Ph.D. in French Studies

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Overview

The Ph.D. in French Studies is designed to provide students with extensive knowledge of French and Francophone literatures and cultures, and to train them to integrate into their research the methods of such disciplines as history, philosophy, religion, film studies, the history of ideas, architecture, art history and psychoanalysis. This second objective will presuppose close interaction between students and those faculty members whose interdisciplinary expertise corresponds to their interests. Given the interdisciplinary orientation of our Ph.D. program, our general examinations are not based exclusively on the traditional periods of French literature. Instead it balances the traditional areas of “Century” or “Literary Movement” with non-traditional areas such as “Critical Problem” and “Outside Areas.” The doctoral program is designed not only to be intellectually compelling, but also efficient: several of its features serve to shorten the amount of time required for completion of the degree. Moreover, to enhance the guidance given to students writing dissertations faculty and doctoral students engage in an annual Faculty-Graduate Colloquium.

Prior Training and Preparation for the Ph.D.

Applicants for the doctorate in French studies are normally required to present the M.A. degree in French or to demonstrate its equivalent for admission into the Ph.D. program. Students with a background in comparative literature or with a specialization in French within another national literature and language program will be admitted to the Ph.D. program on a case-by-case basis. All incoming doctoral students must have demonstrable, broad knowledge in French literature and culture as well as a general background in critical theory (i.e. course work in critical theory and/or course work that incorporates a strong component of critical theory).

Course Requirements (effective Summer 2016)
A minimum of 67 overall credits:

- 30 credits of course-work at the 400 and 500 levels (in general, 6 courses)
  - at least 18 credits taken at the 500 level before the General Exam
  - at least 18 graded credits at the 400 and 500 levels (excluding 499) before the General Exam. A minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 is required.

- 10 credits at the 600 level, to be taken during the concurrent quarter of the student's General Exams
- Passage of the General Exam
- Preparation and defence of a Dissertation Prospectus, to be completed and accepted by the student's Reading Committee by the end of the quarter following the General Exam.
- 27 credits devoted to the dissertation (at the 800 level), taken over 3 quarters
  - A dissertation is a "significant contribution to knowledge and clearly indicates training in research."

- Passage of the Final Examination, which is a defense of the Dissertation.

Prior to Summer 2016

The program demands a total of 77 credits (beyond the 45 required for the French Studies' M.A.), of which 25 should be taken in applicable 500-level courses (graduate seminars both inside and outside the Division) and 27 as dissertation credits (French 800). The other 25 credits - 400 level and above - should be chosen in collaboration with the Graduate Program Coordinator or a faculty mentor. Ten of these credits can be 600-level independent studies. Doctoral students work closely with the Graduate Program Coordinator in the selection of graduate seminars within French Studies and of courses outside French Studies that correspond to the students' cross-disciplinary interests. The doctoral course work should normally be completed in 6 full-time academic quarters, after which the doctoral student must set up the General Exam (aka The Oral) through the Graduate School. When the written and oral portions of the General Exam are passed the student earns PhC status and appoints the Reading Committee from members of his/her Supervisory Committee. During the third year of the PhD program the student completes the minimum 27 dissertation (Fr 800) credits with the Reading Committee Chair. Upon completion of the requisite dissertation credits and with the approval of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee, the student sets up the Final Defense through the Graduate School.

Summary of the French PhD program (2015)

Foreign Language Requirement

Proof of high proficiency in a first auxiliary language (usually a romance language acquired during M.A. study through course work in the literature in the auxiliary language) is required. If the proficiency established at the M.A. level is not satisfactory to perform research at the Ph.D. level in the language, further proof of advanced proficiency will be required. If the student's area of interest has expanded such that she requires another language (e.g. a medievalist who has as yet no Latin), then the student will be expected to study that language to the satisfaction of the GPC. The choice of auxiliary language(s) should be made in consultation with the Graduate Program Coordinator and/or the chair of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee.

"Normative Time" and Time Schedule

"Normative Time" is defined in the French doctoral program as 6 years in total: 2 years for the MA; 2 years to complete the General Exam; and 2 years to complete the PhD. Thus it is expected that the General Exam be completed by the end of spring quarter of year 4; and the dissertation be defended by the end of spring quarter of year 6.

The prospective dissertation topic must be presented during the last 30 minutes of the General Exam (aka The Oral).
The Reading Committee members, drawn from among the Supervisory Committee members, should be appointed by the end of fall quarter of year 5.

The dissertation prospectus should be approved by the end of fall quarter of year 5.

Those students who meet these deadlines WILL be given priority in the distribution of TAships. And students should NOT expect to receive funding through TAships beyond this schedule. However, students who have made good progress on their dissertations by year 6, who have tried but have not yet secured employment (i.e. who have gone on the job market), and who have sought to secure outside funding (by applying for dissertation fellowships) may be eligible for a 7th year of TAship.

