

THE MA /PhD QUALIFYING & PhD COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS DESCRIPTION AND EXPECTATIONS

In addition to the regular exams and written assignments that you complete as course work, you will attempt two major departmental exams. These exams are cumulative, and their purpose is to demonstrate to the faculty that you have the capacity, the skills, and the knowledge base to be a successful scholar in the field of Slavic and East European Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. You will attempt the **MA/PhD Qualifying Examination** no later than at the end of the fourth semester and the **PhD Comprehensive Examination** at the end of the eighth semester.¹

THE ROLE OF CUMULATIVE EXAMINATIONS IN THE GRADUATE TRAINING PROCESS

Graduate education in our field involves *both* structured classroom learning *and* self-motivated, independent study. **Structured classroom learning**, under the guidance of your professors, acquaints you with the general contours and common ground of the field; it exposes you to key works embedded in their historical, cultural, stylistic, and genre contexts; it introduces you to various methodological and theoretical frameworks and strategies; it models different pedagogical and interpretive strategies; and it develops your research, writing, and technology skills. You receive a grade for your structured classroom work at the end of each semester. This grade demonstrates that you are able to work within defined parameters and under supervision.

Self-motivated independent study, however, takes you beyond the classroom. It reinforces and enhances the classroom experience and helps you to identify and fill gaps in your knowledge on your own. Independent study demonstrates that you possess intellectual curiosity, that your goal is the learning and not the grade, that your interest in the discipline motivates you to take your learning beyond limited classroom requirements. It demands a considerable degree of engagement with the field, thoughtful contemplation of the material, and the ability to integrate class work and independent work to create a coherent, holistic view of the field in which you plan to spend the rest of your professional life. You do not receive a “grade” for independent study, as you do for classes, but the cumulative examinations give you the opportunity to demonstrate the results of your independent study and evaluative skills.

Self-motivated independent study does not have to be solitary. Although your written exams must be your work alone, independent study for those exams does not require that you prep for them alone in a cave in the desert by candlelight. Motivated students often organize and participate in a study group with other students who are also preparing for departmental exams. Participation in a study group allows you to learn from others, to measure your knowledge against that of your peers or students ahead of you in the program, to learn about important secondary and database materials that make your life easier, and to verbalize what you yourself have learned, thus making your passive knowledge active (and easily retrievable on exams and later in your professional life: when you stand alone in front of a class, you will need this “walking-around knowledge”). Study groups that include both MA and PhD students serve as a “grapevine” for the

1 Students who plan to go on to careers in the private sector also have the option of attempting an MA Terminal Exam, in which they demonstrate control of Russian language to the intermediate plus level, control of course work, and synthetic knowledge of the basic aspects of Russian literature, linguistics, and culture. After the successful conclusion of this examination, students leave the program to develop their careers.

communication of important information about the examination experience itself and about faculty expectations and conduct of exams. Motivated students also consult with senior students and with their advisors about their independent readings and preparation strategies.

Every successful scholar in our field controls both shared disciplinary knowledge (the “walking-around knowledge” that the MA/PhD Qual Exam tests for) and individual, specialized knowledge. Each scholar’s profile is unique, but all scholars must share the larger ground of the discipline on which they all meet, or meaningful scholarly communication becomes impossible. Your graduate training exists to help you first master the common disciplinary ground (the goal of MA study) and then to develop an original and autonomous scholarly profile (the goal of PhD work and the dissertation).

The important traits of an independent scholar are intellectual curiosity, engagement with the material, self-discipline, the ability to organize and control data, the desire to pursue knowledge for its own sake (beyond the structured and limited classroom experience), and the ability to communicate that knowledge to others in order to “grow” our discipline. Examinations in the fourth and eighth semesters allow students to demonstrate that they have the potential to become successful scholars in the field.

THE MA/PHD QUALIFYING EXAMINATION: GENERAL COMPETENCIES

The MA/PhD Qualifying Exam at the two-year mark tests for the following competencies:

- ◆ mastery of the key works of the literary and cultural canon, as represented by the MA Required Reading List (knowledge of major authors, works, plots, characters, themes, basic historical and theoretical context), acquired through both course work and independent study;
- ◆ general knowledge of the contours of the culture and its literary history, acquired through both course work and independent reading;
- ◆ ability to apply both analytical and synthetic strategies in responding to issues and questions;
- ◆ ability to use the target language at the advanced low level or beyond;
- ◆ knowledge of the target language’s general structure, syntax, and phonology;
- ◆ an understanding and appreciation of the language’s role in shaping identity and creating culture;
- ◆ demonstration of strong verbal and compositional skills as attested by the written and oral portions of the exam;
- ◆ clear potential to succeed in an academic career.

