

**University of Illinois
Department of French & Italian**

Preliminary (Prospectus) Examination in French Studies

The goal of the preliminary examination is to evaluate the student's ability to define a feasible and appropriate dissertation topic by producing an annotated bibliography and prospectus, to be evaluated and discussed at the exam. Preparation for the examination allows the student to advance toward thesis research and gain grounding in the intellectual areas germane to the proposed dissertation topic. Successful completion of the preliminary examination is required to begin work on the dissertation.

The preliminary (prospectus) examination is a two-hour oral exam; there is no written exam. The oral exam will be conducted in French, in English or in a combination of both languages, at the discretion of the committee.

Director of Research and Committee

After successfully passing the Ph.D. qualifying examination, the student will choose an advisor who will in most cases serve as the Chair of their doctoral committee. When the Director of Research is not a member of the Department of French and Italian, another member of the committee who is a member of the Department will serve as Chair. The doctoral committee will consist of the Chair, who must be a member of the graduate faculty in French Studies, and three or four other professors, up to two of whom may be chosen from a different program in FRIT, a different department (usually from the list of FRIT affiliate faculty), or from another institution. The doctoral committee may have up to five members. At least three of the members must be graduate faculty; at least two, tenured; at least two must be faculty in French Studies (at least three, in a committee of five). The committee must be approved by the Graduate College.

Good communication between the student, Director of Research and committee members is important throughout the preliminary examination process. Students will establish a timeline for sharing annotated bibliography and prospectus drafts with their Director of Research and with all committee members. Director and student may request a meeting of the committee at any point before the anticipated examination date in order to facilitate communication.

The FRIT Director of Graduate Studies should be advised of the projected date of the preliminary (prospectus) examination.

Examination logistics

The preliminary (prospectus) examination should be scheduled to take place approximately 2 years after beginning doctoral coursework, usually in the Fall of the third year of the Ph.D. stage of graduate study. Before scheduling the examination, the committee chair should check the student's record to make sure that 32 hours of credited courses have been taken. No outstanding Incompletes are permitted.

Students should use the [Request to Schedule Ph.D. Exam form](#) on the SLCL website.

The form must be filed with SLCL Graduate Student Services **at least three weeks** before the requested exam date.

Results (Pass, Fail) are reported to the Graduate College. If the preliminary (prospectus) examination results in a grade of "Fail," it may be retaken once. A student who fails the preliminary (prospectus) examination a second time must withdraw from the program. Appeals may be considered only on grounds of alleged unfair treatment and would be directed to the FRIT Graduate Studies Committee.

Examination scope and parameters

In consultation with the committee, the student will prepare (1) a 10-page annotated bibliography relevant to the proposed dissertation topic and (2) a 20-to-25-page prospectus, distinct from the bibliography (both documents should be double-spaced, in 12pt font). The final version of these documents will be provided to all the members of the committee **at least three weeks** before the preliminary examination.

Although the content of the prospectus and bibliography will vary depending on the topic and methodology, the following parameters will serve as guidelines for the student and the committee.

The annotated bibliography will be broader in scope, but shorter, than the eventual dissertation bibliography. It should include at least 10 book-length studies (either single-authored works or edited volumes) and at least 10 articles or book chapters. Not all entries need to be annotated. The bibliography will include a combination of:

- texts envisioned as part of the potential dissertation corpus;
- theoretical, historical or methodological texts relevant to the dissertation topic;
- relevant critical literature in French and English.

Many guides to annotated bibliographies are available online, including [this webpage](#) from Cornell University Library.

The prospectus will propose a dissertation topic, explain the proposed methodology or theoretical approach, justify the topic in terms of existing scholarship and contributions to be made to the field, and lay out a plan for the dissertation, including a chapter outline.

At least a week before the scheduled date of the preliminary examination, each member of the committee will submit 1 or 2 questions to the committee chair, who may choose among them before passing them on to the student. The student should prepare notes, which are allowed at the preliminary exam.

The preliminary (prospectus) examination is an oral question-and-answer and discussion session that will consist, at the discretion of the committee, of:

- a brief presentation of the proposed project by the student, summarizing the prospectus (*this may be written in advance*);
- the student's answers to the questions submitted in advance by the committee (*notes may be used*);
- further questions about works on the annotated bibliography;
- discussion of the prospectus.

At the time of the preliminary examination, or shortly thereafter, the Student, Director and committee are encouraged to discuss logistics and a timeline for the dissertation work.

Recent preliminary examination questions are on file with the FRIT Office Manager. Students are encouraged to consult these files as they prepare for their exam.