

The Ph.D. in German Studies at Vanderbilt University

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Initial Coursework

During their first two years at Vanderbilt, graduate students enroll in a series of three team-taught courses by the German Studies Graduate Faculty (one per semester) exploring major transition points of modern German cultural history; theories of literary and cultural analysis; and different modes of scholarly work and writing. In addition to taking required and non-required seminars within the department, graduate students are expected to enroll in at least two seminars on relevant materials taught by members of the German Studies Graduate Faculty outside of the department. Students are typically also allowed to take at least two additional seminars outside of the department with other faculty members to enrich their interdisciplinary training.

Breakdown of Core Course Requirements

Students require a total of 72 credit hours to graduate. Students who enter the program with a B.A. are required to take 60 credit hours in the form of formal coursework; students who enter the program with an M.A. are required to take 42 credit hours of formal coursework. Formal coursework includes regular seminars and all required courses listed below; it excludes credit hours taken for non-candidate research and dissertation research during and after the Qualifying Exam. All formal coursework needs to be completed in order to pass the Qualifying Exam. Students entering the program with an M.A. may transfer up to 6 (in exceptional cases more) credit hours in consultation with the DGS after the end of their first year; such transfer credits, however, cannot be used to offset any of the required formal coursework. Each student is required to take the following courses (23 credit hours) as part of their required 60/42 credit hours of formal coursework:

- GER 7101: Foundations I: Transition Points of Modern German Culture [3 credit hours]
- GER 7102: Foundations II: Theories of Literary and Cultural Analysis [3 credit hours]
- GER 7103: Foundations III: Modes of Scholarly Work and Writing [3 credit hours]
- GER 7104: Pre-Exam Colloquium [3 credit hours]

- SLS 6030: Foreign Language Learning and Teaching [3 credit hours]
- GER 8301 Pre-Dissertation Colloquium [3 credit hours]

Foreign Language Requirement

Students must display reading proficiency in at least one language other than English or German. Students are strongly encouraged to enroll in courses to pass this requirement within the first two to three years of their studies at Vanderbilt. Coursework in foreign language learning does not count toward any of the requirements for formal coursework.

Teaching

The department considers graduate students' teaching experiences to be an integral moment of their education and professional training. Teaching is not simply a service to the department, or a load to be carried, but a critical part of preparing students for successful future careers. Graduate students can typically expect to teach at least two or three different courses in the basic German language curriculum. Staff resources and enrollment distribution allowing, the department will also seek to have graduate students gain teaching experience in as diverse settings as possible beyond the basic German language track.

In the fall semester of their first semester of teaching, i.e. before the beginning of their second year in the program in mid-August, graduate students are required to participate in a three-day workshop prior to the beginning of the semester, a hands-on training program familiarizing them with various concepts, classroom strategies, and textbook choices for German foreign language instruction. During the fall or spring semester of their first year of teaching, graduate students are also required to enroll in "SLS 6030: Foreign Language Learning and Teaching" [3 credit hours] as part of their regular coursework. This course counts as one of the courses that students can take for credit outside of the German PhD program.

The Preliminary Examination

The purpose of the Preliminary Examination (PE) is to evaluate a student's general familiarity with the literary and cultural history of German-speaking countries and to assess a student's ability to discuss key works of German literature, poetry, film, and thought. Graduate students who enter the program with a B.A. take their PE at the beginning of the fifth semester of graduate studies at Vanderbilt; successful completion of the exam will result in the awarding of an M.A. degree. Students who enter the program with an M.A. take their PE at the beginning of the third semester at Vanderbilt.

In the spring semester immediately preceding the PE, PE candidates enroll in "GER 7104: Pre-Dissertation Colloquium" as part of their regular class work. This seminar offers students a space to develop important textual and contextual perspectives and construct three separate reading lists, each including about 25 titles and reflecting some of the student's emerging research areas and interests. List one gathers key works of a single author, director, thinker, or artist, or of a specific group of authors, directors, thinkers, or artists, as well as texts that situate these in their respective historical and aesthetic context. List two is centered around the history and theory of

a particular form, genre, or medium of expression. List three finally collects key works about and representing a particular literary or cultural period. Though some overlap is possible and unavoidable, the design of these lists should be as distinct as possible with as much historical depth and cultural diversity as reasonable.

The PE exam committee is typically chaired by the DGS and consists of three members of the German Studies graduate faculty. The committee will be constituted in consultation with the student by the end of the spring semester. Students will finalize their three reading lists by May 31 so as to use the summer for additional preparation. In the second week before the beginning of the fall semester, students will be asked to write one 3,000-word take-home essay, prepare one 20-minute lecture in English designed for general undergraduate students, and design one self-contained media presentation. These assignments will respond to prompts asking PE candidates to explore synchronic and diachronic dimensions of their respective reading lists. The essay is due one week after receipt of the prompt; the media presentation is due three weeks after receipt of the prompt. The student will meet his or her committee four weeks after receipt of the prompts to present the lecture, discuss the written PE and the media presentation, and learn whether his/her scholarly performance during the examination process has met the expectations of the committee. Should the performance not satisfy the exam committee's expectations, the committee may ask the student to resubmit any or all of the three assignments by the end of the fall semester or recommend to the Department that the student be released from the program by the following summer.

