Summary of Graduate Exams

(REVISED DK 4/18, 12/19)

An important component of the graduate program in Classics is the various examinations that a student is expected to prepare for and pass. While coursework will prepare you for some of these exams, they also require a good deal of independent study and preparation. The following is a summary and description of the exams you are expected to take. All written exams become part of your permanent file.

I. Language Exams

Graduate students intending to complete the PhD must pass competency exams in Greek and Latin, and also in German and French or German and Italian. One modern language examination must be passed for the MA degree.

The examinations in Greek, Latin, and the modern languages are administered on three occasions in the course of the year: on Monday and Tuesday of the third week in the fall quarter and of the eighth week in the winter and spring quarters. Under no circumstances are language exams administered during the summer. Registration is not required in order to be eligible to take these examinations, but if you are not registered you must have been granted on-leave status. Exams are evaluated as pass or fail by a reading committee of three faculty members. In the case of a partial pass or failure, you should meet as soon as possible with the chair of the reading committee to discuss the exam and how best to prepare for re-examination.

Up to two re-examinations are permitted. After three unsuccessful attempts, any further examination requires the permission of the faculty. For the ancient languages, this requires a formal vote of the departmental faculty. For modern languages, permission may be granted without such a vote, if the chair of the exam committee and the graduate advisor think it is appropriate.

A. Latin and Greek

The Latin and Greek examinations are three hours in length. There are six passages (each roughly 15-20 lines long, photocopied from standard editions, generally an OCT or a Teubner) -- four passages chosen from the reading list and two chosen from texts not on the list. No dictionaries are permitted.

Passages for the Greek exam are chosen from the following six categories: epic poetry, drama, other poetry, historiography, philosophy, and oratory (including rhetorical treatises).

Passages for the Latin exam are chosen from the following six categories: epic poetry, drama (e.g., Roman comedy or Senecan tragedy), other poetry (e.g., elegy), oratory (including rhetorical treatises), historiography, and other prose (epistolography, biography, novel, philosophy, etc.).

These examinations test for competence in reading Latin and Greek as acquired through both coursework and familiarity with the
texts on the Reading List. Stress is laid on the ability to recognize and render accurately into English fundamental grammatical and syntactical constructions. Readers look for realistic, reasonable evidence of substantial experience reading and translating Latin and Greek texts selected to represent an array of genres and historical periods.

B. Modern languages
The French, German, and Italian examinations are two hours in length, and consist of three passages (each roughly 15-20 lines of text in length) chosen from various representative examples of classical scholarship in literary studies, history/archeology, and philosophy. Two of the three passages are to be translated; dictionaries are permitted.

These exams should be taken as soon as you feel ready. Please note that in accordance with Departmental policy, holders of TAships and RAships are not allowed to enroll in modern language courses during the regular academic year as part of the 10 credit minimum required by the Graduate School. During the summer quarter, however, and with the Graduate Program Coordinator’s permission, such courses may be taken as part of the 10 credit minimum.

II. Special Author/Topic Examinations
Graduate students are required to take examinations on two focused topics in Classical studies, one primarily Greek and the other primarily Roman. These exams may be taken at any point in your preparation, but will normally be taken only after passing the translation examination in the corresponding language. Special topic examinations are typically administered during the regular academic year. In certain circumstances, and with the permission of both the faculty member supervising the exam and the GPC, an exam may be taken during the summer quarter, but it will not be read and evaluated by the full committee until the fall quarter. Registration is not required in order to be eligible to take these examinations, but if you are not registered you must have been granted on-leave status.

While there is no prescribed formula for these exams, they assume a deep familiarity with the primary sources relevant to your topic and the important secondary works and trends in scholarship. Suitable topics might include a specific author or genre; or, e.g., a literary theme or cultural institution; a historical period, or an area of social or intellectual history; an area of art history or archaeology; Athenian or Roman topography; a technical skill such as epigraphy, linguistics, metrics, or palaeography.

It is important to choose topics wisely. These exams may serve various purposes: they can familiarize you with an author, text, or field that you may at some point be called upon or particularly wish to teach – they can, in other words, establish your ‘credentials’; they can broaden your horizons by familiarizing you with an author, text, or field outside the range of your immediate interests; or they can deepen your familiarity with material relevant to your intended dissertation topic, provided they do not coincide too closely with that topic.

It is your responsibility to identify and meet with a faculty member suitable to administer such an exam. Special topic exams are for the most part administered by departmental faculty. In certain circumstances, however, you may wish to work with a faculty member outside the department, especially if that person has special expertise in the relevant area. In either case you must first consult with the GPC about your plan, and then approach the appropriate faculty member in order to discuss the nature and focus of the exam, a timetable, and how best to prepare for it. The faculty member will identify two additional readers, in consultation with the GPC. The exam will be evaluated as pass or fail by this committee of three faculty members. In certain instances, a partial pass may be deemed appropriate, with re-examination on one or more areas.

III. PhD Oral Examination
The PhD Oral or General Examination is taken once you have been admitted to the PhD program and completed all of the requirements (including all of the above examinations) for the doctoral degree except the dissertation.

The examining or supervisory committee, which is constituted upon admission to the PhD program, typically consists of five members of the departmental faculty and a Graduate School Representative appointed by the Graduate School. The exam must be scheduled at least three weeks in advance, but it is advisable to allow more time than this, since it can be difficult to find a date that works for your whole committee. Registration for the quarter in which the exam is administered is required. Oral examinations are administered only during the regular academic year.

The exam is oral, approximately two hours in length, and covers five broad areas: Greek history and historical writing, Greek literature, Roman history and historical writing, Latin literature, and a fifth field to be chosen from the following: Greek art/archaeology, Roman art/archaeology, Greek and Roman philosophy, and Greek and Latin linguistics. (In exceptional cases, and with approval of the GPC, the fifth field may be another field of equal breadth and depth to the ones listed.) You should early on in your preparation make a point of meeting individually with the members of your committee to discuss general strategies for preparing for the exam.

The exam is evaluated pass or fail; in certain circumstances, re-examination on one or more areas may be required.

IV. Dissertation Defense or Final Examination

The Dissertation Defense or Final Examination occurs upon completion and submission of a dissertation determined to be defendable by your Dissertation Reading Committee. The defense must be scheduled three weeks in advance, but it is advisable to allow more time than this, since it can be difficult to find a date that works for your whole committee. The defense is generally held during the academic year, but under exceptional circumstances, and depending on the availability and willingness of members of the Supervisory Committee, may be scheduled during the Summer Quarter. For details on the requirements surrounding the Final Examination and submission of dissertations check the Graduate School's "General Information for Filing of Theses and Dissertations" at www.grad.washington.edu/stsv/stylman1.htm

The defense is generally an hour to ninety minutes in length, and consists of a presentation of the findings of the dissertation (roughly 30 minutes in length) followed by a period during which members of the Supervisory Committee or other people in attendance (the defense is open to the public) are free to ask questions about the dissertation.

Exam Preparation Time or ‘Floating Credits’

Upon completion of the MA degree and/or admission to the PhD program, you may register in any three separate quarters for 5 credits of Latin or Greek 600 in order to prepare for special author/topic examinations or the PhD orals. Those who are required to maintain full-time status by registering for 10 credits (e.g., those holding TAships) will be expected to register for a minimum of an additional 5 credits of regular coursework. (Please note that this option is not available during the quarter in which you are participating in the Rome program.)

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