



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

Division of the
Humanities
Comparative Literature

Graduate Program Handbook

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Comparative Literature Program Handbook

Advising and Mentoring

Every new student will be assigned a faculty mentor who meets with them at least once a quarter to discuss and approve course registration, and ongoing academic goals. Since the faculty mentors are assigned based on joint interests, the faculty mentor may – but does not have to – become the student’s dissertation adviser. In addition, students meet with their faculty mentor and DGS at the end of each academic year to review progress and plan for summer and the following year. In the first two years of the program, students should also begin to approach specific faculty members for ongoing advising in their respective fields of interest so that they can elicit specialist guidance as they begin preparing for the qualifying examination.

Once students have finished coursework and are registering for fewer than 300 units per quarter, they will be automatically enrolled in an Advanced Studies course for up to 300 units with the instructor listed as the DGS (see the [Humanities Division’s policy on academic progress](#)). The pass/fail grades for this Advanced Studies course will be assigned by the DGS based on the annual review of student progress in the spring quarter.

The department relies on intensive mentoring to balance research and teaching priorities as part of each student’s pedagogical training plan. In the first year, students will consult with their faculty member about appropriate teaching plans, and these discussions will then be formalized in consultation with the DGS and Chair. In consultation with the DGS, mentors will make students aware of what courses faculty are teaching, including in the Core, and implement a procedure for matching students to instructors according to intellectual fit and research program.

Outline of the Ph.D. Requirements in Comparative Literature

Year One: Eight graduate-level courses, including CMLT 501 and 502; demonstrated proficiency in one foreign language; one qualifying paper.

Years Two & Three: Eight graduate-level courses; demonstrated proficiency in two foreign languages; oral and written qualifying examination winter quarter of third year; dissertation proposal presentation by end of third year.

Years Four through Six: Year 5 dissertation colloquium; completion of dissertation, culminating in dissertation defense and award of degree by end of year six.

The timing and nature of teaching under the Pedagogical Training Plan is planned in consultation with the faculty mentor according to the student’s needs and professional goals.

Coursework

Year One

The first year of the Ph.D. program consists of **eight graduate-level courses, all of which must be taken for a quality letter grade** (not pass/fail). These courses may include courses outside of the department but should reflect the student's proposed degree program and must be approved by the faculty mentor and DGS. Students are expected to take a minimum of eight courses in their field of study (including 501 and 502) in years One & Two with room for language study built in.

In order to obtain the MA degree, students must also demonstrate competence (high proficiency in a graduate literature course or high pass in a University translation examination) in **two foreign languages**.

At the annual spring review, faculty will review student progress and incompletes. Students with any incompletes in required courses or in their plan of study at the time of the spring annual review will be asked to reconcile these unfinished courses before the being allowed to register for courses in fall quarter of the next academic year. All papers for incomplete courses should be turned in to the course professor, DGS, and department administrator no later than the first day of Autumn Quarter on the academic calendar. Students who have more than 1 incomplete at the beginning of the Autumn term will be placed on probation for one quarter. If they still have more than 1 incomplete at the end of the fall quarter, they will be denoted to the Dean of Students as making Unsatisfactory Progress and given a quarter to demonstrate renewed progress outlined by the DGS and in consultation with the student's faculty mentor. No student will be allowed to take their qualifying examination or advance to candidacy until all course work is complete.

Student transcripts will be reviewed every quarter to establish "satisfactory progress." The transcripts should contain a majority of A or A- grades. Any grade of B + or above is considered satisfactory. Grades of B and below may be cause for concern. Courses with a grade of B- or below may not count toward departmental requirements.

Students will be eligible for the M.A. degree upon successful completion of the first-year requirements, including the qualifying paper, by the end of the first week of May. For more information on the M.A. degree, see Humanities Divisional policies on [Degrees](#).

Years Two & Three

Students are expected to take a minimum of six courses in their field of study in Year Two with room for language study built in. A full load usually is comprised of eight courses per academic year.

Students may not begin the academic year with any incomplete work. This is Humanities Division policy; students are expected to start each term and each year with their full attention on current course work; please see the detailed information under "Incomplete Work" below.

