

**Department of Comparative Thought and Literature
Johns Hopkins University**

**213 Gilman Hall
3400 N. Charles St. Baltimore, MD 21218
<https://comphoughtlit.jhu.edu>
Tel. 410 516 7619**

GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK

November 29, 2023

Department Overview

The Department of Comparative Thought and Literature (CTL) investigates different traditions of thought in order to expand understanding of the ecologies of human expression. Our conception of thought is capacious and includes literature, aesthetic and moral philosophy, and legal and political theory. Interdisciplinary collaboration is the Department's signature focus, along with commitments to intellectual curiosity and flexibility, attentive reading and criticism, and creative modes of comparison across linguistic, cultural, and temporal boundaries.

The research and teaching of the faculty draw upon philosophy, literature, film, and the arts. Both undergraduates and graduate students are encouraged to undertake projects that draw from diverse media, genres, and traditions, within and beyond the humanities. The courses offered provide students with a broad foundation in the methods, histories, and genres of comparative approaches, with a focus on themes that engage both literature and philosophy, as well as other forms of human expression.

Graduate Admissions

Applications are taken once a year for matriculation in the Fall semester of the following academic year (application deadline is December 31). 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:

- Application fee
- Statement of purpose
- Sample of written work
- Three letters of recommendation
- Transcripts (applications will be reviewed with unofficial transcripts, but official transcripts required after an offer of admission)
- GRE scores (optional)
- TOEFL or IELTS score (for applicants who are not native speakers of English)

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, political theory, a national language and literature, 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: 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. Language competency: Students are expected to work across languages and must give evidence of their foreign language knowledge by the end of their fourth year. A developing competency in at least one foreign language at the time of admission is one factor of consideration.

Requirements for the PhD Degree

Coursework

Students are required to take ten graduate level courses (600-level) for grades, ordinarily in their first two years of study. Of the ten courses, at least five must be offered in CTL, including cross-listed courses. Students in their first year are required to enroll in the two-semester tutorial course (which counts as one of the ten required courses) associated with the Department Seminar Series (see below).

Incoming students are encouraged to choose courses in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) in the summer prior to matriculating at JHU. Incoming students also meet with the DGS during the first week of the incoming Fall semester to continue to discuss their research interests.

All students must enroll for at least 9 credits per semester to maintain full-time status at the University. Students may, in addition, audit courses in CTL and other Departments. On approval by the DGS and the relevant course instructor, graduate students may take 400-level undergraduate courses for graduate credit.

When students have completed the ten courses required, or are taking less than 9 credits in coursework for a semester, they should enroll in AS.300.812: "Graduate Research" in order to meet the 9-credit requirement. Students at the dissertation-writing stage should enroll for 9 credits of AS.300.804: "Dissertation Research."

Graduate courses in CTL are awarded letter grades. Students are expected to maintain at least 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 will result in a probation period and possible dismissal from the program.

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 Incomplete grade into the following semester, but Incompletes must be resolved by the end of that semester.

Departmental Seminar Series

Each year, a faculty Coordinator organizes a regularly-scheduled Departmental Seminar, which provides opportunities for CTL, JHU, and visiting faculty and also CTL graduate students to present and respond to ongoing scholarly work. Work can be pre-circulated or offered as an oral presentation (or both), and presenters also may choose to assign a short, related reading to accompany discussion at the session. The Coordinator may organize the Seminar based on a theme for the year. First-year students will write short papers after each seminar and meet with the Coordinator in a tutorial to discuss their writing, thinking, and reflections; first-year students will receive regular feedback on their writing. The norm of attendance at all sessions of the Departmental Seminar helps to maintain the thriving intellectual community of CTL and affiliates from around the University.

Foreign Languages

By the end of their fourth year, students must possess knowledge of two foreign languages. Evidence of language training can take a number of forms: by passing language courses at the level of intermediate or above; by taking at least two graduate courses taught in a foreign language for grades; or by passing a test administered in CTL or by a relevant faculty member. Students whose primary language is not English may use their native language to cover the language requirement.

Students can acquire language training at JHU in the Departments of Modern Languages and Literatures; Classics; and Near Eastern Studies. Additional languages are taught at the Center for Language Education (<https://krieger.jhu.edu/cle/>), as well as immersive summer courses at other institutions.

In recognition of diverse ways in which a “language” takes shape and operates in society, students may petition to substitute the second foreign language exam with knowledge of a field-specific language. Examples of field-specific languages include, but are not limited to, legal, cinematic, visual, and musical languages. In their petition, students must explain how such training is required for their research and how they plan to demonstrate research-level knowledge of the target language. Students must submit their petition by the end of their first year, for approval by the DGS in consultation with their advisor (if already chosen) or with a faculty member with expertise in the desired field-specific language.

