Graduate Assessment Plan:  
The Department of German Studies

prepared
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One of the leading graduate programs nationally and internationally, German Studies at Cornell offers a flexible yet rigorous course of study that draws on the expertise of faculty members from both the Department of German Studies and a variety of units in the College of Arts and Sciences and other schools (including Comparative Literature; Theater, Film, & Dance; Philosophy; History; Government; Music; and Architecture, Art & Planning). The German Studies faculty has a strong interest in cultural and intellectual history, philosophy, literary theory, gender studies, Jewish studies, visual studies, film, and music. Members of the faculty are also affiliated with the Medieval Studies Program, the Program of Jewish Studies, the Department of Music, the Department of Theatre, Film & Dance, the Visual Studies Program, and the Department of Comparative Literature.

Students are encouraged to pursue their academic interests by exploring a variety of disciplinary and theoretical approaches. Cornell’s unique field system, which fosters close cooperation among scholars working on related topics across departments and schools, is key to supporting our students’ cutting-edge, cross-disciplinary research in German Studies. The areas of expertise covered by the faculty and explored by the graduate students in the Department of German Studies represent the full spectrum of professional sub-fields in German literary and cultural studies (from the Middle Ages to the present), and interdisciplinary affiliations further extend the department’s intellectual and creative engagement.

A distinguishing feature of the Cornell PhD program in German Studies is its reliance on a system of Special Committees, which allows students to develop their own courses of study within a broad framework established by the department (which includes required anchor courses). Graduate students work closely with faculty committees to determine a flexible course of study, to set individually devised qualifying exams, and to determine additional work in foreign languages and related disciplines. This system encourages a close working relationship between professors and students, promoting a high degree of freedom in the pursuit of the graduate degree. Students in the German PhD program also receive extensive teacher training. After the first year in the program, students typically teach introductory language courses and seminars in the university-wide Freshman Writing Program, an experience that prepares them to design and teach courses in German language, literature, and cultural studies (always with an eye to adjacent fields of knowledge and disciplines). The combination of an individualized curriculum, the anchor course system, and rich teaching experience positions our students to be extremely
competitive on the job market, and qualifies them to pursue work in a variety of creative fields.

Learning goals
When students complete the PhD in German Studies they should be able to:

1. demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of their major concentration (German Literature, German Intellectual History, Germanic Linguistics), including in-depth knowledge of their major area(s) of expertise, and competency in relevant interdisciplinary areas of concentration.
2. demonstrate advanced research skills, including broad knowledge of a range of critical and theoretical approaches relevant to their field of research.
3. make an original and substantial contribution to the field, and produce publishable scholarship in a timely fashion.
4. communicate research findings effectively in written and spoken form.
5. be familiar with and follow ethical guidelines for work in the field.
6. demonstrate effective skills in undergraduate teaching (in their special field and as generalists, in both German and English) and potential for graduate teaching.

Direct assessment of learning outcomes:

1. Anchor courses serve as an important quality control and assessment measure in the Department of German Studies. All graduate students are required to take 5 anchor courses (one each in the designated historical periods, plus a second one in the candidate’s chosen period of specialization) for a grade (no S/U or audit options). This guarantees a broad familiarity with the history of German thought, literature and culture. (1, 2, 4, 5)
2. Qualifying examinations, theses, and committee-based reports (guidelines for all examinations are posted on the department website at http://german.cornell.edu/programs/graduate/upload/guideforgradsgs.pdf)
   a. The “Q Exam” (or the Qualifying Examination) represents a diagnostic stage in the graduate program, designed to determine the student’s readiness to proceed toward the Ph.D. The committee assesses the student’s progress in developing the knowledge and skills necessary for graduate work and the dissertation, and makes recommendations for further study. The exam must be completed by the fall semester of the second year. (1, 2, 4)
   b. The “A Exam” (or Admission to Candidacy Examination) serves the two functions of consolidating the student’s knowledge in major and minor fields and preparing her or him to write a dissertation. The exam must be completed before the seventh semester of registration. (1, 2, 3, 4)
   c. The “B Exam” (or Final Examination) entails a formal defense of the dissertation, including detailed discussion of the thesis itself, together with suggestions for revision. (2, 3, 4, 5)
   d. In addition to completing formal examinations, students are required to meet regularly with their PhD committees to assess progress toward the degree. In turn, an annual meeting of the field is called by the DGS to
assess the academic standing of every graduate student in the department. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

Professionalization: training and assessment

1. Teaching. Students receiving the standard tuition package will teach undergraduate courses (in the capacity of an instructor or TA). The field of German Studies requires a carefully supervised teaching experience of at least one year of language teaching and one year of FWS teaching for every doctoral candidate as part of the program requirements. For each teaching assignment, students are assigned faculty course-leaders or supervisors, who offer guidance and support to graduate student teachers. Students are also required to take the appropriate pedagogical training through a departmental language pedagogy course and through the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines before their first teaching assignments in each area. (6)

2. Colloquium Series. Advanced graduate students regularly share their research-in-progress in colloquium series organized each semester by the Institute for German Cultural Studies. The series also features presentations by leading scholars in the field (there are 5 to 6 colloquia in total per semester). Graduate students in German studies are generally expected to attend these events and be involved in the discussion. Students may formally enroll and get 1 course credit. The colloquium is designed to introduce PhD students to significant work in all areas of German studies and to provide a showcase for the work of advanced graduate students. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

3. Graduate Student Conferences. Students organize an annual international graduate student conference that includes a scholar of international renown as a keynote speaker and typically draws participants from North America and Europe. Graduate students also organize smaller workshops and conferences. (2, 4)

4. Conference Papers. PhD students are encouraged to give conference papers during the course of their Cornell careers. Often these papers derive from course work or work on the dissertation. (1, 2, 3, 4)

5. Publications. German PhD students are encouraged to publish work in peer-reviewed journals during their careers at Cornell, often with the help and guidance of faculty members. (2, 3, 4)

6. Organization and attendance of academic lectures and events. Students are expected to attend lectures and to participate in the wider intellectual life of the department and university. Students also commonly participate in student-run reading groups and dissertation writing groups. Students affiliated with these groups, many of them interdisciplinary (e.g., the Theory Reading Group), often organize or facilitate academic conferences. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

7. Job Placement. The Department of German Studies offers extensive guidance for students preparing to enter the job market. Special committee members and the DGS offer individual guidance on the preparation of dossier materials and interview strategies. The faculty also offers mock interviews for students on the market.
Indirect assessment of learning outcomes

1. The department tracks graduate employment and placement. List of first-time, tenure-track positions obtained within 3 years of completion (updated when further information is available) is posted on the department website at http://german.cornell.edu/programs/graduate/phdplacement.cfm.
2. The department/field keeps track of students’ presentations, awards, and publications.

Conclusions:
1. The Department of German Studies already has in place copious tools for assessment of graduate student work, exams, and academic life in the department. The department website provides clear and informative guidelines for the structure of examinations and other forms of student evaluation, in a format that is readily available to faculty, current students, and prospective students.

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