Ph.D. in Advanced Composition and Rhetoric

In the Rhetoric and Composition concentration, doctoral examinations are 7-day off-site written examinations. These exams draw on both a primary field of specialization and a research focus within that field.

General Information

The Comprehensive Exam consists of responses to 4 questions and a manuscript-quality text (e.g., a revision of a seminar paper written to a targeted venue for publication). Students have 7 days to complete their responses after receiving their questions and the remainder of the term in which they take exams to complete revisions of their manuscript.

Students must submit paperwork with the signatures of all three committee members and a reading list to the Graduate Studies office the semester in advance in order to take the exam. In addition, the student will select a major seminar paper or project to revise and submit as their manuscript-quality text (see item 3 below). The original paper must be submitted to the exam committee director along with the responses to the four questions. Students will choose a week within a specified time frame as announced for fall and spring semesters by Graduate Studies in which to complete their 4 responses. Exams are evaluated separately by each exam reader and also given an overall evaluation as determined by the exam chair.

This exam structure builds upon coursework (at least four courses specified in the primary field), moves students toward prospectus and dissertation, increases professional development in teaching, and provides publishing opportunities.

Expectations

The student, in consultation with the exam committee, will compile a reading list with a minimum of 50 sources organized into a field and a focus. Based on coursework (four courses specified for the primary area), previous writing, and a review of new scholarship, the student will be asked to create responses in the following categories:

1. Review of Literature in the Specified Field (addresses an issue, key term, or gap in the scholarly conversation related to theory, history or practice).
   - You work with your advisor/committee to define a research question that is answered in the literature review.

2. Application of Pedagogy/Praxis (designs a course syllabus and rationale, statement of connection to personal teaching philosophy, and sources that include composition theory and pedagogy).
   - You identify which course or curriculum you will design.

3. Revision of Scholarly Writing Project in Area of Focus (provides rationale for research, outline of the piece chosen, and describes the targeted disciplinary journal/publication venue).
   - You explain (in a working revision plan and shorter response than the 10 page maximum) how you will revise the scholarly project in the following ways: identify the paper/project; identify the journal/venue; outline the original paper/project; outline the changes/revisions planned; and explain why these changes are necessary.

4. Proposal for Research (outlines research questions, theoretical frameworks, research design and methods for one specified study).
   - You explain and propose a methodology for a study that you could use as part of the dissertation.

Each Response Demonstrates:

1. Well-structured, focused, detailed, accurate and revised writing in the genre indicated by the question;
2. Strong voice that indicates how you are entering the scholarly conversation with a clear positioning of yourself within the dialogues of the field and focus—not merely a recap of everything you’ve read;
3. Accurate and detailed evidence that emphasizes references to the literature in your field and focus. Particularly we look for the appropriate and selective use of direct quotations, internal citations or data.

Length and Scope:

We expect the equivalent of 10-page maximum responses for each of the four questions, followed by a complete Works Cited for each response. In addition, the manuscript-quality text will be a substantial revision of existing research from a completed doctoral course in the field or focus area and must be the equivalent of a 20 to 25-page written project.

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