

General Examination in Italian

The General Examination in Italian should be taken at the end of the third year of study. In special circumstances the student and her or his adviser can petition the DGS for an extension to the first semester of the fourth year. Students must have completed all course work before the beginning of the semester in which they take the Generals.

Early in the third academic year, students must discuss the scope and nature of the period and topics to be covered, as well as the dissertation proposal, with their adviser and the DGS. The student and the DGS choose a committee of two or three faculty members with interests close to the proposed topic.

The reading list (approximately a hundred texts) should include works in all literary genres relevant to the period covered. The amount of “non-literary” or cross-disciplinary material on the reading list varies according to the period and the research interests of the student. Students ordinarily cover one or two centuries of writing in great depth.

The candidate must present a tentative reading list to the members of the committee six months before the examination and a final reading list at least one month before the examination. This list, to be headed by a title describing the period and topics of the examination, may be divided into two parts: “core” works that the student has found to be central to his or her topic, and works that fill out the “periphery” of the topic. Copies of the final reading list must be promptly sent by email to the members of the committee, the chair of the department, the DGS, and the graduate coordinator.

The aim of the Generals is to establish the student’s credentials as a specialist in the period of his or her choosing, so the core of the reading list must be made up of texts that constitute the cultural baggage essential to any specialist. It follows that reading lists must not focus on the narrow area of the student’s research interests, which is dealt with the prospectus. It follows that the examination will cover the major authors and genres in the student’s period of choice. The list may well include critical and scholarly works or texts from outside the traditional domain of Italian literary studies (such as film, philosophy, other literary traditions, but also art, cultural economics, and the social sciences), but such coverage should be regarded as supplemental except in rare instances where the chair and faculty advisers have agreed to define these materials as the student’s “field.”