GUIDE TO DOCTORAL STUDIES
PROGRAM IN COMPARATIVE LITERARY STUDIES
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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, Philosophy, 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 seminars 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 website: 
http://www.complit.northwestern.edu/graduate/requirements.html.

You will also work with an advisor preparing a schedule for the exam in your home department. In cases where the home department exam structure or schedule is not aligned with the standard CLS schedule, you will work with your advisor to devise a plan for qualifying. This plan must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies in both CLS and your home department.

**Year 3:** In the third year, you will complete the requirements necessary for advancement to candidacy and continue your graduate assistantship. Specifically, you will complete your coursework, take your home department exam no later than Winter Quarter, and give a **Public Presentation** of a comparative paper.

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).

By the end of the third year, you should have completed your course work, taken the CLS theory exam and the home department qualifying exam, chosen a dissertation committee, and delivered your public presentation.

You can then turn your attention to your **Dissertation Prospectus.** Over the summer, your main task will be to plan a course of reading so that you can develop a dissertation prospectus and have a first draft before the fall quarter of your fourth year. In those cases where your home department’s schedule for submitting a prospectus differs from that of CLS, you will work with your advisor and the DGS in each unit to determine the best schedule for proceeding.

**Year 4 and Beyond:** Once you are admitted to candidacy, your progress toward the degree will depend very much on your own pace and initiative. In general, you should plan to expand your prospectus draft into a polished 10-12 page prospectus, along with a detailed bibliography by the Fall Quarter of your fourth year. Once your dissertation committee has approved your prospectus, it will be submitted to the graduate committee for review.

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 three faculty members: one for each of the lists as well as the DGS or Director. 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.

Home Department/Qualifying Exam

All students take an exam in their “home” department. Students need to consult with the DGS of their home department about the scope and structure of the exam. It should be taken no later than the Winter Quarter of the third year. Students are admitted to candidacy after the qualifying exam and previous requirements are completed.

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

In their third-year students present in a public forum (professional conference, graduate student conference, student/faculty workshop) a research paper that contains a distinctly comparative dimension. The paper should thus concern itself with literature in
more than one literary-cultural tradition or with the relation of literature to another medium, mode of art, or scholarly discipline.

**Language Requirement**

CLS graduate 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 in no-longer-spoken languages); this requirement is normally met through graduate level course work or a TA-ship in a language class. A secondary language requires only a single level of examination; this requirement is met through a reading exam, administered by CLS, and taken not later than the end of the fourth year.

**The Prospectus**

The Prospectus establishes a blueprint for the major accomplishment of your career in the doctoral program, the writing of the dissertation. A concise and precise program for the chapter-by-chapter drafting of the dissertation, the prospectus allows both you and your committee to conceive of the dissertation project as a whole. Additionally, the Prospectus places the dissertation in the context of current scholarship in the chosen field of study; it thereby indicates how the dissertation contributes to and potentially changes this field. Chiefly, the Prospectus gives you an opportunity to anticipate and articulate the thesis of your dissertation: the line of argument it will pursue, the logical articulations linking each section to the others, and the method by which the line of argument will be elaborated by reference to evidentiary materials.

**Completion**

Your last examination as a degree candidate will be the oral defense of your dissertation. 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 The Graduate School 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 Ph.D. 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. The Department 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 experience of PhD students at Northwestern. TGS requires that all PhD students serve in some instructional capacity for at least one academic quarter during their graduate education at Northwestern. This teaching requirement is unique to American higher education and is an integral aspect of professional development.

There are three basic forms of teaching in which students participate in teaching our undergraduates: assisting with a class taught by a CLS faculty member or faculty from a related department; participating in language instruction (usually but not always the language of the home department); and for some advanced students, teaching a small seminar. The mix of teaching depends on a number of factors, above all, each individual student's evolving academic profile.

In addition to TA-ships, the program also offers a limited number of research assistantships, which can take one of two forms: either placement as a Graduate Assistant to a program (and these include the Critical Theory and Poetry and Poetics cluster programs), or as a research assistant to an individual faculty member.

**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 Ph.D. 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 his or her Ph.D. from Northwestern. Interested students should contact the DGS and Michael Loriaux or Nasrin Qader (FIG Co-Directors), or Peter Fenves (in the case of German studies).

**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 Masters Thesis. All students receiving a BA/MA in CLS must write both the senior seminar paper and a Masters thesis. Those student 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.

BA/MA applications require four signatures: Undergraduate Advisor, Graduate Admissions Officer, Asst./Assoc. Dean of WCAS, and the Associate Dean of TGS.

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 has to be CLS 410. Students can also take one unit of 499 with the permission of the DGS. In the last quarter of their studies towards the MA, students take one unit of 590 in order to write their MA thesis. The general guidelines for the Master 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 graduate committee of CLS reads and evaluates the thesis and grants the MA.

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.