

English Graduate Workgroup
Outline for new PhD comprehensive exam/prospectus defense milestone

Preparation

- Students create two lists in consultation with their directors and committees: a comprehensive field area/historical period list (approximately 40 texts, at least 10 of which must be secondary sources and a dissertation area list (40 texts maximum, comprised of literature, theory, and criticism) that should prepare the student to write the dissertation. Students are responsible for reading all the material on these lists in preparation for the comprehensive oral exam.
- Students write a prospectus for the dissertation which must be 10-15 pp. double-spaced. The prospectus should include a central argument and specific intervention into the field of study, methodological or theoretical framework, and brief discussion of individual chapters. The student will write/revise the prospectus in consultation with the director.
- Students will prepare two syllabi: one for an undergraduate survey course (in or including the comprehensive field area) and another for any course (upper-level undergraduate, graduate, etc.) that stems from the dissertation area list. Students must create these syllabi on their own as they will serve as the written component of the comprehensive exam. Students may receive sample syllabi and general advice from their director, but must be the sole author of the syllabi they devise. The purpose of these syllabi is for students to demonstrate their ability to conceptualize their reading lists with a specific focus and to prepare materials for the job market. Each of the two syllabi must include:
 - Course title
 - Level of course (e.g. undergraduate survey, upper-level undergrad, graduate)
 - Paragraph-long course description (not unlike course descriptions on the website)
 - Paragraph-long course rationale (elaborating the purpose for the class, learning outcomes, and the motive for its breadth and thematic focus)
 - Required texts
 - Reading schedule for a 15 week semester
 - At least one assignment with a brief, 3-4 sentence explanation (e.g. critical essay, research paper, digital archive, close reading, annotated bibliography)
 - Grade breakdown for the course

Comprehensive Exam/Prospectus Defense

- This hybrid meeting will take 2.5 hours and should be scheduled accordingly.
- Students will pre-circulate the prospectus and sample syllabi to the committee for review before the meeting. The student should bring these documents to the meeting for their own reference as well as their reading lists and paper to take notes.

- After an initial discussion among faculty, the student will be invited to join the meeting and the prospectus will be discussed for 30-45 minutes. Following this portion of the meeting, there will be a short (optional) break for the student and committee.
- Next, the committee will shift to the oral exam component of the meeting. Faculty will ask the student questions about the texts on their two reading lists. This portion of the meeting should last about 30 minutes.
- The committee will then turn to review the syllabi, ask questions about their design, and offer possible feedback for future use. This portion of the meeting will last 30 minutes.
- Finally, the student will leave the meeting so that the committee can discuss the performance and make a pass/fail decision about the exam and prospectus.

Post-Exam/Defense

- If the student passes, he/she will begin writing the dissertation.
- Any required revisions (of the prospectus or syllabi) or retakes (of the exam) should be completed within 3 months of the original meeting, barring exceptional circumstances.