Qualifying Exams

Students normally take two Field Exams during the fall semester of their third year, after having completed all their coursework (with no outstanding Incomplete grades).

Each Field Exam consists in a written and an oral examination on a topic of student's choice and under the direction of one or two faculty examiners. Each of the two topics should include a reading list of at least 30 works that the student selects in collaboration with faculty examiner(s). Students may opt to add a third Field Exam, to be pursued and examined in the second semester of their third year.

Students should identify the faculty examiners for each Field Exam during their second year of study, and the lists should be completed and approved by the faculty examiners and the DGS no later than the beginning of the end of the second year. Students can choose faculty members from outside CTL to direct a Field Exam. One week prior to the oral examination, students should meet with each examiner to discuss themes and questions that have come to the fore during the student's reading and study. On the morning of the scheduled exam date, each examiner provides the student with essay question(s) on the topic; the written exam is due 24 hours later. One week after the written exam has been submitted, all examiners will meet with the student for an oral examination of the written work.

Selection of Advisors

The DGS serves as advisor for new students and will schedule a meeting to discuss their progress at least twice during each semester (normally at the beginning and end of each semester). After the first year, students are responsible for contacting the DGS to set up these meetings.

Normally by the third year, the student will identify a faculty member who will serve as advisor 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 advisor, but in such cases a second advisor from within CTL must also be selected. Students should also identify a second reader, and it is possible to have two official advisors on a dissertation. Students normally also 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 advisor(s) with whom they wish to work for their dissertation. Conversations with faculty and the DGS can guide in this process, and normally the advisor will be someone with whom the student has taken courses during their first two years. The student can expect regular meetings with the advisor (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 advisor, along with other Departmental faculty, 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. Two further resources are the Ombuds Office, where members of the university community can confidentially and informally raise any issue of concern involving Johns Hopkins Doctoral and Postdoctoral Students, Fellow, and Programs (<https://jhu.edu/ombuds>) as well as the Assistant Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Academic and Student Affairs in Krieger.

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 advisors to a faculty member working more directly in the revised area of focus. In such cases, the student should consult with the original advisor, the Department Chair and the DGS.

Dissertation Prospectus

Once students have successfully passed their Field 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 their faculty advisor to discuss drafts of the prospectus.

The prospectus is normally submitted for approval to the advisor at the end of the semester following the completion of their qualifying exams. The student will receive written feedback on the prospectus from the dissertation advisor 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 at the Public Workshop (see below). Samples of the dissertation prospectus are available from the DGS. It is understood that the prospectus is a preliminary description of the dissertation project and that it will most likely undergo changes as research on the topic advances.

The prospectus 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 relevant scholarship and the specific contributions the dissertation seeks to make;
- A description of the content of each individual chapter;
- A preliminary bibliography as an appendix.

Students are encouraged to apply for summer research funds before the ABD stage in order to conduct pre-dissertation archival research and identify relevant primary sources for the bibliography. Students may find Yale University's [Writing a Humanities Dissertation Prospectus](#) helpful.

Public Workshop on Prospectus

After the approval of the dissertation prospectus by the students' advisors, there will be a public workshop in which the student presents their prospectus and receives feedback. External advisors will be invited to participate in the workshop. The workshop normally occurs at the beginning of the student's fourth year of study.

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 other humanities Departments in the Krieger School allow students from CTL to obtain a terminal M.A. degree on the way to the Ph.D. in CTL. 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 CTL, such as the mandatory courses taken in CTL or its qualifying exams.

ABD Timeline

Once students have completed all degree requirements but the dissertation (ABD), it is expected that they 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.

Per university rules, time-to-degree may not exceed 9 years. Any approved leave of absence would not count toward the 9 years. Students who started their PhD program prior to (but not including) Fall 2019 are grand-parented into the previous University time-to-degree maximum of 12 years.

Dissertation Defense

When the dissertation is complete, the student must successfully defend the dissertation before a Graduate Board Oral committee consisting of five faculty 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 CTL. The examining committee is chosen and arranged by the dissertation advisor, and the defense date is arranged by the advisor in consultation with the student, the Chair, and the Department administrator. Before scheduling the defense, the dissertation must have been accepted and approved as complete and finished by the advisor(s).

The defense should be planned at least eight weeks in advance of the proposed defense date. No later than three weeks prior to the defense date, the student is responsible for providing an electronic copy of the dissertation to the Departmental Administrator, who will distribute them to the committee. In cases where examiners request a paper copy, the student is responsible for

coordinating with the Departmental Administrator in order to have a printed copy provided to them.