The Qualifying Examination

The purpose of the Qualifying Examination (QE) is to evaluate a student's knowledge of the field of specialization, to assess familiarity with the published research in the field, and to determine whether the student possesses the critical and analytic skills needed for writing a dissertation. Graduate students who enter the program with a BA take their QE during the seventh semester of graduate studies at Vanderbilt, students who enter with an MA take their QE during the fifth semester at Vanderbilt. The examination process consists of several elements, all designed to interlock with each other and to prepare students effectively for the task of conceptualizing their dissertations.

In the spring semester immediately preceding the QE, QE candidates enroll in "GER 8301: Pre-Dissertation Colloquium" as part of their regular class work. This seminar offers students a space to develop a general conception of their future research—its objects and questions, its theoretical framework, its methodological approach, its historical background. By the last week of the spring semester, students present their research interests to the department's entire graduate faculty during a twenty-minute oral presentation. Responding to the faculty's comments and suggestions, and under the supervision of one faculty member of their choice (who in most cases will be their future dissertation advisor), students then develop a 10-12-page paper over the summer called the "Dissertation Project Proposal" (DPP). In this paper students detail the stakes of their project and situate their interests and modes of inquiry in a broader context. While working on the DPP, students will seek to identify their Ph.D. Committee. The DPP

will be due on the first day of the fall semester and submitted to the student's Ph.D. Committee. If the Ph.D. Committee considers the DPP a viable contribution to scholarly knowledge, it will provide the student by September 1 with comments and questions, meant to guide the student in transforming the DPP into a 20-25-page paper, called the "Qualifying Paper" (QP), over the course of the fall semester, due by December 1. The student will meet his or her committee on or around December 15 to discuss the QP and learn whether his/her scholarly performance during the examination process meets the expectations of the Ph.D. If it does, the committee will pass the student. In preparation for this meeting, the student will also draft a 500-word description of his or her project called the "Dissertation Abstract" (DA), communicating the aim, scope, and procedure of this project in succinct language. Should the DPP, QP, or DA not satisfy the Ph.D. Committee's standards and expectations for scholarly work, the Ph.D. Committee may ask the student to resubmit any or all of these documents or recommend to the Department that the student be released from the program by the following summer. No student is officially accepted as a candidate for the Ph.D. before all requirements are met and the DA has been approved by Ph.D. Committee.

The Ph.D. Committee

Students typically identify their Ph.D. Committee immediately following the end of the "Pre-Dissertation Colloquium" in preparation for the QE. The Ph.D. Committee must consist of at least four members, three of whom need to be either tenured or tenure-track members of the German Department; one member of the committee needs to be from outside of the German Department. The procedures of how Ph.D. candidates circulate individual chapter drafts to the members of the Ph.D. Committee may vary. However, these procedures should be clarified early on and, in accordance with the principal dissertation advisor, clearly communicated to all members of the Ph.D. Committee. Students may substitute individual committee members and even their dissertation supervisor at any time if necessary. Students inform the DGS by June 30 about the members of the Ph.D. Committee.

ABD Colloquium & Annual Ph.D. Committee Meeting

In addition to meeting regularly with their principal dissertation advisors concerning their progress and to participating consistently in the department's ABD Colloquium, Ph.D. candidates meet once a year in late April/early May with their entire Ph.D. Committee to review their research and writing progress, discuss possible challenges, and map out the final stages of the dissertation toward completion.

Application for research funding

Students apply for research fellowships at the beginning of their fourth year (eighth semester, entering the program with a B.A) or their third year (sixth semester, entering the program with a M.A.). Application for research funding is part of graduate students' professionalization and a cornerstone of scholarly independence. Applications for research funding may be based on a student's 10-12-page "Dissertation Project Proposals" (DPP). Evidence of application for research funding within the fourth (B.A)/third (M.A.) year is mandatory to be recommended for further funding through Vanderbilt University. Exceptions may apply on a case-to-case basis.

The Dissertation Defense

The dissertation must be submitted to all members of the Ph.D. Committee at least four weeks prior to the scheduled oral defense date. Faculty and graduate students may attend the dissertation examination unless the candidate requests otherwise.

Good Standing

Students are in good standing when they meet the requirements of the Ph.D. Program as outlined in the Program description. This includes fulfilling the expectation of set exams (even after re-taking them or re-submitting portions of the exam material), having no “Incompletes,” and performing well in their courses.

