

School of Languages and Cultures Purdue University

Guidelines for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

Effective Fall 2025

These guidelines are intended to supplement, but not supersede, the applicable regulations in the [Policies and Procedures for Administering Graduate Student Programs](#) of the Graduate School, with which the student should also be familiar. The current guidelines will apply to all graduate students who are admitted to the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs, and they are intended to give information and provide direction to students and faculty of the School of Languages and Cultures (SLC). Suggestions for amendments to these guidelines may be submitted by the graduate faculty to the SLC Head and Executive Committee for consideration.

1. PhD Degree Programs and Graduate Assistantships in Languages and Cultures

SLC administers PhD degree programs in the following areas:

- [Comparative Literature](#)
- [French](#)
- [German](#) (program currently on hiatus)
- [Spanish](#)

Admission to a PhD program in SLC comes with graduate assistantship funding (as a teaching assistant, research assistant, or other form of graduate assistant), contingent on continued progress toward the degree and on the successful fulfillment of teaching or other obligations associated with the assistantship. The performance of all graduate students will be reviewed by the faculty each year before assistantships are awarded for the following year. Summer session funding is possible in some cases, but it is not guaranteed.

For students who do both their MA and PhD degree coursework in SLC, a maximum of twelve (12) total semesters with financial support in the form of a .50 FTE graduate assistantship **or** fellowship will be allowed for completion of both the MA and the PhD from admission to the completion of the final examination (dissertation defense). Summer session funding does not count toward the twelve-semester maximum. This twelve-semester period is contingent on students' progress being deemed satisfactory by their Advisory Committee (see the appended Glossary for explanation of this and other terms).

For those students who have earned a relevant MA degree from another accredited university prior to admission to one of SLC's PhD programs, a maximum of eight (8) semesters with financial support in the form of a .50 FTE graduate assistantship will be allowed for completion of the PhD from admission to the completion of the Final Examination (dissertation defense).

This eight-semester period is contingent on students' progress toward degree being deemed satisfactory by their Advisory Committee.

The SLC course on college-level language teaching ([LC 519](#); also offered under FR / GER / SPAN prefixes) is required of all new teaching assistants who are teaching in a language other than English and is usually taken in the first semester of the TAship.

All teaching assistants who are enrolled in SLC PhD programs are expected to take at least 15 hours of graduate coursework (at the 500 or 600-level) per calendar year toward their degree program. International graduate students should check with [ISS](#) about current regulations for minimum credit hours per semester to maintain their student visa status.

2. The Assessment Interview

PhD candidates entering Purdue with an MA degree earned elsewhere are required to undergo an Assessment Interview as early as possible during the first semester, and no later than the tenth week. This interview is intended to identify, more specifically than during the application process to the program, the student's knowledge and skills pertinent to the pursuit of the PhD in SLC. On the basis of the results of this assessment, specific courses and readings may be recommended, which may make necessary the completion of additional coursework over and above the usual required number of credit hours.

Members of the faculty in the relevant area of the new PhD student are responsible for the preparation and administration of the Assessment Interview. The SLC Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) in conjunction with the relevant language department chair will appoint a two or three-member Assessment Interview Committee. The DGS will notify the student of the composition of the committee and of the format of the interview.

3. Coursework Requirements for the PhD and the Plan of Study

The PhD programs in SLC require a minimum of 60 total credit hours beyond the MA degree, including 30 hours of graduate-level coursework (courses numbered in the 500 and 600 range) and at least 30 hours of research credits (dissertation research and writing hours taken under the [699](#) course number).

At least 21 of the 30 credit hours of post-MA coursework should be designated as **Primary Area** courses on the Plan of Study. These include courses within the student's area of study (CMPL, FR, GER, SPAN), as well as cross-listed SLC graduate courses in literature and culture that are taught in English as the language of instruction. The required 630 Literary Criticism and Bibliography course and the 519 course on teaching languages both count as Primary Area.

Up to 9 credit hours of post-MA coursework may be listed on the Plan of Study as **Related Area** courses. These include courses that are outside of the Primary Area of literature and culture, and are usually offered by other departments, for example, courses in programs within the College of Liberal Arts (interdisciplinary programs such as gender studies, or fields that are highly relevant

to the study of literature and culture, such as philosophy, history, and anthropology). In some cases, courses from another college could be included in Related Area coursework (such as psychology courses for a student interested in cognitive approaches to literature).