Entering with an MA

Students who enter the program with an M.A. degree from another university that has been judged suitable preparation for Comparative Literature study at the University of Chicago will still be required to take Comparative Literature 501 and 502. Otherwise, they can receive credit for one year's work (typically six courses) and are therefore required to take eight graduate courses in addition to the foundational sequence in the first year and two in the second, corresponding to the normal requirements for second and third year PhDs.

Language Requirements

High proficiency in two foreign languages demonstrated by passing a graduate literature course in the language (and approval by the faculty of record via CMLT department form) **or** a high pass (P+) on the [Graduate Reading Exam](#) proctored by the [Chicago Language Center](#). At least one high proficiency language should be confirmed in the first year. The remaining requirements must be completed before the student is admitted to candidacy.

Students should also be working towards native fluency in the language of their major literature by applying to studying abroad, only after exhausting UChicago language offerings. Funding for language study depends on the language and on the student's immigration status; please review the [Humanities Division](#) and [UChicago Grad](#) websites for more detailed information and policies.

Registration for the language exam (for which a High Pass is required) can be found on the [Graduate Reading Exam](#) page. The exam is proctored by the [Chicago Language Center](#) where you can find more resources on language certificates, courses, and the schedule for language exams.

University of Chicago Language Center

The University of Chicago Language Center is a hub of professional development and services for the hundreds of instructors and graduate students that teach the 60+ languages spread across various departments within the university. It also promotes language study and increases the visibility of language offerings, helping students navigate and go beyond the university's language requirements. More information about language study at the University of Chicago, including pedagogical training in teaching languages; the AEPA and ARCA language examinations; and more are available at the [Chicago Language Center website](#).

Qualifying Paper

In their first year of study, students are required to submit a qualifying paper on a subject agreed upon with a core faculty member of the Department of Comparative Literature. This paper should demonstrate the student's ability to write scholarly prose, to formulate a clear research argument, and to situate it within the context of secondary literature relevant to the topic. It must be submitted during the third week of the Spring Quarter of the first year. The length of this paper should be approximately 6,000 words, including footnotes and references.

The paper may be written for a class outside the department. However, a core faculty member should be consulted about its appropriateness as a qualifying paper. There are two readers for this qualifying paper: The first is the core faculty member who has worked with the student on the paper; the second reader is another core faculty member of the Department appointed by the Department Chair. The two faculty members consult with each other to determine the grade for the paper, either "No Pass" or "Pass". In the case of a "No Pass," the student will receive a detailed explanation of why the paper did not pass and advice on revision(s) from both readers. The student can then revise the paper over the summer and has to resubmit it in the first week of the Fall Quarter of Year 2. In the case of a "Pass," student and readers can decide among themselves on the best process for feedback, whether in writing, in person, or both.

Qualifying Examination

All students will meet with their faculty mentor and DGS at the end of spring quarter of their second year to discuss the qualifying examination. Students should bring to this meeting a draft examination list of approximately 60 texts, provisionally organized into three fields of disciplinary, theoretical, and regional inquiry. The list will be discussed with a view to balancing the specificity of research interests in the student's eventual dissertation proposal with the broader knowledge pertaining to teaching and curriculum development that candidates are typically expected to demonstrate in job applications, interviews, and campus visits. The exams themselves will incorporate language that asks students to reflect upon the ways in which their research speaks to the broader field of Comparative Literature and the ways in which their project challenges disciplinary boundaries, rather than focusing exclusively on the student's specific research agenda.

At the beginning of autumn quarter of their third year, students will submit for the approval of their faculty mentor and DGS a revised list of approximately 60 texts along with a statement of interest outlining the nature of their engagement with them that will guide the examination committee in formulating questions. The examination will take place in the final two weeks of autumn quarter of the student's third year. The committee will provide the student with 2 questions on each list, of which the student must answer one. The student will write 3 written responses of no more than 4,000 words each over a period of 72 hours. The subsequent oral examination will consist of two parts, each 1 hour long: (i) a critical conversation around the lists and written exams, aimed at testing the student's ability to critically frame, defend, and expand upon their responses (ii) a discussion focused on the dissertation proposal that serves as a constructive conversation on the scale, scope, and direction of the project. The goal is to provide an opportunity for the student to parse the parameters of their dissertation project as well as to outline the next steps for crafting a viable dissertation proposal, including identifying potential committee members.

