The learning goals of the First Exam of the Ph. D. Program in Comparative Literature state that:

1. in their second year in the Program, students will have acquired and mastered a breadth of knowledge in literature and criticism;

2. that they will be able to hold, present, develop, and defend their assessment of a variety of literary and theoretical issues;

3. that given a text that they may never have seen before, they will be able to analyze it in a lucid, comprehensive, knowledgeable, and persuasive manner;

4. that they possess the ability to synthesize and evaluate the scholarship concerning many foundational texts of literature.

Preparation:

The First Exam is traditionally administered over a two-day period. Each part of the examination is graded separately, and may be taken no more than twice. The exam is graded by a committee of two readers including the Deputy Executive Officer. Should the readers disagree, then the exam is read by a third reader.

Part 1: (two hours) consists of three short essay questions, one each on the following areas: periodization, genre, and poetics. Students will choose one of two questions in each area. Although the questions will be of a general nature, students will be expected to cite specific works and provide examples from at least two national literatures.

Part 2: (two hours) is a thematic essay. To develop this essay, students must choose three works from at least two literatures, including at least one from the Program’s Reading List distributed to all students.

Part 3: (two and a half hours) is a prepared option to be selected from a list of works supplied to each student at least six weeks before the date of the examination. The list will consist of pairs of works from different literatures drawn from the Reading List. Students will be tested by writing a substantial essay on their knowledge of the two texts assessed from their critical and historical contexts. The examination will be based on two passages from works they will have chosen; each text will be in the original language, if that language is English, French, German, Italian, or
Spanish; otherwise in English translation together with the original. But in every case at least one of the two selections will not be in English.

**Expectations:**

The purpose of the First Examination, which is a written examination, will test students’ familiarity with a range of major works in at least two literatures and the ability to analyze these works in their critical and historical contexts. It will also test students’ command of the theory and methods of Comparative Literature.

**Discussion regarding the First Exam:**

On Tuesday March 4th, 2014 the Executive Committee met to discuss the status and purpose of the First Exam. In the course of the assessment of the First Exam, it became very clear that there was very little support among the members for Part 3. Part 3, in fact, is basically an extended comparison of two texts. The preparation for Part 3 requires weeks, and sometimes months of work and is limited to issues that most students may never have to revisit again. Comparing *Don Quixote* with *Moby Dick* may work as a “sight” exam, but its pedagogic purpose given the amount of time required and its non-relevance to the students own academic projects begins to pale when it required three summer months.

The Executive Committee therefore decided to suppress Part 3 and to replace it with a long qualifying paper of 8,000 words. This paper will have been written with faculty feedback and supervision and may have been part of the coursework for a seminar.

Readers for the qualifying paper will comprise the EO, the DEO, and a third reader who could be either the professor for whom the paper was originally written or, in the event that the paper is new or was already written for the EO or DEO, by a third reader selected by the EO.

Due date for the qualifying paper is on the day before classes start in the fall semester. and on the day before classes start in the spring semester.

**Rationale:**

It is hoped that this qualifying paper will be of near-publishable quality, that it will reflect students’ own academic and scholarly interests, and above all—seeing that students are strongly encouraged to accelerate their work at the Graduate Center—that it will represent an efficient preparation toward work on the dissertation.