

Preliminary Examinations

For formal admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. in French, a student must pass two preliminary examinations: a “field examination” and a “dissertation proposal oral examination.”

Field Exam:

- **Purpose of the Exam:** The goals of the field exam are twofold: 1) to guide students toward a deeper knowledge and understanding of two areas of French and Francophone literature than is afforded by the M.A. exam; and 2) to enable them to define and narrow their interests in preparation for the greater specialization required for the dissertation. Thus the exam tests not only first-hand acquaintance with selected texts and the ability to analyze and interpret them in depth, but also the ability to synthesize and define a field of inquiry in a persuasive, coherent, and original way.

- **Timing, Sign-Up Period:** Students normally complete all requirements for the M.A. by the end of the second year of study. Within four months of their receiving the M.A., they identify two areas of specialization corresponding to two of our seven areas; choose an exam committee chair; and in consultation with him or her ask two other members of the graduate faculty to be members of their field exam committee. The exam itself is taken at the beginning or in the middle of the fourth year of study, by the end of September or the end of February. Registration for the exam generally closes April 30th for fall-semester exams and prior to the Thanksgiving break for spring-semester exams; exact registration deadlines are provided by the graduate coordinator each semester. In advance of the exam itself students submit a field exam document (see below) to the three members of the exam committee as well as to the chair of graduate studies and the graduate coordinator. It is up to the exam committee chair, in consultation with the student and the other two committee members, to decide on the exact deadline for the submission of the field exam document, but that date should not be later than one month before the exam itself. Students should be aware that in the case of exams scheduled during welcome week, a finalized version of the field exam document can reasonably be requested, if the committee so chooses, by the last day of instruction of the previous semester. The precise exam date is to be arranged with the graduate coordinator at the time the field exam document is submitted.

- **Incoming Students Holding an M.A.:** Students who hold an M.A. in French from another university and who pass the qualifying exam in their first semester of study are encouraged to schedule their field exam to be taken as soon as they have satisfied all the requirements for the M.A., including all course requirements. In other words, in some cases they might actually be forming a committee and drawing up their field exam document while still completing their distribution requirement or other course requirements (French 626 and French 825, for example) for the M.A.

- **Area Configuration, Composition of the Committee:** The two areas of interest, which need not be chronologically contiguous, are configured either as a major area and a minor area, if that degree of specialization is already known, or simply as the two areas most closely related to

students' dissertation interests. The exam committee chair should be a specialist in the major area (if designated) or simply one of the two areas chosen, and at least one member of the committee should have a reasonable degree of expertise in the second area of specialization.

• **Field Exam Document:** The field exam document consists of 1) an individualized reading list; 2) rubrics of research interest, the number to be determined in consultation with the exam committee; and 3) two optional exam questions drawn up by the student in consultation with the exam committee.

- **Reading List:** The reading list, to be drawn up conjointly by student and committee, is comparable in length to the sum of two area prelim reading lists, which will be maintained as "field exam advisory reading lists." The field exam reading list can be but need not be similar to these advisory lists; in any event it should reflect students' interests but also fill gaps in their knowledge of the areas. Both areas chosen must be well represented, either equally or with a larger number of works in the major area, if one has been designated. Students are also free to add a small number of works pertinent to their interests from other areas.
- **Rubrics of Research Interest:** Students identify rubrics of research interest with as much specificity as possible. These rubrics can be quite general (medieval fabliaux; lyric poetry of the 16th and 19th centuries; *écriture féminine* in the 17th and 20th centuries) or relatively focused (Proust and Sévigné; Rousseau's autobiographical texts; conceptions of homeland in francophone texts; poetry and the plastic arts in the 19th and 20th centuries). Students are encouraged to group at least some of the works on their reading list under these headings.
- **Two Optional Exam Questions:** In consultation with their exam committee, students may submit two broad exam questions that help to define and synthesize the field of their research interests and that will be used in some form by the exam committee in formulating the exam questions.

