

PhD Program in English RWS

~~PROPOSAL~~ 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 RWS, the portfolio, around 60 pages in length, will consist of five sections:

1. A 2 page single-spaced cover letter,
2. An annotated bibliography for the field list (framed by exploratory questions) that situates the student in rhetoric and writing studies,
3. An annotated bibliography for the focus list (framed by exploratory questions) that establishes an area of expertise,
4. A scholarly essay that draws upon the student's exam research (either one 25-30 pg. essay that bridges the lists or two 12-15 pg. essays that address each list),
5. and two course syllabi that the student would be prepared to teach, one that draws on the contents of the field list (an upper-level undergraduate course) and one that draws on the contents of the focus list (a graduate course).

After the portfolio is approved by their committee, the student will complete a qualifying oral interview on the entire portfolio. The goal of this interview is to have a conversation about the field and focus lists the student constructs, and how they see their scholarship and teaching fitting 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 to seek their advice while drafting.

2. Field Section

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

Framing Questions for the Field Section

As a way of coming to terms with the fundamental issues animating the chosen field, 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 Field List Questions: Contemporary Rhetorical Theory

- What can rhetorical studies gain by investigating neoliberalism from the perspective of its publics and counterpublics? What role does rhetoric play in the

acceptance or resistance of neoliberalism? How has neoliberalism transformed our understanding of power, agency, and the rhetorical subject?

- How did wartime paranoia chart the course for modernist rhetoric? How did trauma impact the purpose of rhetoric?
- How might animal rhetoric, ambient rhetoric, and new materialist rhetoric—all pulling from the interdisciplinary concept of posthumanism—offer a framework for reevaluating the function and impact of rhetoric for the disabled mind? How does the ontology of cognitive impairment relate to rhetoric and its situations?

The Field List

The field list should consist of around 40-50 foundational books, articles, edited chapters, or digital texts representing some major field in rhetoric and writing studies—they must all be annotated. The student's goal in the field list is to situate their work in the larger intellectual terrain of rhetoric and writing studies by tracing the foundations, conversations, disagreements, trends, and historical turns of the student's chosen area; thus, subcategories and a variety of perspectives on the student's topic are encouraged.

Example field list topics might include Contemporary Rhetorical Theory, Composition History and Theory, Rhetoric and Technology, 18th Century Rhetoric, Community Literacy, Feminist Historiography, Cultural Rhetorics, Writing Centers and the University.

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 Latinx Rhetorics, Memory Studies, Disability and Composition, Food and Feminist Rhetoric, the Rhetoric of Podcasts.

Sample Focus List Questions: Disability Rhetorics

- In what ways has feminist rhetorical studies inspired and/or impacted the study of disability? How does disability studies expand feminist thought? How should we define the feminist disability studies perspective?
- What moral or ethical implications should the disability researcher consider when conducting qualitative research with participants who are cognitively disabled? What are the risks of narrative representation? How might researchers listen rhetorically to discourse that is co-constructed, such as with a parent/guardian, sibling, or loved one?

The Focus List

The focus list should consist of 20-30 foundational and/or emerging books, articles, edited chapters, or digital texts representing a particular specialty in rhetoric and writing

studies—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(s)

The purpose of the scholarly essay(s) is to give the student an opportunity to draw connections across the two reading lists (in the case of one 25-30 page major essay) or within each list (in the case of two 12-15 page minor essays). Rather than making a grand overview of the terrain, the essay(s) should 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 scholarly essay(s) must be documented using consistent citation formatting and include a works cited page (not included in page count).

5. Syllabi

Drawing from the field list, the student will design an advanced undergraduate course. Drawing from the focus list, the student will design a graduate 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 undergraduate and graduate syllabi as models. If the student has decided to enter a non-teaching profession upon graduating they 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
- Field list with framing questions and annotations
- Focus list with framing questions and annotations
- Scholarly essay or essays
- Advanced-undergraduate course syllabus
- Graduate-level course syllabus

Oral Exam

The portfolio should be given to the doctoral committee at least four weeks before the two-hour interview. The exam 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 formalizes their doctoral advisory committee (three English Department faculty and one member from outside of the department).
- Student takes their final required course and exam hours with their 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.

Summer

- Student continues to read and annotate lists.
- Student writes essay(s) 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.
- Student schedules oral interview once the committee approves the portfolio.
- Student completes the oral interview.