

**The Johns Hopkins University**

**Department of Comparative Thought and Literature Graduate  
Program Handbook  
Updated December 2020**

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## **Department Overview**

The Department of Comparative Thought and Literature (CTL) offers students the opportunity to pursue research on questions at the intersection of literature, philosophy, and aesthetics. Central to these concerns is the analysis of literary and philosophical texts, ranging across a set of diverse traditions, genres, and languages, in relation to ethics, law, religion, history, art history, anthropology, media studies, political theory, and the natural sciences. Questions of literary theory, the history and value of literature, and the constitution and development of philosophical and literary forms in a global context are similarly at the forefront of the department's research and teaching.

Drawing on the strengths of its current faculty, the department's focus is on comparative approaches to modernisms and modernities. This temporal restriction, however, is joined by a commitment to the deep historical understanding of modernity and the department seeks to ground students' rigorous training in a broad understanding of literature and thought prior to 1750. The rich resources and opportunities offered by other departments and faculty in the Krieger School, as well as the wider University community and Baltimore area, are central to students' preparation for the PhD.

## **Fields of Study**

For over 50 years, the department has engaged the close relation between comparative literature and intellectual history. Students have the opportunity to work with faculty whose research draws on both these fields in a transnational and multidisciplinary context. Courses in the department provide students with a broad foundation in the methodology and history of comparative approaches, with more specific seminars focused on movements, genres, authors and questions that engage both modern literature and thought. Recent additions to the department are a focus on literature and thought outside Europe and the Americas, as well as the relation of literature and law. Upon graduating, students will have received qualification to teach in at least two national literatures of the modern period, or in a subfield of the study of modern literature and thought that spans two or more disciplines.

## **Admissions**

Applications are taken once a year for matriculation in the fall semester of the following academic year (the annual application deadline is December 15). Students may apply for admission to the Ph.D. program with either a B.A. or M.A. degree in hand or in the final year of progress.

All application materials and supporting documents should be uploaded electronically through the online system; these include:

### **Online application**

- Application fee
- Statement of purpose

- Sample of work
- Three letters of recommendation
- Official transcripts (applications will be ready for review with unofficial transcripts, but official transcripts will be required if an offer of admission is made)
- Official GRE test scores (optional)
- Official TOEFL or IELTS score (for international applicants)

## **Admission Criteria**

Admissions decisions are based on four principal factors:

1. Preparation for conducting research: Either a B.A. degree (or its equivalent) or a M.A. degree is required for admission to the Ph.D. program. Students are expected to enter with an adequate knowledge of the history of at least one national literature as well as literary theory, philosophy, or another disciplinary field. During their first two years at Hopkins, students are encouraged to audit upper-level undergraduate courses in areas where they require further preparation. Applicants trained in comparative literature, philosophy, a national language and literature department, or intellectual history and related subjects are encouraged to apply. Materials bearing on preparation include transcripts of college courses, letters of recommendation, work experience and travel.
2. Writing sample: A research paper on a topic in modern thought and literature. A graded paper in an undergraduate course, a senior thesis, a post-graduate writing project, or any other sample that demonstrates an ability to conduct research, formulate arguments, and write clearly is acceptable.
3. Statement of purpose: Hopkins graduate students work closely with individual members of the faculty; therefore, applicants need to describe clearly the department's suitability to their research interests.
4. Foreign languages: Students are expected to work across multiple languages and must give evidence of their foreign language knowledge by the end of their third year. A strong developing competency in at least one or more foreign languages at the time of admission is therefore a factor of consideration. Students who are not native English speakers must submit TOEFL or IELTS scores with their applications.

## **Requirements for the PhD Degree**

### **Coursework**

Students are required to take ten graduate level courses (600-level) for grades in their first two years of study. Of the ten graded courses, five must be courses offered by the core faculty in the Department of Comparative Thought and Literature, including a mandatory pro-seminar on comparative methods and theory for all incoming students in the fall semester of their first year.

