PhD Program in English LCS

~~PROPOSA~~L FOR REVISED DOCTORAL EXAM STRUCTURE

Overview

The portfolio exam structure is designed to provide materials for doctoral students to draw from for the dissertation, job market, and future publications. It guides students in developing their identity as a scholar.

For LCS, the portfolio, around 60 pages in length, will consist of five sections:
1. Cover Letter: (2 pp, single-spaced);
2. Breadth List: framed by exploratory questions that present the student as a "generalist";
3. Focus Section: the annotated bibliography (also framed by exploratory questions) that demonstrates an area of expertise (the student as a "specialist");
4. Scholarly Essay (about 7,000-8000 words or 25-30 pp.): a literature review essay that gives account of the larger field with which the dissertation will engage;
5. Two Course Syllabi: one that draws on the contents of the breadth list (a lower-level undergraduate course) and the other draws on the contents of the focus list (an upper-level undergraduate course).

After the portfolio is approved by the student's committee, the student will complete a Qualifying Exam/Oral Interview based on the entire portfolio. The goal of this interview is to have a conversation about the breadth and focus lists the student constructs. Students should be prepared to explain how they see their scholarship and teaching fit into larger conversations in the discipline.

Portfolio

1. Cover Letter (2 single-spaced pages)

The cover letter is designed to provide an overview of the materials that follow, showing the relations among them. It does not require prior approval by the faculty members serving on the candidate's committee, although the candidate is encouraged while drafting the letter, to seek advice from any committee member

2. Breadth List

The breadth list includes framing questions and a reading list of about 50-60 primary literary texts from a particular century (e.g. Early Modern American Literature, 19th century British literature) or a broad field of study/theoretical area (e.g. NALC, postcolonial literature). Students should aim to include at least three genres, although their focus can be more on one (e.g. the novel)

Framing Questions for the Breadth Section

As a way of coming to terms with the fundamental issues guiding the study of the historical period or field of study under consideration, the candidate should formulate a set of framing questions written in consultation with the director. The purpose of these questions is to guide reading list selections.

Sample Breadth List Questions: Postcolonial Literature

- How do postcolonial writers contend with the promises and pitfalls of anticolonial nationalism?
- What is necolonialism and how is it represented in literature? How would you distinguish neocolonialism from neoliberalism? Discuss with examples from texts included in your list.
- It has been argued that postcolonial literature is too focused on assessing legacies from the past. How does postcolonial literature, especially postcolonial science fiction, imagine futurity?

3. Focus Section

The focus section includes framing questions, a reading list, and an annotated bibliography.

Questions for the Focus Section

Following the same purpose and procedure as the field section, the focus list establishes an area of expertise within the field to which the student will contribute as a scholar. Examples might include Ecocriticism, Histories of the Book, Material Cultures of Early Modernity etc.

Sample Focus List Questions: Ecocriticism

- What are the primary areas of overlap between ecocriticism and contemporary discourses on the Anthropocene? Where do the two discourses diverge?
- How does contemporary ecocritical discourse draw upon the legacies of environmental movements from the last century?

The Focus List
The focus list should consist of 30-35 foundational and/or emerging books, articles, or edited chapters representing a particular specialty in LCS—they must all be annotated.

Annotated Bibliographies
Every item on the field and focus list should be annotated. Annotations should be a full paragraph (300-350 words), following standard bibliographic form (i.e., citing author,

title, and publication information for each item). The purpose of the annotated bibliography is to provide a detailed synopsis of texts, including key arguments, terms, ideas and connections to other texts that can then be referred to in writing the dissertation or in preparing for job interviews. When appropriate, annotations can make reference to how texts inform the student's thinking about the framing questions.

4. *Scholarly Essay*

The purpose of the scholarly essay is to give the student an opportunity to draw connections across the two reading lists. This essay should be between 25-30 pages in length. While making a grand overview of the terrain, the essay should also make an argument. The argument might be about gaps that could be filled, promising intersections with scholarship from other disciplines, earlier moments in the development of a field that should be reclaimed, innovations in the major field that impact where the focus area could go, and so forth. The aim of this essay is to help the student think about the eventual form of the dissertation. With revisions, it can hopefully serve as a template for the prospectus or first chapter of the dissertation. The scholarly essay must be documented using consistent citation formatting and include a works cited page (not included in page count).

5. *Syllabi*

Drawing from the breadth list, the student will design a lower level undergraduate course (in the form of either an "Introduction to Literary Analysis" or a survey of a historical period). Drawing from the focus list, the student will design an upper level undergraduate seminar. At a minimum, both syllabi should include: course title, course description with explicit goals, list of required texts, brief descriptions of assignments, grading scheme with weights of assignments, and reading schedule. The student is encouraged to ask advisors to review their syllabi as models. Students who intend to enter a non-teaching profession upon graduating may work with their advisor to create a professional alternative to the syllabi such as a proposal for a website, anthology, or museum exhibit.

Organization of the Portfolio

The portfolio will be paginated continuously, and a table of contents will be provided at the beginning. In most cases, the portfolio should have the items assembled in this order:
- Title page
- Table of contents
- Cover letter
- Breadth list with framing questions.
- Focus list with framing questions and annotations
- Scholarly essay
- Lower-level undergraduate course syllabus
- Upper-level undergraduate course syllabus

Oral Interview

The portfolio should be given to the doctoral committee at least four weeks before the two-hour interview. The interview will begin with an opening statement by the student that orients the committee to the field and focus the student has constructed and the scholarly conversations that the student's research and teaching engage. After this brief introduction, the committee members will take turns asking questions of the student based on their reading of the portfolio. The goal of the interview is to clarify how the student's professional identity/agenda fits in with and contributes to the discipline across teaching, research, and service (when applicable). The oral interview will end by asking the student to leave the room at which time the committee members will decide whether the exam meets expectations.

Proposed Timetable

Spring of 2nd Year (4th Semester)

- Student formalize the doctoral advisory committee (three English Department faculty and one member from outside of the department).
- Student takes a final course (to complete course requirements) and consult as needed with one's committee chair to define framing questions, develop lists, and begin annotations.
- Once drafts of the questions and reading lists are created, the student will work with the rest of the committee to expand and improve selections. Upon meeting with each member, the director will approve the finalized list and circulate it to the rest of the committee. It is preferable that the director calls a meeting with the committee before approval.

Summer

- Student continues to read and annotate lists.
- Student writes essay and builds the rest of their portfolio.
- Student should stay in contact with and receive feedback from their chair over the summer.

Early Fall (5th Semester)

- Student submits portfolio to graduate program assistant.
- Four weeks before the oral interview, the student schedules a date for the interview once the committee approves the portfolio.
- Student completes the oral interview.