• **Content and Format of the Exam:** The field exam consists of three essays. For each of the essays, students will be given a choice of two questions based on their expressed interests. The committee should make sure that students are required to write about both of the areas selected, although any or all of the questions may cross area boundaries. All the questions should be given in French, and at least one of the three responses should be written in French; the other two may be in French or English. No formal bibliography or footnote apparatus is expected on the exam, although sources must be acknowledged and may be concisely cited and documented (author, title, page number). There are no specific length requirements, but students typically write between 5 and 8 double-spaced pages per essay; it is not unusual for the length of essays to vary somewhat. The exam is a forty-eight-hour open-book take-home exam. The questions are sent to students by email; they may arrange to receive the questions at any time that is acceptable to the committee and should be sure to inform the graduate coordinator of this choice at the time the exam is scheduled. Students email their responses both to their exam committee chair and to the graduate coordinator by forty-eight hours after receiving the questions.

- **Withdrawals and Completion:** Once the field exam has been scheduled, students may withdraw until one week before the scheduled exam without penalty. Beyond that time, students who decide not to take the exam receive a “technical failure” and forfeit one of their two opportunities to take the field exam. In the case of failure, students are allowed one chance to retake their field exam. The time framework of the retake is to be determined by the exam committee.

- **Incompletes:** Students who have one or more incompletes at the time of signing up for the field exam and/or receive any during that semester must complete their course(s) before taking the exam. If they are unable to remove all incompletes, they must withdraw from the exam prior to one week before the scheduled examination to avoid a technical failure.

Dissertation Proposal Oral Exam:

- **Purpose, Language of the Exam:** The goal of the exam is to evaluate students’ ability to articulate the constituent elements of their dissertation topic coherently and convincingly; to test their awareness of various questions, problems, and limitations implied by their framing of their topic; and to assess their skill in defending original ideas in a well-informed and effective way. The exam may be in French or English, depending on the student’s preference, but it is recommended that at least one question be asked and answered in French.

- **Timing, Format, Sign-Up Period:** After passing their field exam, by the end of the fourth year of study students choose a thesis advisor and form their dissertation committee; draft their dissertation proposal; and draw up a working bibliography. Students normally take the dissertation oral exam only after completing all other requirements, including the Ph.D. minor and language requirements. The exam might well be taken during welcome week of the semester that starts the fifth year of study, but a time during the course of that semester would also be possible; students are reminded that dissertator status is not granted until the beginning of the semester following the one in which all requirements have been fulfilled. As with the field exam, it is up to the advisor, in consultation with the student and the other two committee members, to decide on the exact deadline for the submission of the dissertation proposal and bibliography, but that date should not be later than one month before the exam itself. Students should be aware that especially for August welcome week exams, these documents can reasonably be required to be finalized by the last day of instruction in May if the committee so chooses. The precise scheduling of the oral exam is arranged by the graduate coordinator in consultation with the student and the committee. Exams should not be given during university breaks. In cases of faculty leaves or other reasonable contingencies one member of the committee may be substituted for by another member of the graduate faculty for the purposes of the exam.

- **Dissertation Committee:** The dissertation committee may be but need not be the same as the field exam committee.

- **Dissertation Proposal:** Dissertation proposals average ten pages in length. For sample proposals students are encouraged to consult those on file with the graduate coordinator.

- **Oral Examination:** On the basis of the dissertation proposal and bibliography, an oral exam of

approximately one hour in length is administered by the three members of the committee.

• **Retaking of Dissertation Proposal Oral Examination:** In case of failure, students may retake the dissertation proposal exam once. The time of the retake is determined in consultation with the committee.

Transitional Period:

• All students enrolled in the M.A. and Ph.D. programs prior to Fall 2008 have the option of completing their studies under the old system. For those who wish to avail themselves of the new system, the following procedures apply:

1. Students who have not yet completed their M.A. are free to follow the new system if they wish. They should simply inform the graduate coordinator and the chair of graduate studies of their intention by the time they complete the M.A.
2. Post-M.A. students who have not yet taken preliminary exams also have the option of following the new system, but in that case they should consult with the chair of graduate studies about the timing of the sequence, which might diverge somewhat from the model offered above but should not delay timely progress toward completion of the Ph.D.
3. Students who have already passed their preliminary exams have the option of modifying the special topics-dissertation proposal sequence in the following way: if they prefer to go directly to the dissertation proposal without a special topic exam, within nine months of passing their area prelims they can draft a dissertation proposal and bibliography and take a forty-eight-hour written take-home exam. Students will be given four questions (two in each of two sections) and they will choose one from each section. The language to be used in the answers will be decided by the exam committee. This exam is followed by an oral exam of about forty-five minutes based on their written answers and on their proposals. Probably this alternative would not decrease students' time to dissertator status, but it might well speed up their time to completion of the Ph.D.