The examination committee will determine the grade for the exam, either "No Pass" or "Pass". In the case of a "No Pass," the student will receive a detailed explanation of why the examination did not pass and advice on revision(s) from the committee. The student will have one opportunity to retake the examination at the end of winter quarter of their third year. In the case of a "Pass," the student should transition immediately to preparing the dissertation proposal.

Assembling the committee

The qualifying examination committee is assembled by the student in consultation with their faculty mentor and should be comprised of two or three full-time UChicago faculty members, at least one of whom must be a core member of Comparative Literature. Students are responsible for assembling their lists in consultation with their committee. Once the committee is satisfied, the candidate must complete the examination list approval form and forward it to the DGS. The candidate is responsible for arranging the date of the oral component of the examination with their committee; the department administrator for arranging the room. Examinations are not administered during school breaks or over the summer.

The Humanities Division expects students to complete PhD examinations by the end of their third year. Meeting this schedule will enable applications for summer funding (see Summer Stipends above) and other travel awards posted on the Divisional website. **If a student has not completed the qualifying examinations by the end of their third year, he or she will be put on academic probation and a timeline established with the aim of avoiding their attrition from the program.**

Leaves of Absence

If students need to take a leave of absence during the program, including parental leave, they should review divisional policy on residency and academic requirements in the [Humanities Division Student Manual](#) and discuss options with the DGS, Chair, and Humanities Dean of Students.

Annual Review

Each student while enrolled in the program must complete an annual academic progress report, administered by the department. This report will be used by the faculty to assess students' academic progress during the annual spring review. It complements but does not replace the "Advanced Studies" course that students are enrolled in when taking fewer than 300 units in years three and beyond. See the [Humanities Division Student Manual](#) for more information. The Annual Report, which is due in spring quarter, requires signed approval from a student's faculty mentor, and (if applicable) from their examination and/or dissertation committee chair in the third and subsequent years.

The report should provide an account of coursework, and for students who have completed their coursework, of relevant milestones such as examinations and dissertation research. For students in candidacy, the report should include a summary of dissertation writing accomplished during the academic year, including a description of what committee members have seen and approved and deemed complete in the past year. It should also note any teaching experiences or pedagogical training courses and workshops completed.

Incomplete Work

Students may not begin the academic year with any incomplete work. This is Humanities Division policy; students are expected to start each term and each year with their full attention on current course work. Students with incompletes in required courses at the time of the spring annual review in May will be required by the Dean of Students to demonstrate that all incomplete work has been completed **and graded before the beginning of Autumn quarter of the next academic year**. All papers for incomplete courses must therefore reach the course professor and the department **before** the start of Autumn quarter. In the event that a student is experiencing difficulty in receiving a grade for a paper they have submitted, they should contact the DGS who will intervene on their behalf.

Students with any incompletes at the beginning of Autumn quarter will receive a "UW" or "Unofficial Withdrawal" for that course, be placed on academic probation and given one quarter to reconcile these courses for possible grades. Students with ongoing incompletes will not be able to proceed to the qualifying examination and dissertation proposal, to serve as a CA, or to teach until all incompletes are resolved.

Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal of approximately 15 pages or 4000 words (excluding bibliography) should be approved by the student's dissertation committee and submitted to the DGS by ninth week of spring quarter of the student's third year. The dissertation proposal should demonstrate that the student (a) has moved from thoughts on a topic to advancing a significant and original set of questions about that topic; (b) has sufficient understanding of the relevant scholarship and of his or her chosen methodology, and (c) has formulated plausible organizing principles for the dissertation as a whole.