The major professor and the Advisory Committee must approve Related Area courses if they are to count for the PhD Plan of Study. PhD students are encouraged to take at least 3 credit hours of Related Coursework for their Plan of Study, but this is not a requirement.

Other notes regarding the Plan of Study for SLC PhD programs:

- Under ordinary circumstances, no more than 6 credits of individual directed reading courses ([590](#)) may be included on the Plan of Study.
- The SLC graduate course on literary criticism and bibliographies ([LC 630](#); [FR 630](#); [GER 630](#); [SPAN 630](#)) is required for PhD students who did not take the course during their MA program, or – for students who do not hold an MA from SLC – a similar course at another university. The 630 course should be taken as soon as possible within the students' course of study, since it isn't offered each semester (currently it is offered every other Fall semester).
- PhD students in SLC should prioritize 600-level seminar courses in their respective areas in SLC and take them when they are offered. However, relevant 500-level courses will also be allowed on the Plan of Study and, at present, there is no minimum or maximum number of either 500- or 600-level courses for the Plan of Study.
- No courses for which the student earns the grade of "C+", "C", or "C-" or below may be included on the Plan of Study to count toward the PhD degree.

4. Additional Requirements and Expectations for the PhD

In addition to pursuing coursework, students are responsible for the material on the appropriate reading list, which will be addressed on the Preliminary Examination (see #6 below).

Note: *students should see SLC's Graduate Studies Coordinator or the relevant language-specific Graduate Advisor during their first semester of study to receive the most up-to-date information about reading lists and examination procedures specific to their areas.*

Students pursuing the PhD degree from Purdue's School of Languages and Cultures are also expected to demonstrate, at a minimum, the ability to speak the major language fluently, in a substantially correct form; to read and comprehend texts in the major language; to write the major language in a style completely understandable to a native speaker; and to understand the language as spoken by native speakers. (An exception to this expectation would be Comparative Literature students who are not specializing in one major language and instead are studying texts from a variety of cultures in English translation).

If a student's proficiency level in their major language of study is deemed by faculty in their area as too low to ensure their academic success, the student will be required to complete one or more advanced undergraduate language courses (e.g., 400-level language courses such as 401 and 402). These courses will be listed on the student's transcript, but they will not count as part of the coursework required for the PhD degree.

For the PhD, the student must also demonstrate reading knowledge in two languages other than English and the student's major language of study. Reading knowledge is understood to be functional competence in reading—usually at the intermediate to advanced level—which implies the ability to work with scholarly articles, books, or documents well enough to extract meaning for research purposes, even if with aid of a dictionary. PhD students may count their L1 (first language), without the need for an examination, as one of their four minimum research languages if the L1 is neither English nor the language of study.

This language requirement may be met in any of the following ways:

- a. by examination in the language;
- b. by completing the language course 202 or higher in the language with a minimum grade of B (3.0);
- c. by completing the equivalent of 202 or higher in the language with a minimum grade of B (3.0) at another institution within five years of beginning the SLC graduate program.

This additional language requirement must be satisfied before the Preliminary Examination may be scheduled.

5. The Major Professor and the Advisory Committee

The student's Advisory Committee (a total of at least three professors, including the major professor who chairs the committee) must be constituted during the student's second semester of PhD coursework. The major professor must be chosen by the fifth week of that semester, and the committee will be established in conformity with the procedures outlined in the [Policies and Procedures for Administering Graduate Student Programs](#): "The student and the major professor are responsible for the selection of an advisory committee. The duties of that committee are to assist the student in the preparation of the plan of study and to offer advice during the period of graduate work, including research and thesis preparation when these are required components of the student's degree program. The committee consists of the major professor and at least two other members of the graduate faculty" (Sec. VII.A.1-2.).

The PhD student, along with their Advisory Committee and their Graduate Advisor, are responsible for ensuring that the student meets all requirements on schedule and that a meaningful program of study be pursued. **Note:** *Comparative Literature students should consult with and get approval from the Director of Comparative Literature on their Plan of Study, in addition to their major professor and Advisory Committee.*

The student's Advisory Committee including their Graduate Advisor must approve coursework designated as Related Area before it can be used on the Plan of Study as counting toward the PhD degree (see #3 above). Appeals to these decisions by students should be addressed

directly to the SLC Head and the DGS.