TYPICAL STUDENT TRAJECTORIES

Students entering the program with a B.A.

Year One: Fall Semester [12 credit hours]

- Foundations I: Transition Points of Modern German Culture [3 credit hours]
- 3 additional seminars [9 credit hours]

Year One: Spring Semester [12 credit hours]

- Foundations II: Theories of Literary and Cultural Analysis [3 credit hours]
- 3 additional seminars [9 credit hours]
- Late April: First-Year Review

Year One: Summer

- Supplemental Reading

Year Two: Fall Semester [9 credit hours]

- Foreign Language Learning and Teaching [3 credit hours]
- 2 additional seminars [6 credit hours]
- TA for beginning or intermediate language courses

Year Two: Spring Semester [9 credit hours]

- Foundations III: Modes of Scholarly Work and Writing [3 credit hours]
- Pre-Exam Colloquium in preparation of Preliminary Examination [3 credit hours]
- 1 additional seminar [3 credit hours]
- Language requirements
- TA for beginning or intermediate language courses

Year Two: Summer

- Preparation of Preliminary Examination (PE)
- August: PE (two weeks before the beginning of fall semester)

Year Three: Fall Semester [9 credit hours]

- 3 seminars [9 credit hours]
- TA for beginning or intermediate language courses

Year Three: Spring Semester [9 credit hours]

- Pre-Dissertation Colloquium in preparation of Qualifying Exam [3 credit hours]
- 2 additional seminars [6 credit hours]
- TA for beginning or intermediate language courses

Year Three: Summer

- Determining Ph.D. Committee by June 30

- Qualifying Exam: Dissertation Project Proposal (DPP)

Year Four: Fall [12 credit hours]

- Non-Candidate Research [12 credit hours]
- Qualifying Exam: Qualifying Paper (QP) and Dissertation Abstract (DA)
- Application for research fellowships abroad
- TA for language or upper-division courses or courses outside the department; RA work

Year Four: Spring [0 credit hours]

- Dissertation Research [0 credit hours]
- TA for language or upper-division courses or courses outside the department; RA work

Year Five: Fall and Spring [0 credit hours]

- Dissertation Research abroad [0 credit hours]
- Students will seek to secure external funding such as DAAD or Fulbright for this year

Year Six: Fall [0 credit hours]

- Dissertation Research [0 credit hours]
- TA for language or upper-division courses or courses outside the department; RA work

Year Six: Spring [0 credit hours]

- Dissertation Research [0 credit hours]
- Dissertation Defense (February or March)
- TA for language or upper-division courses or courses outside the department; RA work

Students entering the program with an M.A.

Year One: Fall Semester [12 credit hours]

- Foundations I: Transition Points of Modern German Culture [3 credit hours]
- 3 additional seminars [9 credit hours]

Year One: Spring Semester [12 credit hours]

- Foundations II: Theories of Literary and Cultural Analysis [3 credit hours]
- 2 additional seminars [6 credit hours]
- Pre-Exam Colloquium in preparation of Preliminary Examination [3 credit hours]

Year One: Summer

- Preparation of Preliminary Examination (PE)
- August: PE (two weeks before the beginning of fall semester)

Year Two: Fall Semester [9 credit hours]

- Foreign Language Learning and Teaching [3 credit hours]
- 2 additional seminars [6 credit hours]
- TA for beginning or intermediate language courses

Year Two: Spring Semester [9 credit hours]

- Foundations III: Modes of Scholarly Work and Writing [3 credit hours]
- Pre-Dissertation Colloquium in preparation of Qualifying Exam [3 credit hours]
- Language requirements
- 1 additional seminar [3 credit hours]
- TA for beginning or intermediate language courses

Year Two: Summer

- Determining Ph.D. Committee by June 30
- Qualifying Exam: Dissertation Project Proposal (DPP)

Year Three: Fall [12 credit hours]

- Non-Candidate Research [12 credit hours]
- Qualifying Exam: Qualifying Paper (QP) and Dissertation Abstract (DA)
- Application to research fellowships abroad
- TA for language or upper-division courses or courses outside the department; RA work

Year Three: Spring [12 credit hours]

- Dissertation Research [12 credit hours]
- TA for language or upper-division courses or courses outside the department; RA work

Year Four: Fall and Spring [6 credit hours]

- Dissertation Research abroad [6 credit hours]

- Students will seek to secure external funding such as DAAD or Fulbright for this year

Year Five: Fall [0 credit hours]

- Dissertation Research [0 credit hours]
- TA for language or upper-division courses or courses outside the department; RA work

Year Five: Spring [0 credit hours]

- Dissertation Research [0 credit hours]
- Dissertation Defense (February or March)
- TA for language or upper-division courses or courses outside the department; RA work