A dissertation proposal will typically include the following elements:

- statement of the topic or problem the dissertation will address with a succinct discussion of the inadequacies and insufficiencies of previous approaches to this topic or problem. The discussion of previous approaches should not be an exhaustive history of previous scholarship, but rather a pointed discussion of the most important and relevant scholarship with which the dissertation will engage
- preliminary version of the dissertation's overall argument, as you understand it at this point
- discussion of the specific contributions to its field of specialization the dissertation seeks to make
- explanation of the methodology to be used, with relevant representatives cited
- outline of the dissertation's chapter organization and contents
- preliminary working bibliography of primary and secondary publications, and archives if relevant

Students should consult their dissertation committee regarding their specific expectations. Once the committee approves the proposal before the presentation, the chair of the committee should submit the signed Dissertation Proposal Approval Form to the department, and the candidate must file a copy of the dissertation proposal with the department.

Proposal Presentation

The student will present the approved dissertation proposal at a dissertation proposal presentation to which the faculty and graduate students of the department as a whole are invited. The student will circulate an abstract of the proposal beforehand and introduce the proposal for 15-20 minutes with an open discussion of one hour following. The presentation is an opportunity to present and share the approved proposal with other faculty and students in order to get feedback. At the conclusion of the hour's discussion, the student and committee members will meet separately in order to capture the main suggestions from the larger group.

Dissertation Completion

Students who are admitted to candidacy by the conclusion of their fifth year and who have at least one polished and approved chapter will be eligible to apply for the Humanities Division [Dissertation Completion Fellowships](#). Students who earn the DCF in year 6 are also eligible for an appointment under the [UChicago Humanities Teaching Fellows](#) after defending their dissertations.

The Humanities Division encourages dissertations to be completed within six years of joining the program. Candidates should be aware that in order to remain in good standing and able to receive advanced dissertation funding, they should submit drafts of their dissertation chapters to their committee members at regular intervals agreed with their chair and committee. In the event that a student is experiencing difficulty in receiving timely feedback on chapters they have submitted — under normal circumstances, within a month of submission — they should contact the DGS who will intervene on their behalf.

Writing a dissertation is a long and, sometimes, an isolating process. Students are encouraged to make use of the resources available on campus such as the Comparative Literature colloquium, the Comparative Literature writing group, Graduate workshops, and Graduate Writing Consultant. Students are also encouraged to explore the writing support offered by UChicago Grad's Writing Workshops, the Comparative Literature Graduate Writing Workshop, and the [Council on Advanced Studies Workshops](#).

In addition to sharing chapters with their dissertation committee, doctoral candidates' writing and professional development depend on presenting work to others. Candidates are therefore strongly encouraged to join appropriate graduate workshops to observe other graduate students and candidates presenting chapter-length work and conference papers, and to present their chapters on a regular basis to such workshops. Lists of workshops can be found on the [UChicago Council on Advanced Studies in the Humanities website](#). The Department of Comparative Literature also offers a colloquium and writing workshop where such work can be discussed.

Dissertation Completion Fellowships & Advanced Funding

Candidates who are still working on their dissertations in the winter of their fifth and sixth years should be prepared to apply for dissertation completion fellowships not only in the Humanities Division, but also in University Centers for the Study of Gender, Center for the Study of Politics & Race, Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, Jewish Studies, and area studies such as Latin American and East Asian scholarly foundations. Candidates should also inform themselves of outside funding from resources like the Fulbright, DAAD, Lurcy Foundation, the American Council on Learned Societies.

Candidates are eligible to apply for dissertation completion fellowships only if they have completed at least one polished and approved chapter of the dissertation by the application deadline and are in good academic standing demonstrating sustained progress. Fellowship awards often require certification that the dissertation will be completed within the term of the award, and require students to meet minimum qualifications which vary based on the award.

For more information about fellowships and divisional policies on progress, the inclusive funding package, and more, graduate students should review the [Division of the Humanities website](#) and consult their Departmental Administrator, Director of Graduate Studies, or Dean of Students office.

Dissertation Colloquium

As part of the regular process of dissertation feedback, the chair of the dissertation committee will schedule a year 5 dissertation colloquium to review progress with the student and the dissertation committee as a whole. In this colloquium, candidates will discuss with their dissertation committee the current state of the dissertation and outline their plans and schedule for further progress. This meeting will also help ensure that dissertation committee members are aware of each other's views and expectations.