Admitted students who have taken relevant graduate coursework at another institution beyond the BA degree in an accredited graduate program may, after a semester of satisfactory work at Purdue, petition for graduate coursework completed elsewhere to count on the PhD Plan of Study. In such cases, the DGS will consult with relevant SLC faculty to determine how much of the previous coursework can be used to satisfy course and seminar requirements for the PhD program in SLC.

A tentative Plan of Study must be drafted by the tenth week of the second semester and submitted for approval to the major professor and the Graduate Studies Coordinator. The definitive plan of study (revised, if need be) must be approved online by the Graduate Studies Coordinator, the major professor, the other members of the Advisory Committee, the SLC Head, and the Graduate School before the preliminary examination can be scheduled. See [Policies and Procedures for Administering Graduate Student Programs](#), Sec. VII.B., for a detailed description of the Plan of Study.

6. The Preliminary Examination and Dissertation Prospectus Defense

A student should take the Preliminary Examination in the semester in which course work is completed for the PhD or in the following semester at the latest. The examination will consist of a written and an oral component, both of which must be passed in addition to the Prospectus Defense to become a PhD candidate (sometimes referred to informally as “ABD” – *All But Dissertation*) and to proceed to the dissertation phase of the program.

Students are normally required to complete the written phase of the examination during a period not exceeding two weeks. After satisfactory completion of the written exam, the oral will be scheduled, normally within two weeks. The oral component will not last longer than two hours; its purpose is to give the student an opportunity to elaborate on and clarify responses, and to acknowledge and correct any factual errors, from the written exam, and to extend the scope and depth of the total examination.

The Graduate School specifies the following about the PhD Examining Committee:

The preliminary examining committee must consist of a minimum of three members of the graduate faculty. At least 51% of the committee members must have regular graduate faculty certification. All members of the examining committee are to be notified of the scheduled examination. Other faculty members may be requested by any member of the examining committee to participate, without vote, in the examination, and any interested faculty member may be present, without vote. Although only three committee members are required, if the committee has four or more members, a single member may withhold his or her signature of approval. ([Policies and Procedures](#), Sec. VII.D.3.)

To clarify, if the examining committee has four faculty members, three out of four must approve the passing grade. If the committee has only three members, the approval vote

must be unanimous across all three of the faculty for the student to receive a passing grade. An unsatisfactory Preliminary Examination may be repeated only once after the lapse of at least one semester, if the student has the approval of their major professor to do so.

After the Preliminary Examination has been passed, the student writes a dissertation prospectus that outlines what they plan to write about for their dissertation and that includes a working bibliography and any initial research conducted on the topic (the student should discuss program-specific expectations for the prospectus with their major professor). The Prospectus Defense generally takes place no later than one semester after the Preliminary Examination.

7. The Dissertation and Dissertation Committee

After successful completion of the Preliminary Examination and the Prospectus Defense, the PhD candidate will concentrate on conducting research for and writing the dissertation. This is a substantial piece of original scholarship that is required for all PhD degrees in SLC (refer to the website for the [Thesis and Dissertation Office](#) for template and specific guidelines).

The four-person Dissertation Committee consists of the candidate's major professor and three additional faculty who are chosen by the candidate in consultation with the major professor.

The major professor and the candidate will meet regularly throughout the research and writing process, and they should have a common understanding at the beginning of the writing process regarding the procedure and protocol for sharing chapter drafts with the other members of the Dissertation Committee.

Additional important notes about the PhD dissertation:

- The dissertation document must conform with the regulations outlined in "[A Manual for the Preparation of Graduate Theses](#)."
- During the final semester at Purdue, before scheduling an appointment to deposit the dissertation, the student must complete a Graduate School exit questionnaire.
- Students are responsible for being familiar with all [deposit requirements](#) of the Graduate School.
- Students must pay a **dissertation deposit fee** (\$125 at the time of this writing), which cannot be waived. Candidates can pay the deposit fee through their myPurdue accounts. The deposit fee should appear in a candidate's student account 2-3 days after their successful deposit.

8. Final Examination (Oral Dissertation Defense)

The PhD Final Examination, which is an oral defense of the dissertation, will be conducted by the candidate's Dissertation Committee.

Students should speak with their major professors in advance of the defense about specific expectations (such as whether the candidate will give a presentation of a certain length, about the dissertation at the beginning of the defense meeting) and should be prepared to respond to questions about the dissertation from all members of the Dissertation Committee.