Year 3
- course work pertaining to the general examinations topics and general course work required to complete or supplement broad knowledge in French literature and culture
- course work in critical theory if needed
- Spring Quarter: coursework. Constitution of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee in consultation with GPC and faculty (at least 3 members; one must be from outside the French department. Comp Lit will do). Student declares the three areas they intend to prepare for the general examination and present them to the chair of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee. Start working on descriptions of three areas, and reading lists.

Year 4
- Fall Quarter: Student presents preliminary General Exam areas and reading lists (including both primary and secondary texts) to the chair of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee and to the Graduate Program Coordinator for approval. Plan of Study Approval Form.
- Winter Quarter (or Fall): Student presents General Exam topics and lists to the chair of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee and to the Graduate Program Coordinator for finalization.
- Spring Quarter: 10 credits of general examination reading hours; general examinations completed by the end of the quarter.
- Immediately following the General Exam, the student identifies and meets with potential members of his/her Reading Committee, and presents his/her dissertation topic for feedback.
- With their approval, the student appoints the Reading Committee, including a Chair and two other members (if the student takes the General Exam later than May 15, this may take place in the first month of the fall quarter)

Year 5
- If the student took his/her General Exam later than May 15 of year 4, he/she will appoint a Reading Committee by Oct. 31.
- Student writes the dissertation prospectus, and, with the approval of all Reading Committee members, submits it to the GPC and the department, by the end of the fall quarter.
- Winter and Spring: reading for and writing of the dissertation.

Year 6
- Reading for and writing of the dissertation. Defense by the end of spring quarter.

General Exam

The general examinations are divided into three broad areas. Each area corresponds to a “Plan of Study” that the doctoral candidate writes in collaboration with the Doctoral Supervisory Committee. It is the Doctoral Supervisory Committee’s responsibility to supervise the student's compilation of his or her reading lists (see Plan of Study).

I. Century or Literary Movement

II. Critical Problem
III. Outside Area or Constructed Area

I. Century or Literary Movement

This examination area provides the student with the scholarly focus necessary for (1) writing a dissertation that examines French or Francophone literature and culture in its historical contexts, (2) fulfilling the requirements and designations of the current academic job market for specialists in a given century or literary movement. In certain cases this examination area might provide instead the more general historical/literary historical background for an examination whose other areas are already specialized in a given century. The student who has designed a twentieth century examination (a Twentieth-Century author, a contemporary critical problem such as the Lacanian subject along with an outside area of film) would benefit from defining the “century” examination topic that completes and complements the historical breadth of the general literary topic that will eventually define the dissertation. In the example above the student would benefit from defining his or her century or literary movement historical between the nineteenth and twentieth century in order to account for the important historical events and disciplinary developments in psychoanalysis and in photography and film that are endemic to a discussion of the emergence of the modern subject.

II. Critical Problem

This topic requires the student to examine a critical or theoretical area of study (theatricality, monstrosity, trauma theory, psychoanalysis, feminism, Marxism, structuralism, deconstruction etc.) and to formulate an informed and original argument about it. It is designed to demonstrate the doctoral candidate’s background and expertise in current critical methods and to provide a forum in which the candidate takes active part in contemporary debates in literary theory and criticism. The reading list, however, is not limited to only critical and theoretical works but includes other disciplines (philosophy, anthropology, sociology, etc.) that inform the critical field of study as well. A student who chooses to develop a critical problem by focusing upon a school of thought or movement in literary studies, for instance structuralism, will formulate a list of readings from the disciplines that inform that school of thought or literary movement; for example readings from early twentieth century semiotics and linguistics. Conversely, a student who chooses to develop a critical problem by focusing upon a specific critical concept, for instance monstrosity, will be best served by formulating a list of readings from current criticism on that topic as well as from literary and philosophical works that elucidate and illustrate it.

III. Outside Area or Constructed Area

Disciplines and areas of study outside French Studies make up the substance of the “outside area” topic. If the student chooses a topic that corresponds to an academic discipline or program in which the student takes two seminars, the topic may be defined as an “outside area” (ex. history, art history). (The student must identify to the chair of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee the faculty member who has agreed to supervise his or her “outside area” examination.) The “constructed area” is an area of study custom designed by the student in consultation with the chair of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee (ex. 20th century French poetry and visual arts; Medieval French romances and historiography). The “Plan of Study” and reading list for this area reflect cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary research on the part of the doctoral candidate as that research has been informed by the student’s course work. Courses taken outside the Division or courses of an interdisciplinary nature taken within the division will inform the scope of the Outside Area or Constructed Area as well as that of the dissertation project. For this reason, emphasis will be placed on the pertinence of the Outside Area or Constructed Area to the literatures of France and Francophone countries. From a pragmatic stand point, students will profit most from developing a reading list for the Outside Area or Constructed Area that makes important intellectual, literary or philosophical connections with the plans of study formulated for the Century or Literary Movement and the Critical Problem.
Plan of Study

The Doctoral Supervisory Committee closely supervises the student's formulation of their “Plan of Study,” which provides the critical parameters for the lists of primary and secondary works. Each “Plan of Study” must be broad enough to justify the choice of titles in the list of primary and secondary works and focused enough to posit an original argument.

