

# Comparative Literature Program

## Comprehensive Field Examination Guide for Faculty Members on the Examination Committee

For students entering the program in Fall 2007 and later  
(For students entering prior to Fall 2007, please see section 8 of the Comparative Literature Graduate Student Handbook)

### Field Examinations

To meet the qualifying requirements for the Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, graduate students complete three examinations in their chosen fields of study. Two of these fields are considered major, the third, minor.

#### a. Definition of a field

A field is an area of study within a national literature or within a related discipline. Comparative Literature students prepare themselves in two literary fields and either a third field from literature or from another field such as philosophy, history, art history, critical theory, or film.

Comparative literature students do not necessarily organize their studies around the canonical history of a national literature. Rather they define their field according to a period and possibly a genre, and then create a reading list that reflects that focus and includes what is necessary to understand that focus in an historical context. So, for example, a student working on the French realist novel, in addition to reading a substantial number of works of that genre, might also include on the list French novels and other prose works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and theoretical works on the novel. Or, if a student is interested in French naturalism, the reading list might include key scientific treatises that influenced theories of naturalism.

It is also expected that students familiarize themselves with the secondary literature relevant to their fields. The point is that each student's fields are both focused and sufficiently broad to reflect a grasp of influences, antecedents, and relevant ancillary disciplines.

#### b. The field exams

The exams are based upon a reading list of 50-75 works that the student develops with his or her three member exam committee. The expectation is for literature to be read in its original language.

The preparation for the exam enables students to gain reasonable “mastery” of a given field, understood as the competence necessary to teach eventually within this area.

The exam in the major fields consists of a written and an oral component.

The written will take one of the following forms to be determined in consultation with the examining committee and the Graduate Advisor:

- i. one substantial original essay of approximately 50 pages (the idea of which can come from seminar work but the essay should not be merely a longer version of a seminar paper) or a thesis (for the first field exam only)
- ii. a two-day written examination based upon three questions.

The oral, which lasts no longer than 90 minutes, will take place after the written is passed. Its primary purpose is to demonstrate a breadth of knowledge within the chosen field.

For the minor field only a written exam is required. It may take the form of either:

- i. one substantial original essay of approximately 35 pages (the germ of the idea of which can come from seminar work but the essay should not be merely a longer version of a seminar paper)
- ii. two 20-page papers (unrelated to seminar papers)

c. Field exam committees

All three field exam committees must have a minimum of three UC ladder faculty, two of whom (including the Chair, must be from the home department, i.e. must be affiliated to Comparative Literature.).

d. Exam procedures

1. Student chooses the field exam quarter, the quarter during which the exam will be taken.
2. Student chooses the Chair of the exam committee in consultation with the Graduate Advisor. Student chooses two other members of the exam committee in consultation with the Chair of the exam committee and the Graduate Advisor.
3. Student meets the Chair of the exam committee early on in the process, at the latest in the beginning of the quarter preceding the field exam, to determine the area

that the exam will cover, the type of exam chosen, materials for the reading list, and a schedule for taking the exam

4. Once a preliminary reading list is developed, the student meets with all three field examiners to discuss the list, topic of the paper(s), and strategies for completing the exam. The student should articulate a clear focus for the chosen topic and possibly make clear how the focus of her field exam advances her larger interests and/or dissertation topic, if such a topic has already been determined.

5. Once all three committee members are satisfied with the reading list and the chosen topic, each one signs a form provided by the student indicating that he/she approves the project.

6. At the beginning of the field exam quarter, the student submits to the form signed by all three committee members to the Graduate Advisor with an abstract outlining the chosen field, the topic, its articulation within the student's larger interests and/or dissertation, the type of exam chosen and a schedule for completing the exam.

7. Student submits the exam (the essay(s), short papers or two-day written exam) to the exam committee by the 8th week of the quarter chosen to write the exam.

8. Each member of the committee grades the exam and submits his or her comments and a pass/not pass grade to the Chair of the exam committee.

a. If the committee members concur that the exam is a pass, the Chair of the committee contacts the student, the Graduate Advisor and the Graduate Program Assistant. The Graduate Program Assistant will then schedule the oral exam.

b. At the oral exam, the three committee members briefly discuss the written exam with the student and ask questions regarding books on the list not covered in the written exam. The aim is to ensure that the student is broadly qualified in his or her chosen field.

c. If the committee members do not concur on the results of the exam, the Chair of the committee either works out the discrepancies among the examiners to their satisfaction and then contacts the student, the Graduate Advisor and the Graduate Program Assistant, who will then schedule the oral exam, or, if major problems persist, all three examiners meet with the student to discuss revisions. Once the revisions are made and accepted, the student takes the oral exam.

9. The student must pass both the written and the oral to pass the field exam.

10. The student can retake a field exam only once.

11. Students should enroll in 4 units of Comparative Literature 597 during their examination quarter. The Chair of the exam committee will be responsible for awarding the student a S or U for these units at the end of the quarter.

If you have questions regarding the field examination format, please contact Sierra Gray, Graduate Program Assistant (x2131 or [sierra@gss.ucsb.edu](mailto:sierra@gss.ucsb.edu)), or Sara Lindheim, Graduate Advisor (x7897 or [lindheim@classics.ucsb.edu](mailto:lindheim@classics.ucsb.edu)).