THE MA /PhD QUAL EXAMINATION: SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

At the fourth semester in the graduate program, students who plan to continue on to the PhD should be able to do the following:

General - Prose and Poetry

- ✓ Demonstrate knowledge of the evolution of the movements of Russian literature from 1790 to the present: Sentimentalism, Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism, Modernism/s, Socialist Realism, Post-Modernism;
- ✓ Develop a working definition and understanding of each of these movements;
- ✓ Identify the distinctive features of these movements and know their subsets and principal themes;
- ✓ Identify and describe the genres, authors, works, and styles that are characteristic of these movements;

- ✓ Know the canon of Russian literature as outlined in the MA Required Reading List: be familiar with authors, plots, characters, themes, styles, etc. of the major works;
- ✓ Understand basic themes of nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century Russian literature. These include (but are not limited to): “The Superfluous Man,” “The Napoleonic Theme,” “Slavophiles and Westernizers,” “Men of the '40s and Men of the '60s,” “Plight of the Peasants,” “The Repentant Nobleman,” “Literature as Moral Touchstone,” “The Redemptive Power of Suffering,” “The New Man and the New Art,” “Revolution,” “The Individual and the State/Collective,” “Man and Machine,” “Real and Virtual,” and other basic themes as they are reflected in literature;
- ✓ Demonstrate general familiarity with classic exemplars of poetry by major Russian authors;
- ✓ Identify basic poetic genres (ode, sonnet, lyric, narrative poem, etc.) and know the basic structure of verse (meter, rhyme, rhythm, tropes);
- ✓ Know the genres, styles, and authors that are characteristic of the different literary periods;
- ✓ Show general familiarity with the principal theoretical and methodological approaches to literature and their terminologies.

General - Linguistics and Language

- ✓ Understand the relatedness of Slavic languages: their origins in Proto-Indo-European, Common Slavic; the disintegration of Common Slavic;
- ✓ Know general linguistic concepts and traditional grammar as applied to Slavic languages (especially Russian, or whichever you have studied the most): the comparative method, internal reconstruction, phonetics, phonology, inflection, word-formation; grammatical categories; functional, cognitive approaches to linguistics; dialectology; language contact; sociolinguistics;
- ✓ Know the history/mythology of Slavic literacy from its beginnings;
- ✓ Understand language and national identity/sociolinguistics: Soviet language planning; post-Soviet trauma of Russians in the Near Abroad; Rise and fall of the Yugoslav project; language standardization and relation to nation-building; language mythology (depending on course work);
- ✓ Read Old Russian (or OCS) texts, given access to a dictionary of Old Russian (or OCS); know periodization of East Slavic languages;
- ✓ Identify Slavic standard languages and know their diacritic and distinctive features.

THE PHD COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION: GENERAL COMPETENCIES

The PhD Comprehensive Exam in Russian literature (or Slavic linguistics, *mutatis mutandis*) in the eighth semester additionally tests for the following competencies:

- ◆ Evidence of substantial evolution beyond the MA foundation, as demonstrated by control of the PhD Required Reading List, knowledge of field resources in relevant formats, reference works, journals, research techniques and strategies, etc.;
- ◆ Ability to extract interpretive and theoretical possibilities from material in order to pursue a particular line of study in depth;
- ◆ Coherent development of a chosen area of specialization through independent study of additional primary and secondary works relevant to this specialization in preparation for the dissertation;
- ◆ Ability to manipulate the material with sophistication, creativity, and considerable verbal skill;
- ◆ Control of a second Slavic language and culture;
- ◆ Knowledge of a relevant external discipline and its basic methods (the minor);
- ◆ Sophisticated knowledge of the profession, its ethics, etiquette, strategies, and other evidence of professional development;
- ◆ Acquisition of necessary critical thinking skills and control of the scholarly apparatus necessary to

write a persuasive dissertation that will contribute new knowledge to the field.

PLANNING YOUR STRATEGY

The MA/PhD Qualifying Exam is, arguably, the more important of the two examinations you will attempt. At the MA/PhD Qualifying Exam you must demonstrate to the faculty (and to yourself) that you have the knowledge, the commitment, the self-discipline, and the intellectual potential to succeed in the field. Once you are passed on to PhD work, the faculty expect that you will continue to grow and to build on the abilities that you successfully demonstrated by passing the MA/PhD Qualifying exam. Your last exam, the PhD Comprehensive Exam, although it surveys the entire field (all periods of Russian literature or both diachronic and synchronic linguistics), will be written for you and for no one else. On this exam you must demonstrate to the faculty that you have general knowledge required by the discipline, the specific knowledge necessary to your area of concentration, and the various skills you need to write a successful dissertation and become a contributing member of our larger profession (whether you remain in academia, go into academic support, or choose to work in the public or private sectors). Thus there is no statement of “Specific Objectives” for the PhD Comps here; those objectives will depend on the intellectual trajectory you chart for yourself. Working closely with your advisor and with the members of your examination committee, you should encounter no surprises at the level of the PhD Comps.

In all cases, your best guide to the exam process is frequent consultation with your advisor and the DGS.

Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the SLL Rules and Regulations concerning the MA and PhD exams.