As the regulation of the Graduate School states "No more than one dissenting vote is acceptable in certifying a candidate to receive the PhD degree" ([Policies and Procedures](#), Sec. VII. F.4),

9. Exceptional Cases and Extensions

These SLC guidelines are intended to help PhD degree students work with their major professors and Advisory Committees to design effective programs of study which will contribute to their academic and professional growth. Exceptions to these guidelines occasionally may be granted in individual cases with extenuating circumstances. It is incumbent on the student and their major professor to justify requests for exceptions, including extensions to length of degree program, via a memorandum addressed to the DGS and to the Head of SLC, preferably prior to the filing of the Plan of Study. Note that an extension granted to the length of a degree program does **not** guarantee an extension of funding.

Students are advised that regulations in the [Policies and Procedures for Administering Graduate Student Programs](#) of the Graduate School cannot be overruled by the SLC administration.

NOTE: It is the student's responsibility to comply with all SLC and Graduate School guidelines and deadlines. Please note that any relevant changes in university guidelines will supersede the information presented in this document.

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Glossary of Terms

Advisory Committee

This committee consists of two faculty members in addition to the major professor and should be constituted in the second semester of PhD studies. The Advisory Committee determines whether courses may be used on the Plan of Study as Related Area

coursework.

Assessment Interview

By the tenth week of their first semester in SLC, PhD students who completed their MA degree elsewhere should have an Assessment Interview conducted by a committee consisting of two to three relevant faculty in their area. The interview is intended to identify, more specifically than during the application process to the program, the student's knowledge and skills pertinent to the pursuit of the PhD in SLC. On the basis of the results of this assessment, specific courses and readings may be recommended, which may make necessary the completion of additional coursework over and above the usual required number of credit hours.

Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)

The DGS works with the SLC Head and the Graduate Studies Coordinator to administer the SLC graduate programs. This can include advising students on problems and concerns that arise, informing them about relevant professional development opportunities and scholarships or fellowships, and consulting with the Head on decisions about requests for funding or time-to-degree extensions.

Dissertation Committee

Consists of four faculty members including a dissertation director (the committee chair / major professor) and serves as the examining body for the prospectus defense and the dissertation defense. Note that the three Advisory Committee members also often serve on the Examining Committee for the Preliminary Examination and / or on the Dissertation Committee, but this continuity is not required. Committee composition may be reconstituted through the PhD studies as needed to better align with student preferences and their dissertation topic.

Dissertation Defense

See "Final Examination."

Examining Committee

At the PhD level, the Examining Committee is for the Preliminary Examination and consists of the major professor and at least two other relevant graduate faculty; may have the same members as the Advisory Committee, but it doesn't need to be.

Final Examination

For the PhD degrees in SLC, this is the candidate's oral defense of the dissertation, which is attended and assessed by the Dissertation Committee. Students should speak with their major professors in advance of the defense about specific expectations (such as whether the candidate will give a presentation of a certain length about the dissertation at the beginning of the defense meeting) and should be prepared to respond to questions about the dissertation from all members of the Dissertation Committee.

Graduate Advisor (program-specific)

Each SLC graduate program designates a faculty member to serve as the graduate advisor to assist new graduate students before they select a major professor. The SLC orientation week schedule (the week before classes start in the Fall semester) traditionally lists on its first page the faculty who hold these roles for the respective programs.

Graduate Studies Coordinator

An administrative staff team position in SLC; this is our graduate students' primary contact person for questions about degree requirements, procedures, and policies governing our graduate programs.

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

The IDP is a document that encourages graduate students to consider their strengths, potential areas for professional growth, and their career goals (whether for academic or non-academic jobs). The IDP template is given to graduate students during SLC's Orientation Week (the week before Fall semester classes start in August) and should be drafted and discussed with a faculty mentor by halfway through their first semester (week 8). The IDP should be reviewed and revised each year of the student's program of study.

Major Professor

Sometimes referred to as faculty advisor, this is the primary academic contact person for an SLC graduate student during their time in the program. The major professor should be an SLC faculty member in the student's field of study or one that is closely related. Responsibilities of the major professor include advising the student on coursework selections, tracking advisees' progress toward degree, reading carefully and commenting on drafts of the dissertation, and coordinating the Preliminary Examination, Prospectus Defense, and Dissertation Defense with the respective committees, which they will chair or co-chair. The student advisee may consult with their major professor about post-graduate career possibilities and professional development opportunities. However, PhD students are also encouraged to reach out to multiple faculty members in SLC for informal mentoring, rather than relying solely on the major professor. (See also SLC's document on SharePoint titled [Graduate Mentoring in the School of Languages and Cultures](#)).