General Examination in French Studies- Plan of Study Approval Form

The “Plan of Study” takes the form of an introductory paragraph for the reading lists of each general examination area. Each plan articulates a general observation and develops a critical focus and serves three important functions:

1. It summarizes the scope of each examination area for both the candidate and the examination committee;
2. It acts as a means of assessing if the student is ready to proceed to the writing of the examinations;
3. It provides the critical focus necessary for writing a successful examination and, eventually, an original dissertation.

Administration of the General Exam

1. Please note that all incomplete course work (any "I" or "X" on a student's transcript) must be completed before advancing to the Ph.D. examination.
2. Having finalized and prepared a “Plan of Study” for each of the general examination areas by the end of the Fall Quarter of their second year, the doctoral candidate schedules one weekend take-home written examination for each examination area. Two of these essays will be written in English; the third will be written in French. The candidate is responsible for distributing copies of the examinations to all the members of the Doctoral Supervisory Committee upon completion of each exam area.
3. The Doctoral Supervisory Committee reviews the three examinations and acknowledges to candidate that s/he may advance to the oral examination.
4. The doctoral candidate, in coordination with the Graduate Program Assistant, schedules the oral examination (conducted in English) to follow no more than two weeks after the written examination.
5. If the candidate fails the written examinations, s/he will be granted one additional opportunity to retake them. The oral examination may then be suspended or postponed. The written parts of the general examinations will be taken between weeks 2 and 8 of the final quarter of course work.

Oral Examination

The Oral Examination last two hours and will primarily be based on the written portions of the General Exam. However, in the last 30 minutes, the committee will open up the discussion to the student's prospective dissertation topic. The student will briefly present this topic and the examiners will ask questions and offer suggestions. The committee will consider all aspects of the exam in its evaluation, including this final discussion of the student's dissertation topic.

Dissertation

The program requires that each student produce a dissertation in English on a subject approved by the student's Reading Committee, which will be formed immediately upon completion of the general examination. Once completed, the dissertation must meet the approval of the Reading Committee, after which the candidate will proceed to the oral dissertation defense or final examination. Doctoral candidates must be registered as part-time or full-time students at the University of Washington during the quarter in which the degree requirements are completed.

As a matter of pedagogical philosophy, the faculty encourages graduate students to pursue writing, research and class discussion topics in an increasingly in-depth manner over the course of their studies in order to facilitate the formulation of dissertation topics. In addition, the faculty, in conjunction with the Graduate Program Coordinator, assures that each student is familiar with the
normative time constraints as well as his or her progress within those constraints. The suggested timetable for students enrolled in the doctoral program appears in the introductory text of this section detailing the Ph.D. program.

Appointing a Reading Committee

The student must appoint a Reading Committee, including a Chair and at least two additional members within one month following completion of the General Examination. The dissertation committee may or may not be the same as the Supervisory Committee for the General Examination. The student should approach prospective committee members with a dissertation topic, and report their agreement to the Graduate Program Assistant, who will submit the Reading Committee to the Graduate School. The student cannot appoint a Reading Committee without a dissertation topic that has been discussed with and approved by all the prospective members. A Graduate School Representative must also be selected in accordance with the current regulations of the Graduate School.

Dissertation Prospectus

A dissertation prospectus must be approved by all members of the committee by the end of the quarter following the General Examination. Students who take the General Examination in the spring are strongly encouraged to complete the prospectus by the end of summer but are not required to complete it before the end of fall quarter. The prospectus should be about 10 pages and present:

1. the problems to be investigated
2. the originality/importance of the project (with reference to the scholarship that you will be engaging)
3. the sources and methods to be used
4. the tentative organization (i.e. a chapter breakdown)
5. a preliminary bibliography

The prospectus will be filed in the department.

Faculty-Graduate Colloquium

The graduate faculty also provide guidance for dissertation development by sponsoring Faculty-Graduate Colloquia. The aim of this colloquium is to allow faculty and graduate students to come together informally to listen to each others' work and provide feedback. There will usually be one per quarter, during which one faculty member and one graduate student present a paper. Students writing dissertations are especially encouraged to volunteer, or who plan to give a conference paper and want a friendly forum on which to give it a trial run. For details, contact Rich Watts (rhwatts@uw.edu).

Resources for graduate students to find Fellowship Support

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