Students will select courses in discussion with the DGS during the first week of the fall semester with a view to developing the course of study most suited to a student's broader research interest.

Students normally take three courses in each of their first two semesters, and two courses in each of the semesters of their second year. Students are encouraged to audit courses both in CTL and other departments relevant to their interests for the entirety of their time at Hopkins. On approval by the DGS and appropriate arrangements with the relevant course instructor, graduate students may take 400-level undergraduate courses for graduate credit.

Graduate courses in the Department of Comparative Thought and Literature are awarded letter grades. Students are expected to maintain an A- average in these courses. Students whose grades in these courses fall below that average will be notified in writing during the annual evaluation process (see below). Continued poor performance in course work can result in a probation period.

Faculty set their own policy for submission of written work in their courses. With approval from the instructor of the course, students may carry one (1) incomplete/in progress grade into the following semester. Incompletes must be resolved prior to the beginning of the next semester.

### **Foreign Language Exams**

By the end of their third year, students must possess advanced knowledge of at least two foreign languages. Evidence of language training can take a number of forms. Students can satisfactorily complete language courses at the level of intermediate or above in one of the language departments at JHU; they can take at least two graduate courses taught in a foreign language for grades; or they can pass a test administered in the department or by a relevant faculty. Students whose primary language is not English can use their native language to cover one of the language requirements. Students can acquire language training at JHU in the Departments of German and Romance Languages and Literatures, Classics, and Near Eastern Studies. Additional languages are also taught at the Center for Language Education at JHU, as well as any number of immersive summer courses at other institutions. If students wish to pursue languages not currently taught at Hopkins they should consult with the Chair and DGS who will take every possible measure to facilitate such instruction by other means.

### **Qualifying Exams**

Early in the fall semester of their third year, no later than the end of September, students take their qualifying exams. To do so, students must have completed all their course work and have no outstanding incompletes. The qualifying exams have two components. The first is an oral examination of the student's knowledge of 40 books of major importance to the study of modern thought and literature. This list of books will be common to all students taking their exams in a given year, but often vary from one year to another. The common reading list includes fundamental works in three broad areas: I. imaginative literature; II. philosophy and religion; III. social theory and history. Students will be introduced to some of these texts during the pro-seminar in their first semester and the complete reading list will be made available to them by the DGS, in discussion with the whole faculty, no later than the end of the students' first year.

The second part of the exam covers two topics of the student's choice, each of which will be the subject of a written and an oral examination. Each of the two topics should include a reading list

of at least 30 works that the student selects in collaboration with a faculty member. Students should identify the faculty member to lead this topic during their third semester of study, and the lists should be completed and approved by the faculty member and DGS no later than the beginning of the fourth semester. Students can choose faculty members from outside the department to direct their specific topic exams. One week prior to the oral examination, students are provided with two essay questions on each of the two topics, of which the student must answer one for each topic in writing in the course of twenty-four hours.

The department's full faculty participates in the examination of the first reading list, while the examination of the specific topics will be based on the written exams and be led by the faculty members with whom the student designed the topics. Oral examination of the specific topic exams aims to relate the student's written answers to the broader reading list developed for the topic. All three oral examinations take place together and are scheduled to take two hours, with discussion of each reading list normally receiving equal time. Failure to pass the exam in a satisfactory manner may be grounds for probation. In such cases, a second attempt to take the exam can be scheduled for the end of the fall semester in the student's third year. Failure at the second attempt will constitute grounds for dismissal from the program.

