after one year of study, either in late spring or early fall. The exam tests the student's knowledge of a selected [list of critical and theoretical texts](#) and his or her understanding of the central topics and issues in the history of Western literary theory. The current lot of texts is always available in the Comp. Lit. office. The examining committee consists of three members, one of whom must be either the Program's Chair or the teacher of Comp. Lit. 501. The other two are selected by the student, subject to the Chair's approval, from the Graduate Group. A satisfactory performance on the examination is a Requirement for an M.A.

degree in the Program. A superior performance is a requirement for continuation in the Program as a Ph.D. candidate. The exam is graded Pass/Fail. A student who fails the examination may take it again the following semester but it cannot be taken more than twice.

M.A. PAPER

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In order to fulfill the research requirement of the Graduate School, each student must submit an M.A. paper. This will normally be an approximately 20-page research paper, with bibliography, written in the context of a graduate course and, if necessary, revised for this occasion. The master's paper must be approved by the Chair.

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

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To receive an M.A. degree, the student must demonstrate proficiency in at least one non-native language relevant to his or her program and mastery of the language of the national literature specialization. To receive a Ph.D., the student must demonstrate proficiency in **at least two non-native languages** relevant to his or her program (one of which must be 'modern') and mastery of the language of the national literature specialization. Proficiency is defined as the ability to conduct research on literary and critical texts in that language. Mastery is defined as the ability to teach, as well as to conduct research on, literary and critical texts in that language, and to write in it. Linguistic competence in a foreign language is demonstrated by (a) the level of the student's performance in at least two graduate literature courses taught in that language and/or (b) his or her score (at least 650) on the Princeton ETS examination. In the case of languages for which there is no ETS examination, an examination will be prepared and evaluated by a relevant department of the University. In all unusual cases, the Chair of the Program will determine whether the student is to be considered as having fulfilled the appropriate language requirements.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS FOR THE PH.D

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The student is expected to take two comprehensive examinations: (a) one in the national literature in which he or she is specializing and (b) one dealing with the student's area of special interest. The recommended time to schedule the exams is indicated below.

A. National Literature Exam

A two-hour oral examination, graded Pass/Fail, based on a list of fifty texts in the national literature. The list is prepared by the student in consultation with the three members of the examination committee and must be approved by the Program Chair. Examiners are selected by the student, subject to the Chair's approval. The list should be designed to embrace the range of the national literature and be balanced both chronologically and in respect to genres.

Each of the fifty items should be a work (or related collection of works) generally held to be important and durable. The list should be arranged chronologically and should contain integral works, not excerpts. In the case of poetry sequences or standard collections of an author's major poems, the list should include a selection of at least twelve poems that the student has studied in greatest depth..

B. Field Exam

A four-hour written examination, graded Pass/Fail, based on a list of 25-30 primary and secondary texts relevant to the likely field of the student's dissertation research. The list is drawn up in consultation with the student's adviser, who normally chairs the 3-person

examination committee. Other examiners are chosen by the student in consultation with the Chair. The field list must be accompanied by a 3-page rationale explaining the choice of texts and must be approved by the Chair.

In the case of specializations in literatures or areas of study not represented by any member of the Graduate Group, faculty from other relevant graduate groups in the University will be asked to serve on the student's examination committee(s). A student who fails either examination may elect to take it a second time, normally three to four months later. No examination may be taken more than twice. A student who fails either examination more than once cannot continue in the Program.

PH.D. DISSERTATION

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A doctoral dissertation in the Program is expected to be a substantial work of original scholarship demonstrating literary scope and theoretical sophistication.

A. Dissertation Proposal

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The dissertation proposal should be about 8 pages long, double spaced, and include a selective bibliography. It must be submitted in first and final drafts. The first draft must be discussed thoroughly at an informal meeting with the student's dissertation director, the two other faculty members on the dissertation committee, and the Program Chair. Suggestions from this meeting should be incorporated into a final draft of the proposal, which must be signed on the first page by the dissertation director. This finished draft must be approved by the Program's Chair and Executive Committee. It is then circulated to all members of the Graduate Group for their information.