Plan of Study

The Plan of Study is submitted by the student online via the [Graduate School Database](#) after consultation with the major professor. For the PhD degree, 90 credit hours total, including 30 credits of post-MA coursework and at least 30 credits of dissertation research hours, are required for the Plan of Study. Students should begin drafting their Plan by the fifth week of their second semester of PhD studies, with the final version submitted and approved online by the tenth week of that semester. Note that certain types of courses are not allowed to count for credit on the Plan of Study (e.g., Pass / No-Pass courses, audited courses, zero credit courses).

Preliminary Examination

Sometimes referred to as prelim(s), this examination has a written and an oral component and is a prerequisite for writing the dissertation. The Preliminary Examination covers the works on the area-specific reading lists, and students will have the opportunity to demonstrate relevant background knowledge gained from their coursework and other reading as well. Students should consult the SLC Graduate Studies Coordinator or program-specific Graduate Advisor for details about the format and other expectations for the Preliminary Examination, as these may differ somewhat depending on the area.

Primary Area Coursework

At least 21 of the 30 credit hours of post-MA coursework should be designated as Primary Area courses on the Plan of Study. These include courses within the student's area of study (CMPL, FR, GER, SPAN), as well as cross-listed SLC graduate courses in literature and culture that are taught in English as the language of instruction. For SLC PhD programs, the required 630 Literary Criticism and Bibliography course and the 519 course on teaching languages both count as Primary Area.

Prospectus / Prospectus Defense

Sometimes called the Dissertation Proposal, the prospectus is drafted after successful completion of the Preliminary Examination. Students should consult the SLC Graduate Studies Coordinator or language-specific Graduate Advisor for details about the length and timeline for submitting the prospectus and scheduling the defense of it with the Dissertation Committee.

Related Area Coursework

For the PhD, this consists of up to 9 credit hours of Related Area coursework (taken after completion of the MA degree) and includes courses that are outside of the Primary Area of literature and culture, usually offered by other departments. The major professor and the Advisory Committee must approve Related Area courses if they are to count for the PhD Plan of Study. PhD students are encouraged to take at least 3 credit hours of Related Coursework for their Plan of Study, but this is not a requirement.

Checklist with Deadlines for PhD Degree Students

Task	Completion Deadline
Individual Development Plan (IDP) is drafted and shared with faculty mentor / prospective major professor; this will be reviewed at the beginning of each year	Semester 1, week 8
Assessment Interview	Semester 1, week 10
Major Professor selection is finalized	Semester 2, week 5
Plan of Study drafting begins	Semester 2, week 5
Advisory Committee constituted	Semester 2, week 7
Plan of Study submitted for approval by Advisory Committee	Semester 2, week 10
Language requirement fulfilled and Examining Committee established	Before scheduling Preliminary Examination
Dissertation Committee established and Dissertation Director selected by PhD candidate	After successful completion of the Preliminary Examination and before the prospectus defense
Prospectus is submitted to Dissertation Committee and prospectus defense scheduled	After successful completion of the Preliminary Examination. Students should consult the SLC Graduate Studies Coordinator or program-specific Graduate Advisor for the timeline and more details about the prospectus.
Declare candidacy for graduation with approval of major professor; register in the appropriate candidacy section using the <u>scheduling assistant</u>	Semester of graduation, week 1 (see Graduate Studies Coordinator if you are unsure whether to register for CAND 99100 - With Assistantship; CAND 99200 - Degree Only; or CAND 99300 - Examination Only)

Electronic Graduate School Form 8 "Request for Appointment of Examining Committee" submitted by major professor	At least two weeks before Final Examination (dissertation defense) date as agreed on by the PhD candidate, major professor, and Dissertation Committee
Electronic Thesis Acceptance Form 9 (ETAF) submitted by the student	After dissertation defense (allow at least 2 business days for the ETAF to be approved by committee members and receive departmental approval)
Student deposits the dissertation and pays the deposit fee (\$125 at the time of this writing)	Refer to the webpage for the Thesis and Dissertation Office for specific guidelines on submitting the dissertation to HammerRR at least 24 hours in advance of the Deposit Deadline (usually about a week and a half before commencement each semester).