

Joint Track General Examinations

Single track guidelines apply unless otherwise stated below.

PURPOSE

Candidates are expected to demonstrate breadth of knowledge and acquaintance with their fields, to define the area of specialization and show their mastery of it, and to present their methodology and perspective.

TIMING

The general examination is taken in May, during the spring term of the third year in the graduate program. In some cases, and with approval of advisers, it may be taken in December of the fall term of the third year.

EXAMINATION COMMITTEE

At the end of their second year, and in consultation with their advisers, students establish their examination committee. The committee's role is to advise candidates as they constitute their lists and draft their essays, and to administer the examination. Normally one of the two academic advisers of the candidate chairs the committee. The committee comprises at least two RLL faculty members, and at least one faculty member who represents each of the candidate's fields. When possible, the committee should include more than two RLL faculty, including faculty members representing other areas of specialization than the student's chosen area. In some cases, a faculty member from another department may join the committee.

LISTS OF MATERIALS

After the end of their second year, each candidate starts creating three lists, comprising in total about 100 to 120 items. The three lists should involve materials coming from both fields.

The first list constitutes the "field" covering a wide chronological and spatial array including several subfields (subfields are defined by each section). It comprises about 60 to 70 items and provides coverage in the two romance languages and literatures chosen.

The second list constitutes the "area" and represents the specialization of the student. It comprises about 30 to 40 items.

The third list constitutes the "prospectus list" and introduces the problem and specific sub-areas the candidate will address in the dissertation. It comprises about 10 items.

The lists are structured chronologically and geographically. They are expected to be balanced in such a way that the field list complements the area and prospectus lists rather than overlapping with them. Therefore, the field list should mostly comprise subfields that are not the area of specialization of the candidate.

Sections may decide to substitute course work for a subfield, which then may not be represented in their lists. This should be clearly explained to new students entering the program, so they can choose their courses judiciously. It is up to the sections to decide how many subfields need to be represented in the lists, and how many courses can be accepted as substitutes. It is also up to the sections to decide what texts or items need to be present on the lists of all students.

WRITTEN COMPONENT OF THE EXAMINATION

As they establish their lists, students work on two essays (8-10 page for each) presenting two large themes broad enough to be relevant to the different subfields represented on the list. Through examples selected in all subfields, candidates demonstrate the breadth of their knowledge and their ability to read critically across time, space, and genres, using their themes as points of entry. The essays include references to theoretical and critical works, and give the committee a sense of the methodologies used by the candidates. The essays should not be a mini-dissertation prospectus, but a broad map helping to structure the lists and constitute the indispensable background for the prospectus. The essays should be written in the languages the committee finds most appropriate.

Candidates start working on the essays in consultation with their advisors, and eventually with the other members of their committee.

ORAL EXAMINATION

The examination lasts no less than two and no more than three hours. It starts with a brief presentation in English of the essays, followed by questions on the essays and on any item of the lists that faculty members decide to address. The questions are informed by the two themes proposed in the essays. Follow-up questions may address other topics or matters. The questions are not seen in advance by the candidates. Their goal is to assess the knowledge and familiarity candidates have with the field, their ability to think on their feet, and to go back and forth between concepts and particular traits of the works they have studied. The conversation is conducted in English and/or the Romance languages, as directed by the committee. The examination concludes with the candidates presenting a brief oral account of their dissertation project.

Beside the prescribed opening and conclusion, sections may structure the oral examination differently, either around the themes in the essays, or by subfields, or by lists. They may decide to divide the exam equally between a part in English and a part in the Romance languages, or to move back and forth between languages. In any case, each faculty member present should have the opportunity to ask more than one or two questions. The expectations of the section

and their particular way of carrying out the examination should be made clear to candidates in advance.

GRADES AND FEEDBACK

The members of the examination committee evaluate and comment on the essays and the oral examination immediately after it has been administered, and the committee communicates its feedback right away to candidates. The scale used is: Distinction; high pass; pass; fail. The assessment and grade are recorded in a written report signed by all members of the committee. The graduate coordinator is in charge of filing the report in the candidate's dossier. If the committee judges that the examination does not earn a "pass," the candidate is asked to take the examination again within six months. If the candidate fails a second time, they are not authorized to continue in the PhD program