Proposals ought to set forth, as clearly and concisely as possible, some or all of the following:

1. Any background information pertinent to the subject;
2. A close exposition of the subject and its value within the field of study;
3. The proposed methodology to be adopted and a justification of its relevance to the subject;
4. Some notice of previous scholarship and of its relation of the proposed work;
5. Some ideas as to how the argument will be structured in the dissertation, with a tentative indication of the table of contents;
6. Any special research needs or likely research problems to be faced.

B. Completion of Dissertation

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In many cases the completed dissertation need not be longer than 150-200 pages. Three hundred pages should be the greatest anticipated length. The principal academic adviser of a Ph.D. candidate will direct his or her thesis research and supervise the writing of the dissertation. Other members of the dissertation committee may read preliminary drafts and suggest changes. In all cases the dissertation must be read and approved by the candidate's adviser in his or her capacity as first reader, while another member of the dissertation committee must serve as second reader.

When candidates are ready to have the final drafts of their dissertations typed, they should obtain from the Graduate Faculty Office a set of University of Pennsylvania rules

governing the form in which dissertations are submitted. **This is very important** for that office has in the past refused to accept theses with too narrow margins, incorrect pagination, no indexes, or other flaws, thus delaying the awarding of Ph.D. degrees. Doctoral candidates in the final stages of their dissertation writing should also be sure to consult the calendar published in the *Graduate Studies Bulletin* in order to know the various deadlines for applying for the degree, submitting finished dissertations to their first and second readers for their approval, and depositing the completed thesis at the Graduate Faculty Office. Either the candidate in person or his/her adviser should "deposit" the dissertation since it is not the responsibility of the Chair, any other faculty member, or of the secretarial staff to do this.

Students who have gone past five years on dissertation will be required to retake the dissertation prospectus exam (also known as the "final exam"). This exam will involve submitting an updated version of the prospectus to the student's committee; the committee must approve the new prospectus in order for the student to satisfy the recertification requirement.

Typical Program of Study for Students Entering with a B.A. First Year: 8 courses

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- **Fall semester:** Comp. Lit. 501, the basic course in the history of literary theory from Plato and Aristotle to the present.
- **Spring semester:** Comp. Lit. 999.040, a reading course to prepare for the M.A. exam. First year students form their own reading group(s) to study for this exam, meeting informally once a week to discuss texts on the M.A. list. Professors may on occasion be requested to join the group(s) to help out in the analysis of particular authors and issues.

April - May or September: M.A. exam, a 2-hour oral exam based on the M.A. [reading list](#). Subject to the Chair's approval, each student selects three examiners from the Graduate Group, one of whom must be the Chair or the teacher of Comp. Lit. 501.

Second Year: 6 courses

- **Fall semester:** Students should complete all requirements for the M.A., including the language requirement, by December at the latest. They submit their M.A. paper to the Chair.
- **Spring semester:** February 15, list due of 50 books on which the student's Ph.D. oral exam in the national literature is based. The list must be signed by the student's adviser and the chair of his or her examination committee. Students take an independent study (Comp. Lit. 999.041) to read for the 50-book exam.

April - May or September: national literature exam.

Third Year: 6 courses

- **Fall semester:** Students take an independent study (Comp. Lit. 999.042) to read in their field of special interest and to prepare their field list in consultation with their faculty adviser.
December 10 (or last day of classes): field list due, with its supporting rationale. The list must be signed by the student's adviser and the chair of his or her examination committee.

- **Spring semester:** Students take an independent study (Comp. Lit 999.043) to prepare a dissertation proposal.

April - May: Field Exam.

Fourth Year: Research in Europe possible (see below) but not mandatory.

- **Fall semester:**
 - **September 15:** first draft of Ph.D. dissertation proposal due.
 - **November 1:** final draft of dissertation proposal due.

Fifth Year: We encourage students to have completed a significant part of their thesis by November 1, when the job search becomes quite time-consuming. The dissertation should be completed by the end of the fifth year and the degree received in May.