Dissertation Defense

The candidate must conclude their studies by successfully defending the dissertation in an oral final examination. Candidates must get the approval of their committee for a dissertation defense at least a month prior to submitting the full dissertation. The dissertation should be submitted in the standard format required by the University's dissertation office. Please visit the [Dissertation Office website](#) for more specific information on university-wide deadlines, formatting, and submission procedures.

Pedagogical Training Program Requirements

Graduates from Comparative Literature compete for positions in diverse institutions of higher education. Many of these institutions are teaching-intensive. Even Research 1 institutions require significant evidence of

teaching experience and training. Thus, graduates from Comparative Literature who want to be successful on the academic job market need strong teaching profiles; an excellent dissertation and record of publication is not enough. It is teaching, increasingly, that sets our most successful students apart and gets them jobs.

The pedagogical training of students of Comparative Literature is complicated by the fact that they have to be qualified and prepared not only to teach successfully in comparative literature departments but also in language departments or departments of other disciplines such as religious studies, film studies, area studies, to name a few. Thus, graduates from Comparative Literature must be trained in multiple pedagogical methodologies and have appropriate teaching experience.

All graduates of our program should all be able to:

- design and teach introductory courses in the discipline
- design and teach introductory and upper-level courses in their field
- design effective assignments for a range of courses
- effectively facilitate discussion
- design and deliver an effective lecture
- describe their approach to student learning and give reasons for their pedagogical choices

Students should graduate well-versed in methods and approaches to undergraduate writing instruction, and are encouraged to seek additional training in inclusive pedagogy through the [Chicago Center for Teaching \(CCT\)](#) and Diversity + Inclusion programming.

The Pedagogical Training Plan is established in consultation with the faculty mentor according to the individual student's needs and professional goals, and may be tailored to include the following pedagogical and teaching experiences:

Year 1

- Teaching Experience: None
- Pedagogical Training and Mentoring: None

Year 2

- Teaching Experience: None
- Pedagogical Training and Mentoring: For Core Teaching: HUMA 50000 "Pedagogies of Writing"

Year 3

- Teaching Experience: One (1) Writing Internship (WI), Course Assistantship (CA), or Language Assistantship (LA)
- Pedagogical Training and Mentoring: [Teaching@Chicago](#) Orientation at CCT; and for Language Assisting, CTE 50100 "Language Pedagogy for the Contemporary Classroom"; pedagogical mentoring with faculty instructor

Year 4

- Teaching Experience: One (1) Writing Internship (WI), Course Assistantship (CA), or Language Assistantship (LA)

- Pedagogical Training and Mentoring: Begin work towards [CCT's College Teaching Certificate](#); ongoing pedagogical mentoring with faculty instructor

Year 5

- Teaching Experience: One (1) Comparative Literature or Core Stand-Alone Course Lectureship
- Pedagogical Training and Mentoring: For Core teaching: [CCT's Forum on Core Teaching](#) and participation; For self-designed course teaching: ongoing faculty teaching mentoring, [Teaching Consultation CCT](#), 2 hours of [Inclusive teaching programming](#), Completion of remaining CCT's College Teaching Certificate requirements

- Year 6

- Teaching Experience: One (1) Comparative Literature or Core Stand-Alone Course Lectureship
- Pedagogical Training and Mentoring: COTE 50000 “Course Design and College Teaching”, ongoing workshops on Diversity & Inclusion, ENGL 33000 “Academic and Professional Writing” (known as “Little Red Schoolhouse”)

The Chicago Center for Teaching

The Chicago Center for Teaching supports the University's diverse community of instructors —graduate students, postdocs, and faculty members — in developing their teaching practices with the goal of enhancing student learning across campus. They are committed to the idea that effective teaching begins with an instructor's intentions and expectations for their students. Toward that end, they encourage the use of pedagogical practices that are based in scholarly literature on teaching and learning and foster dialogue and reflection on effective teaching through workshops, seminars, individual consultations, and other programs and activities. Their aim is to promote teaching as a scholarly practice that is integral to the University's values. For more information about pedagogical training including workshops and one-on-one teaching evaluations, visit the [Chicago Center for Teaching Program Page](#).

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