### **Dissertation Proposal**

Once students have successfully passed their qualifying oral exams, they are ready to work towards the dissertation by formulating a prospectus. To this end, following the oral exams, they will meet at least twice with a designated faculty member to discuss drafts of the prospectus and receive feedback. Normally the role of guiding the student through the writing of the prospectus will be assumed by the faculty member with whom the student plans to work on the dissertation, but this need not be the case. The prospectus should be submitted for approval to the adviser no later than three months after the completion of the oral exams. In cases where the dissertation adviser differs from the faculty member who guided the student through the writing of the prospectus, approval depends on the adviser of the dissertation. The student will receive written feedback on the prospectus from the dissertation adviser no later than one month after submitting the final version. After the prospectus has been approved by the advisor, the student will discuss the prospectus with department faculty and the advisor, ideally sometime before the beginning of the spring semester of the student's third year.

The proposal should be approximately 10-15 single-spaced (or equivalent double-spaced) pages long and include:

- A brief statement of the purpose and aims of the dissertation.
- An overview of the scholarship on the topic and the specific contributions the dissertation seeks to make to the field.
- A description of the content of each individual chapter.
- A preliminary bibliography as an appendix.

It is understood that the proposal is a preliminary description of the dissertation project and that it will most likely undergo significant change once research on the topic advances.

## **Selection of Adviser**

On arrival at JHU, the DGS serves as adviser for all students and will meet with them to discuss their progress at least at the beginning and end of each semester. At the time of prospectus submission, the student must have identified a faculty member from the department who will serve as adviser for the dissertation and who will assume regular advising tasks for the student from the DGS. Students may choose a faculty member from outside the department who will serve as primary adviser, but in such cases a second adviser from within CTL must also be selected. Students can have up to two official advisers on a dissertation although it is expected that students will receive informal feedback on their research and writing from other faculty at JHU and beyond.

It is the responsibility of students to identify and contact the adviser(s) with whom they wish to work for their dissertation. Conversations with faculty and the DGS can guide in this process, and often the adviser will be someone with whom the student has taken courses during their first two years. The student can expect regular meetings with the adviser (at least twice per semester) and prompt feedback on all drafts of the dissertation (normally within two weeks and no later than a month). The adviser will also guide the student in preparing for the job market and provide the necessary support. Students are encouraged to raise any concerns they might have about advising with the Department Chair or DGS, who will help resolve the issues with the requisite care.

It is possible that, as research on the dissertation progresses, the project may undergo enough change to make it beneficial for the student to change advisers to a faculty member working more directly in the revised area of focus. In such cases, the student should consult with the original adviser, the Department Chair and the DGS to discuss the possibility of changing to a new adviser.

## **M.A. Degrees**

The department does not accept students seeking a terminal M.A. degree. However, those entering the Ph.D. program with a B.A. degree will qualify for an M.A. from the department upon completion of all program requirements but the dissertation (course work, qualifying exams, prospectus, and foreign language requirement). Students who wish to receive the M.A. degree along the way to the completion of their doctoral requirements must submit a request to the department administrator so they can be added to the graduation list.

Some humanities departments in the Krieger School allow students from the Department of Comparative Thought and Literature to obtain a terminal M.A. degree on the way to the PhD in CTL if they fulfill all necessary requirements. The department encourages students to take advantage of such possibilities, which can serve to accredit students more firmly in a second discipline and offer them more extensive training in its methods. A M.A. in a department other than CTL cannot, however, substitute for requirements in the department itself, such as the mandatory courses taken in the department of Comparative Thought and Literature or the qualifying exams.

## **ABD Timeline**

Once the student has completed all degree requirements except the dissertation, it is expected that she/he will make steady progress in the research and writing process. While timelines and writing schedules may vary due to the nature of the research involved, in general students are expected to have at least two chapters completed by the end of the spring semester of their fourth year of study. This will allow students entering the job market in their fifth year to have at least one chapter from which to draw their writing sample and another that can serve as a job talk.

## **Dissertation Defense**

When the dissertation is complete, normally in the spring semester of a student's fifth year, the student must successfully defend the dissertation before a Graduate Board Orals committee consisting of five members: at least two and no more than three readers from within the department and at least two and no more than three readers from outside the department. The defense should be scheduled in consultation with the student's adviser(s), the Department Chair and the department administrator. Before scheduling the defense, the dissertation must have been accepted and approved as complete and finished by the adviser(s). As specified by the Homewood Graduate Board, the faculty can consult with the student regarding possible members of the examination committee, but selection of the final committee is the department's responsibility and not the candidate's responsibility or prerogative.

