

# Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

For Ph.D. students in the Translation Research and Instruction Program (TRIP)

## 1. Guidelines

These guidelines are meant to help you anticipate and prepare for the comprehensive exams (“comps”). As a program that is by definition interdisciplinary and that does not fully “house” any BU faculty, TRIP students work with faculty across academic disciplines in many campus departments. These guidelines exist to provide a clear explanation of TRIP’s comprehensive exam process and expectations, in order to support students and faculty in understanding the exam process.

## 2. “Pre-Dissertation” Work or Becoming ABD

You are eligible to take the comps upon having satisfied all coursework (36 credits of degree-counting coursework, unless stipulated otherwise). The comps are a formal tool to prepare yourself for writing the dissertation and to receive substantial feedback before embarking on that project. To pass the comprehensive exams and obtain ABD (“all but dissertation”) status (also known as admission to candidacy for doctoral degree), you will need to acquire and display broad and profound familiarity with the relevant fields of your interest and be able to articulate the specific intervention in the scholarship you envision with your project. This requirement also applies to projects that consist of a translation, as the dissertator must articulate in their analysis the relevance of their translation to the existing scholarship.

## 3. The Quadripartite Examination

The comprehensive examination consists of four parts, detailed below: a dissertation prospectus, two written take-home exams, and an oral examination. You will need to form an **exam committee** consisting of your academic advisor (who will usually serve as your dissertation director (chair of your committee) and who supervises the dissertation prospectus) and two additional faculty members whose work is relevant to your project, each of whom will be responsible for one of the written take-home exams (ii-iii below).

Committee members may be drawn from various departments but must be tenure-track Binghamton University faculty; a petition for approval must be submitted for non-tenure track faculty to join a doctoral committee. If you choose to do so, you may add extra members (beyond the required three) to your committee who are located on campus or are from other campuses. If they are from other campuses, they are called “external committee members” and require approval of the Graduate School to join your committee. (Note that external committee members are different from the Outside Examiner, who is added during the “all but dissertation” (ABD) stage.) These members will be added subject to approval by the Graduate School. Speak with your committee chair to decide whether to add extra members and work with the TRIP Graduate Director and Coordinator on obtaining Graduate School approval. For projects that involve translation, at least one member of the committee must be fluent in the source text language. The exam committee will conduct the oral examination collectively.

You need to compile a **reading list** for each of the two written exams, in consultation with and approved by the respective examiner. The number of titles on the list varies depending on the nature of the texts and the discretion of the examiner. The four exams are usually taken in the following order:

- i. **The Dissertation Prospectus** takes the form of a substantial (30-50 page) paper, devoted to a theoretical issue or area of focus explicitly related to translation studies, which will help you establish the direction of your dissertation. It should involve substantial scholarship and show that you are familiar with the current bibliography related to the selected topic and are able to articulate your argument following academic conventions for the discipline. The paper also serves as a dissertation proposal in that it defines the areas of focus for your research moving forward.

Initially, in the fourth semester, you are required to complete the Prospectus and Dissertation Writing workshop sequence to write a draft of your prospectus, in consultation with your advisor. You continue to work closely with your advisor on the prospectus after the workshop, and all committee members are encouraged to participate in the process of writing. Scheduling other parts of the exam are pending the advisor's approval of the prospectus.

- ii. **Major Field:** This section of the exam is devoted to a theme that is your major area of specialization. It treats your area of expertise, likely in its historical dimension, and thus places the prospectus in a broader context. The nature and scope of this theme and its historical dimension is represented by the reading list and is contingent on your specific project.

This is a take-home exam, to be scheduled upon approval of (i) and in consultation with the examiner. You have 72 hours (usually starting at 9 a.m. on a Friday and ending the subsequent Monday at 9 a.m.) to write an essay in response to one or more broad questions formulated by the examiner. You should consult with the examiner about the expected length of the essay, which may range from 10 to 25 pages. Notify the TRIP Graduate Director and Coordinator of the scheduled exam a minimum of two weeks prior to the Friday you plan to take it. The TRIP Coordinator will email you your exam question(s); the final essay is to be submitted electronically to the TRIP Coordinator and the examiner.

- iii. **Minor Field:** This is a second area of specialization and may be conceived as another aspect of the dissertation that complements the major area of expertise. Consult with your advisor to make sure that the fields for exams (ii) and (iii) are sufficiently differentiated. The format of the minor exam, which is to be scheduled for a separate weekend, is the same as (ii).

- iv. **Oral Examination:** This segment brings together the dissertation prospectus and the written exams and involves all committee members. You prepare a short presentation of your project. Committee members may ask questions about the presentation, the dissertation prospectus, and/or the written exams (in addition to, or elaborating on, previously provided feedback). You receive valuable feedback and advice on your project and are expected to adjust accordingly. The committee collectively determines a grade for the oral exam.

To schedule the oral exam, you will first ensure (1) your advisor has approved your prospectus; (2) the TRIP Coordinator has received, via email, a copy of the approved prospectus; and (3) all committee members approve that your prospectus indicates you are ready to hold the exam. Their approval should be indicated in writing in an email either directly to or cc'd to the TRIP Coordinator.

#### 4. Scheduling and Grading

You are expected to commence comprehensive exam work in the spring semester of the second year in the program (fourth semester). Students will take the course "Prospectus and Dissertation Writing" that semester to facilitate their prospectus writing.

Although parts (ii) and (iii) of the examination are not usually scheduled until the dissertation advisor has signed off on the prospectus (i), you are encouraged to start developing your reading lists in collaboration with the respective examiners in advance and preparing to take these exams.

Once the prospectus has been approved by all committee members, you can contact the committee to schedule the oral examination (iv), which typically takes place while classes are in session. (Contact the TRIP Coordinator if you would like assistance scheduling this exam.) Notify the TRIP Graduate Director and Coordinator of your exam date and time. You may take multiple exams in the same semester and during the summer, if your committee members agree to lead the exams for you. You do not receive a letter grade for the prospectus (i) or the written exams (ii and iii), but you will need to obtain a Pass (B+ or higher) for each exam to be able to schedule the oral examination. At the oral exam, if the committee members collectively award you with an **overall grade of B+** or higher, you are formally admitted to **candidacy** (ABD status). You then have five years to complete and defend the dissertation. The exam committee typically continues as the dissertation committee. If you fail any comprehensive exam, you may retake it once. If you are asked to revise something and are awarded a contingent pass, you must complete this required revision to the committee's satisfaction to pass the exam.