Typical Program of Study for Students Entering with an M.A. First Year: 6 or 8 courses

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- **Fall semester:** Comp. Lit. 501
- **Spring semester:** Comp. Lit. 999.040 Reading for the M.A. Exam
- April - May or September:** M.A. exam.

Second year:

Assuming that the Student has 4 units of transfer credit, has passed the M.A. exam, and has submitted an acceptable M.A. paper, he or she may apply for the M.A. degree. Thereafter, the student may apply for an additional 4 units of transfer credit toward the Ph.D. These 8 units added to the 6 or 9 credits earned in the first year leave 4 or 6 additional courses to be taken in the second year.

- **Fall semester:**
 - **September 30:** 50-book list due.
 - Student takes Comp. Lit. 999.041, a reading course, to prepare for the 50-book exam.
 - **December 15-20 (at the latest):** national literature exam.
- **Spring semester:**
 - **February 15 - March 15:** field list due.
 - Students take Comp. Lit. 999.042, a reading course, to prepare the field list and study for the Field Exam under the guidance of the faculty adviser.
 - **April - May:** Field Exam.

Third Year: Research in Europe possible (see below) but not mandatory.

- **Fall semester:**
 - **September 15:** first draft of Ph.D. dissertation due.
 - **November 1:** final draft of dissertation proposal due.

Fourth Year:

We encourage students to have completed a significant part of their thesis by November 1, when the job search becomes quite time-consuming. The dissertation should be completed by spring of the fourth year and the degree conferred in May.

GOOD STANDING RULES

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In order to stay in good standing and hence be eligible for financial aid from the department, students must abide by the following rules on incompletes:

- No student may carry more than one incomplete past the following deadlines:
 - **Fall semester:** All course work must be completed and submitted to the professor by the first Friday of the first week of classes.
 - **Spring semester:** All course work must be completed and submitted to the professor by May 30.
- Work for any course in which an incomplete was received, whether the course was taken in the fall semester, the spring semester, or the summer session, must be completed and submitted to the professor by the first Friday of the subsequent fall semester.
- Any incomplete that has not been removed from a student's record according to the above timetable will remain on his or her record as a permanent I. An I does not count as credit toward a degree.

RELATED INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS AND CENTERS

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- African Studies Center
- Center for Africana Studies
- Program in Jewish Studies
- Program in Latin American and Latino Studies
- Program in Medieval Studies

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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The Program's Executive Committee is made up of the graduate and undergraduate chairs, five other faculty members appointed for a term of three years by the Chair with the approval of the Graduate Group, and two student representatives elected by CLAS (see below) for one year renewable terms. The graduate student representatives on the Executive Committee have the same rights and responsibilities as the faculty members in deliberations on all matters concerning educational policy. They do not participate in deliberations on personnel matters such as admissions and financial aid.

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE ASSOCIATION OF STUDENTS (CLAS):

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CLAS, which was founded by students in 1980 and is open to all students in the Program, sponsors a colloquium in the spring (COMPLICOL), visiting lecturers, discussion groups, translation workshops, and student readings. The association elects its own officers and delegates two students to represent the group at meetings of the Program's Executive Committee. It also provides advice and assistance to visiting applicants and incoming students and is consulted by the Chair in all matters concerning the Program's policies and regulations.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

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Students are encouraged to attend the lectures, symposia, and other activities sponsored by the Program. They should also check regularly for mail and announcements in the Program's office, 720 Williams Hall, where miscellaneous books, journals, reprints and other texts are available for browsing and borrowing, and coffee, tea and conversation are always free for the asking.

STUDY AND RESEARCH ABROAD

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Especially in the case of students whose major literature is foreign, the Program often recommends a year's study in the relevant country. The Chair will help students find funding agencies to support such study and to subvent the research activities of dissertation students working abroad.

HOUSING

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Housing forms for dormitory housing will be sent upon request to any student entering the Program. The majority of our students prefer to make their own housing arrangements. Good rental apartments are easily available within walking distance of the University at rents that are surprisingly low for a big city.

GRADUATE RULES AND REGULATIONS

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For more information on university policies regarding graduate studies, including [maximum time limits of study](#), please consult the Office of Graduate Studies's [Rules and Regulations](#).

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