The defense should be planned at least eight weeks in advance of the proposed defense date. Students should be in communication with the department administrator to make sure they understand the deadlines, forms, and procedures involved in scheduling the defense and completing all requirements for graduation (for further information visit the Graduate Board website: <http://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/academics/graduate-board/graduate-board-oral-exams/>). No later than three weeks prior to the defense date, the student is responsible for providing seven hard copies of the dissertation as well as an electronic copy to the administrator, who will distribute them to the committee.

Successful defense of the dissertation and electronic submission of the complete work to the library constitutes the fulfillment of the program's degree requirements. Note that there is a fee for submitting the dissertation to the library; this will be paid by the department.

## **Policy on Probation and Termination**

Students who do not make satisfactory academic progress in any area of work required in the program may be put on academic probation. Failure to meet the terms of his/her probation will result in the dismissal of that student from the program. Further information on probationary policies can be found online: <http://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2014/08/Graduate-Student-Probation-Funding-Withdrawal-and-Dissmissal-Policy.pdf>

## Teaching

The Department of Comparative Thought and Literature considers the training of future educators a central component of its mission. For at least four of the ten semesters during which they receive funding, students gain valuable pedagogical experience by serving as Teaching Assistants for courses in the department under different faculty mentors. All students are exempt from teaching obligations in the first year of their fellowship, and also during their fifth year, when they are completing their dissertation and pursuing future employment opportunities. If a student selects to study outside the department during their fourth year, they are also exempt from teaching during this period. When the department's course offerings for the following semester are announced, students should indicate their preference for courses in which they wish to serve as TA. The Department Chair will make every effort to accommodate such preferences when allocating TA positions, but final decision will depend on availability and the department's needs.

New TAs will be required to attend the mandatory orientation and training day organized by the university and the Center for Educational Resources of the MSEL. This is usually hosted the week before classes begin in the fall semester and an announcement will be sent via email.

In addition to serving as TA, the department will select one student per semester to serve as Editorial Assistant for the Comparative Literature issue of *Modern Language Notes (MLN)*, the journal edited by the department. *MLN* is one of the oldest and most prestigious journals in the field and an important source of visibility for the department nationally and abroad. The Editorial Assistant will support the Executive Editors in performing a range of administrative and editorial tasks necessary to the production of each issue, in collaboration with The Johns Hopkins University Press. The *MLN* editorial assistantship is an excellent opportunity for students to learn the details of academic publishing. No student can serve as Editorial Assistant for more than two semesters.

In addition to regular TA positions, the University offers a variety of teaching opportunities to graduate students, including Intersession Courses, Summer Courses, SOUL courses, Dean Teaching Fellowships and teaching fellowships from the Program in Women, Gender and Sexuality. Only students who have completed all their requirements except the dissertation are eligible to teach these courses and any teaching other than regular TA positions must be approved by the Department Chair. In exceptional cases, students who are making good progress towards their dissertation may receive permission from the Chair to teach courses prior to being ABD. Students wishing to pursue such opportunities must petition the Chair directly.

## Study Abroad

The Department of Comparative Thought and Literature encourages students to pursue research and study at another university during their fourth year. In particular, students are encouraged to study in countries whose primary language is central to their research and of which they are not a native speaker. In the past, students have been able to take advantage of the department's exchange programs with other institutions of graduate education, such as the Principles of Cultural Dynamics Network at the Free University of Berlin. Currently, the department offers an



exchange program with the École normale supérieure in Paris, to which it can send one student per year. Students wishing to pursue research at other institutions during their fourth year will take their stipend with them, but it is the responsibility of the student to make the necessary arrangements to be accepted as a visiting student at the host institution. Students planning to take advantage of this opportunity should consult with the DGS and their adviser as early as possible to discuss their plans. Approval of study abroad plans is the prerogative of the Department Chair in consultation with the student's adviser.