Students should understand the requirements for completion of the Ph.D. and be in communication with the Department administrator to make sure they understand the deadlines, forms, and procedures involved in the defense. For further information visit <https://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/academics/graduation-guide/>.

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 probation will result in the dismissal of that student from the program.

Teaching

CTL 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 (TAs) 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 will be excused from teaching during that period. (See “Doctoral Study Outside of JHU” below.)

When the CTL course offerings for the following semester are announced, students should indicate their preference for courses in which they wish to serve as TA. The Chair will make every effort to accommodate such preferences when allocating TA positions, but final decisions will depend on availability and the Department’s needs.

New TA’s will be required to attend the mandatory orientation and training day organized by JHU’s Center for Teaching Excellence and Innovation. This is usually hosted the week before classes begin in the Fall semester and an announcement will be sent via email.

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’s Teaching Fellowships and teaching fellowships from the Program in Women, Gender and Sexuality and the Alexander Grass Humanities Institute (including BLAST). Students are encouraged to pursue teaching opportunities in order to further their professional development.

Those interested in receiving additional pedagogical training beyond the TA position should also consult with the Center for Teaching Excellence and Innovation (CTEI). Any teaching other than regular TA positions must be approved by the Chair. Students are encouraged to discuss pedagogical strategies and to develop course syllabi in consultation with a faculty mentor.

Doctoral Study Outside of JHU

The Department of Comparative Thought and Literature encourages students to pursue research and study at another university or archive during their fourth year. For example, students may pursue their research in countries whose primary language is central to their research and of which they are not a native speaker. Or students may seek sponsorship at another university or archive within the U.S. that has resources pertinent to their dissertation research.

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. In recent years, CTL students have been affiliated with University of Tokyo, Stanford, and Columbia. Students planning to take advantage of this opportunity should work with their advisor to develop a plan for study abroad. Approval of study abroad plans is the prerogative of the Chair in consultation with the student's advisor.

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 advisor (or the DGS, in the case of students in their first and second year) completes "Part B: Advisor's Assessment," stating the faculty's evaluation of the student's progress. After this, advisors will schedule a one-on-one meeting with students 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 advisor and submitted to the Department administrator who will keep it in the student's file.

Following the evaluation process, letters of 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. The letters will also indicate the T.A. assignment (if any) for the coming Fall semester. 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 that is disbursed evenly throughout the year, including summer, and is contingent upon satisfactory progress year by year. This support covers the individual's annual full tuition costs, health, dental, and vision 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. Students may apply for additional summer funding through the Passow Fund.

Students should plan to complete the program within the five years of funding. There may be limited funding for an additional semester or year under some circumstances. Students are strongly encouraged to apply for external grants and fellowships to support them once their university sponsored funding has 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 Chair, may apply for a DTF; these fellowships cover tuition costs and can be used to bank a semester of university-sponsored funding.)

Program in Women, Gender and Sexuality 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 advisor and obtain permission from the Department Chair)

Travel Funds through the Graduate Representative Organization
The University Writing Program (ABD only)

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: paused for 2023-25)
- Mellon Foundation Humanities Collaboratory Fellowship (JHU)
- Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship (national)
- 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 principal faculty advisor. Students should contact the Department administrator for details on how to process the payment.

Registration Status

Students must register each semester from matriculation through graduation (unless on approved leave).

Students who are in their first five funding years, and/or receiving Department funding as TAs, are considered "Resident" students. Those still doing coursework are responsible for meeting with their advisors before registering for courses. Once the advisor approves of the student's schedule and lifts the advisor 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. Students should make sure to register for the section that corresponds to their faculty advisors in order to facilitate grading. Advisors 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 by the Departmental Administrator 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:
https://research.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/07/Rights_Responsibilities_Final.pdf

Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Graduate & Postdoctoral Affairs
<https://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/>

General Graduate Student Policies
<https://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/academics/policies/>

The Homewood Graduate Board
<https://homewoodgrad.jhu.edu/academics/graduate-board/>

Academic Misconduct Policy
https://provost.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/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/>

PHutures (career and professional development resources)
<https://imagine.jhu.edu/channels/phutures/>

JHU Teaching Academy (including Teaching Institute)
<https://ctei.jhu.edu/teaching-academy>

Student Health & Well-Being: Counseling Center
<https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>

Johns Hopkins University

Graduate Handbook Receipt and Agreement

I certify that I have received a copy of the 2023-24 Graduate Student Handbook for the Department of Comparative Thought and Literature, and that my good standing as a Ph.D. student in the Department is contingent upon compliance with the rules therein contained.

Your name:

Signature:

Date:

Please return this signed form to Marva Philip, Department Administrator,
by Monday, October 30, 2023