

The PhD in French at Columbia
Revised Requirements, effective Fall 2020

Overview

The PhD in French trains students in French and Francophone literature, culture and history, preparing them for academic and academic-adjacent careers. The program consists of approximately two years of coursework, including both required and elective courses, an MA thesis, oral examinations in the student's primary areas of specialization and a dissertation that represents an original contribution to scholarship in their field. Students also receive pedagogical training and teach undergraduate students. A minimum of two years of teaching is required; most PhD students teach for three years.

Advising

First-year students are assigned an academic adviser from among the department's faculty and also receive guidance from the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). In the second semester, they choose an adviser with whom they work on their MA thesis, which is submitted by the end of the third semester.

In the third year, students work with a committee of three faculty members on their oral examinations. At least two members of the exam committee must have a full or joint appointment in the French Department. One member of the orals committee is usually the anticipated dissertation sponsor.

Dissertation sponsors must be approved by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS). Faculty members are generally approved as sponsors following their third full year of service at Columbia or another university.

The dissertation committee consists of three core members (including the Sponsor), at least two of whom must have a full or joint appointment in the French Department. Two additional or 'external' members join the committee as the project approaches completion. All five members participate in the Defense. The 'external' members are faculty members in other departments at Columbia or at other universities.

Students are advised on job placement by the DGS and the Placement Officer as well as by their dissertation committee. In the fifth and/or sixth years they participate in workshops that prepare them to apply for academic positions and postdocs. Students interested in other careers can seek guidance from the Placement officer and the DGS but are also strongly encouraged to participate in career workshops and programs organized by GSAS, including GSAS COMPASS.

Coursework

The MA in French requires 8 courses and the MA thesis. The PhD in French requires an additional 8 courses. * Students may take additional courses beyond these requirements.

Foreign language courses at the undergraduate level are not usually counted toward the requirement.

The dissertation writing workshop, in which students are required to enroll at least once during Y3-6, is not included in the 16 required courses.

Required courses

In the first year, students take the fall Proseminar, which offers an introduction to close reading, the explication de texte and fundamental research techniques. The Proseminar is taken P/F.

During the first two years of their program and for two additional semesters between years three and five, students participate in the French Lecture Series for R credit.

In the fall of their second year, students take the Language Pedagogy course. This is taken for R credit.

Students enroll in the *Dissertation Workshop* at least once in Y3-6. This course is taken for R credit.

Distribution requirements

Students must take at least three courses with a significant focus on literature/culture before 1800. At least two of these courses must be taken in the French Department.

Students take at least one course in literary and/or cultural theory. This course may be taken in the French Department or through another department. The course taken to meet this requirement must be approved by the DGS.

R-credit courses

With the exception of the required courses listed above, only one course may be taken for R credit.

Courses in other departments

No more than four of the sixteen courses required for the PhD may be taken in other departments.

The MA Thesis

The thesis can take several different forms, e.g. it can offer an original analysis of a single work, or treat a question or theme across several works. It is written in French unless there is a compelling reason to write in English. The minimum length is 25 pages. The thesis must include a bibliography and footnotes and should reflect the consultation of critical, historical and/or theoretical sources appropriate to the project. It is written under the direction of an adviser.

Students choose either to defend the thesis in a one-hour examination to a committee consisting of the adviser and a second faculty member, in which case this committee assigns the grade, or they can simply submit the thesis to the adviser, who assigns a letter grade.

The Foreign Language Requirement

Students must show at least an intermediate to advanced level competency in a language other than English or French. This can be demonstrated through coursework (a grade of B, or better, in the fourth semester language course), or the proficiency exam offered by the relevant Columbia department.

Examinations

In the third year, students take a two-hour oral examination for which they prepare three reading lists under the direction of faculty with expertise in these fields. One of the lists may be (but doesn't have to be) a longer 'major field' list. In the examination, students answer questions about individual works on their lists as well as broader thematic, theoretical and historical questions. Grading is PASS/FAIL.

Following the oral examination, students take a one-hour Explication de texte exam. A week before the exam, one of the members of the orals committee, usually the intended dissertation sponsor, assigns a passage for analysis. In the exam, the student presents this passage for about 30 minutes, then discusses it with two faculty examiners. A letter grade is assigned.

Students usually take both oral exams by the end of the fall semester.

Prospectus and Dissertation

After completing all coursework and examinations, students write a dissertation prospectus. This is a five to six- page document that describes the topic of the dissertation, outlining its anticipated methodology, conceptual framing and structure as well as the original contribution that it makes to a particular field or intellectual debate. The Prospectus includes a preliminary bibliography and a chapter breakdown. It is written under the guidance of the sponsor with input from the two other dissertation committee members. All three committee members must approve the Prospectus.

Students usually submit the Prospectus by the end of their 6th semester. If needed, the DGS may allow an extension to the 7th semester.

Dissertation and Defense

The dissertation, written in English, is usually 250-350 pages in length. It contains the student's original research and argumentation and represents a new contribution to a particular field and scholarly conversation. It is divided into chapters and includes an Introduction, a Conclusion, an abstract and a bibliography. The dissertation must be formatted according to the guidelines of Columbia University.

The dissertation is usually defended in the 5th or 6th year. The defense is a two-hour exam conducted by the three 'internal' and two 'external' committee members. Dissertations are either approved with minor changes, approved with major changes to be completed within six months of the defense, or (in exceptional circumstances) failed.

Teaching

Students begin teaching in their third semester, following a pedagogical orientation. During the first semester of teaching they enroll in a pedagogy workshop. Students typically teach in years two to four, though other arrangements are possible. In their second year, students usually teach elementary and intermediate French language courses. As they advance in their program, they are often invited to teach advanced literature and culture courses. Teaching outside the department, e.g. for the Core Curriculum or the University Writing program, is also encouraged. Students in their fourth and fifth years may propose their own courses under the GSAS Graduate Scholars program.

Job Placement

Students receive guidance about applying for academic positions and postdoctoral fellowships in their fifth and sixth years. Placement is overseen by the Placement Officer in collaboration with the DGS