### **Annual Evaluations and Renewal Letters**

Every spring, as part of the fellowship contract renewal process, the department conducts graduate student evaluations to assess the accomplishments and progress of each individual in the program. There are several steps to this process. First, the student fills out the form: "Part A: Graduate Student Self-Assessment." This self-assessment will be made available to the entire faculty, who will discuss it as a group. Following this, the student's primary adviser or the DGS, in the case of students in their first and second year, completes "Part B: Adviser's Assessment," stating the faculty's evaluation of the student's progress. After this, students will be asked to schedule a one-on-one meeting with the adviser or DGS to discuss the faculty's assessment, and a final form is filled out, "Part C: In-Person Meeting," describing the conclusions to the meeting. This form is signed by both student and adviser and submitted to the department administrator who will keep it in the student's file.

Following the evaluation process, letters of fellowship renewal are prepared and distributed to all continuing graduate students in the department. These letters contain financial details of each individual's fellowship award, as well as an explanation of each student's status and responsibilities for the coming academic year; accordingly, these letters should be read very carefully for accuracy. Letters must be signed and returned to the department by the deadline indicated (typically, mid-May), since they are used to set budgets for the coming year. In cases where letters do not reflect a student's own understanding of the fellowship or the obligations attached to it, the Department Chair and administrator should be notified immediately, and prior to the signing deadline.

### **Financial Support**

All graduate students entering the program are guaranteed five years of support, including summer funding, contingent upon satisfactory progress year by year. This support covers the individual's annual full tuition costs, health insurance, and a stipend. Student stipends are guaranteed at the level stated in the letter of offer (for incoming students) and in the renewal letter (for continuing students) for the duration of the applicable period.

All ABD students (those who have completed all requirements but the dissertation) are strongly encouraged to apply for external grants and fellowships to support them once their university-sponsored funding is expired. In certain cases, students may receive external grants prior to the expiration of their funding. In the cases where such fellowships cover full tuition and stipend costs, students may "bank" their university-sponsored funding to use at a later date, although no

more than two semesters of university-sponsored funding may be banked. If students obtain funding that does not cover their tuition costs, this can be used to supplement their regular stipend but it cannot serve to bank university-sponsored funding. Any fellowship that involves significant responsibility other than dissertation research (e.g. teaching) must be approved by the Chair.

Students may supplement departmental funding with funding from sources outside the department, as in the following examples:

- Dean's Teaching Fellowships (only ABD students, with permission from the Department Chair, may apply for a DTF; these fellowships cover tuition costs and can be used to bank a semester of university-sponsored funding).
- WGS Teaching Fellowships (only ABD students, with permission from the Department Chair may apply for WGS teaching fellowships).
- JHU Intersession Courses / January Term and Summer Sessions (interested students must first consult with their adviser and obtain permission from the Department Chair).
- Travel Funds through the Graduate Representative Organization
- The J. Brien Key Fund (Dean's Office)
- The Expository Writing Program (ABD only; administered through the English Department)

There are numerous internal and external sources of year-long, semester, summer, or intersession research and travel funding, including:

- WGS
- FLAS
- Fulbright
- SSRC

Students are encouraged to seek dissertation completion fellowships to extend their funding from internal and external sources such as the following:

- The Alexander Grass Humanities Institute (JHU)
- Center for Advanced Media Studies (JHU)
- Mellon Foundation Humanities Collaboratory Fellowship (JHU)
- Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship (national)
- The Social Sciences Research Council (national)

The department allocates a standard maximum amount of \$750 to each graduate student to use for conference needs over the course of their career in the department. Funding from this source can be requested any time in the student's career, although normally this would occur after the student has completed course work. Approval will be granted by the DGS and the student's principle faculty adviser. Students should contact the department administrator for details on how to process the payment.

