I. Learning Goals to be Assessed

A. Professional Development

The PhD Program in Comparative Literature does not currently list areas of Professional Development and Ethics as part of its overall learning goals for students. However, professionalization and ethical training have long been a central, if implicit part of how we prepare students and guide them through the program. Part of our goals as a Program for the 2016-2017 academic year is to render these learning outcomes explicit by writing and including them within our Program’s general outcomes, to systematize the implementation of workshops and other activities aimed at achieving these outcomes and to prepare for how to assess these initiatives in the coming years.

Although our Program does not include specific goals related to Professional Development and Ethics in our learning outcomes, our students nonetheless participate in a number of activities aimed at professional development. These include: 1) participation in Handbook events; 2) organization of two annual Graduate Student Conferences; 3) participation in national and international conferences; 4) preparation and submission of grant proposals, and; 4) publication in scholarly venues.

1) Handbook events

Since the Fall 2015 semester, the Program has offered monthly Handbook Events geared towards students’ professional development. Generally held on Friday afternoons, some of the topics are geared toward demystifying and helping students prepare for specific academic benchmarks laid out by the Program. For example, we offer the following topics each semester: “How to Prepare for the First Exam,” “How to Prepare for Orals,” and “How to Write a Prospectus.”

Many of the topics covered by these workshops also address issues pertaining to professionalization. Each academic year we offer “The Job Market,” “How to write a CV,” “How to Publish in Scholarly Journals,” and “How to apply for Academic Grants” at least once. The topics for these events were developed in close consultation with students based on their perceived needs and the Program’s goals. The events have been well-attended thus far and students have informally voiced their appreciation for them.

The success of last year’s workshop on Academic Publishing led by Duke University Press Editorial Director and Graduate Center colleague Ken Wissoker led us to hold a similar event on February 26, 2016, featuring Brigitte Schull, an Editorial Director for the publisher Palgrave-Macmillan who spoke to students about how to prepare and submit a book proposal for consideration at a press.

For the first time this year, we have also been running a Prospectus and Dissertation Writing Workshop. At each bi-weekly meeting, individual students present drafts of their writing (either the Prospectus or a part of a dissertation chapter). Led by a faculty member, the hour is spent providing constructive feedback to those who have
presented. Students attend this workshop not just for the feedback, but also to develop a sense for how to set weekly writing goals and be accountable for reaching them.

2) Graduate Student Conferences

Students in the Program plan, prepare and run two Graduate Student Conferences each year. This entails developing a topic, inviting a Keynote speaker, soliciting and evaluating abstracts from Graduate students both within and outside of CUNY, organizing the panels and ensuring the smooth operation of the panels on the two days of the conference itself. These events are key to how we help students develop professionally: the planning and coordination introduces students to various aspects of the profession including identifying relevant and timely areas of academic inquiry, recognizing and corresponding with scholars working in the field, appreciating different academic approaches to a specific topic and making personal connections with peers and scholars outside of CUNY. By organizing such a complex event so early in their careers, they also learn the importance of administrative skills which are otherwise rarely taught in Graduate programs.

3) Participation in National and International Conferences

Our students regularly apply for funding to attend and present at national and international Conferences in their field. The Program explicitly encourages participation in these events through regular advertising of Calls for Papers and through Handbook Event sessions on the topic “How to Write an Abstract for a Conference.” At least two-thirds of our student are active on the national conference circuit (ACLA, MLA, NEMLA, RSA, AAIS, etc.). By participating in these conferences, students develop a social network which is key to future collaboration with scholars working in their field and correlates strongly with success on the market.

4) Preparation and Submission of Applications for Outside Grants

Our Program actively encourages students to apply for Grants funded by external organizations. Since last year, we have instituted regular workshops aimed at supplementing pre-existing University-wide programs. “How to Apply for Outside Grants,” introduced students to various databases available through CUNY, the ACLA and the MLA, which list grants for different kinds of projects in the specific field of Comparative Literature. Together with Jennifer Furlong of the Office of Career Planning and Professional Development, we have invited a representative from ACLS (The American Council of Learned Societies) to come speak to our students about their Dissertation Completion grants (the event is planned for April 15, 2016).

5) Publication in Scholarly Venues

Students in our program are actively encouraged to begin publishing in peer-reviewed journals from the moment they begin their coursework. In particular, the recent changes to the format of the First Exam now include the submission of a “publishable” paper. In this way, students begin thinking about standards of publication before reaching 45 credits. They also receive feedback from the Exam committee concerning the suitability of their paper for publication.
B. Ethics

1) Teaching

Students teaching in CUNY colleges regularly undergo pedagogical training that introduces them to ethical issues which arise in the classroom. This training is supplemented by workshops run by the director of the Italian Specialization pertaining to issues dealing specifically with teaching language.

2) Research

Like all CUNY doctoral students, students in our Program are required to attend RCR (Responsible Conduct of Research) workshops at least once. In addition, most of our Handbook events also serve as reminders for proper ethical conduct in the profession, reminding students of guidelines for avoiding plagiarism and methods of proper citation.

II. Plan for Future Assessment

We have established a database which enables us to track how many of our students are publishing, attending conferences and receiving requests for interviews on the job market. We are also tracking their placement after Graduation. We have found from this database, that the majority of our students regularly attend conferences. We have also found, that some of our students have also published articles in peer-reviewed journals within the last two years.

During the Student Meeting at the end of the Fall semester, we discussed openly how students felt about Professional Development. At this meeting, students requested in particular the institution of a Prospectus/Dissertation Workshop which was instituted in the Spring 2016.

Our goals for the coming years include developing further methods for direct and indirect assessment. These may include:

- Yearly distribution of a survey measuring efficacy and relevance of Handbook Events
- Exit interview for graduating students

Respectfully submitted,