## **Registration Status**

Students who are in their first five fellowship years, and/or receiving department funding as TAs, are considered “Resident” students. Those still doing coursework are responsible for meeting with their advisers before registering for courses. Once the adviser approves of the student’s schedule and lifts the adviser hold, the student is free to register.

Those who have completed all coursework and expect to maintain their resident status into years 3, 4, and 5 of the fellowship must register for the course “Dissertation Research” (AS.300.803). This is not an actual course but a registration of status (since everyone in residence must be registered for something). Students should make sure to register for the section that corresponds to their faculty advisers in order to facilitate grading. Advisers will assign a grade of Pass/Fail for this course. Enrolling in “Dissertation Research” does not preclude students from simultaneously enrolling in classes for audit or independent studies, should they wish to do so.

Students who have exhausted department funding are permitted to continue in the program, but will be required to apply for "Non-Resident" status. Non-resident students are responsible for paying for their own tuition costs (equivalent to 10% of full-time tuition that year) and health insurance costs, and do not receive a stipend. In order to obtain non-resident status, the student must apply to the Graduate Board through the department and be approved. Please contact the department administrator for instructions on applying for the change of status. Once approved by the Graduate Board, students must register themselves for the course “Non-Resident Status” (AS.910.600). This is also not an actual course but a registration of status. For more information about residency requirements, please see the Graduate Board website:

<http://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/academics/graduate-board/new-grad-board-residency-page/>

Note that the university strictly limits all graduate students to ten non-resident semesters, prior to receiving their degree. Students who do not receive their degree by this time are terminated.

Care should be taken when registering since university regulations prohibit the awarding of a grade for a course taken as an audit. Students who need to receive a grade in a course should register to take the course for credit. This includes courses taken as Pass/Fail outside the department. Similarly, students who do not need to obtain a grade from a course, or who do not wish to complete all assignments for a given course but wish to attend course meetings on an informational basis, should register as an auditor for that course. Once the add/drop period has passed for a semester, the type of registration cannot be retroactively changed.

## **Department Files**

Files are maintained in the department office for each graduate student. These files may contain information to which the student has waived access and/or confidential communications. It should be understood that the department reserves the right to refuse access to portions of the file

if a student does not make an appointment in advance to view his/her file. Requests for specific information should be made to the department administrator.

### **Krieger School of Arts and Sciences Policies and Resources**

- Statement of the Rights and Responsibilities of Ph.D. Students at Johns Hopkins University
  - [http://web.jhu.edu/administration/provost/initiatives/phd\\_board/rights\\_responsibilities](http://web.jhu.edu/administration/provost/initiatives/phd_board/rights_responsibilities)
- Krieger School of Arts & Sciences Graduate And Postdoctoral Affairs
  - <https://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/>
    - The Homewood Graduate Board-  
<https://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/academics/graduate-board/>
    - Academic Misconduct Policy-  
[http://krieger.jhu.edu/hwgradaffairs/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2018/08/Homewood-WSE\\_KSAS\\_-WSE-EP\\_KSAS-AAP-Graduate-Academic-Misconduct-Policy-2018SU.pdf](http://krieger.jhu.edu/hwgradaffairs/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2018/08/Homewood-WSE_KSAS_-WSE-EP_KSAS-AAP-Graduate-Academic-Misconduct-Policy-2018SU.pdf)
    - Family Resources for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Fellows –  
<http://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/2017/06/28/new-university-wide-policy-for-graduate-student-and-postdoctoral-fellow-new-child-accommodations/>
- Career and Professional Development Resources for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Fellows
  - <https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/careers/students/graduate-students/>
  - <https://engineering.jhu.edu/cle/>
- Pedagogy Resources
  - <http://cer.jhu.edu/>
- Women and Gender Resources
  - <https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/women-resources/>