A. Learning Outcomes

The [revised] Learning Outcomes of the Second Examination are as follows.

Students who complete the Second Examination will be able:

1. to identify, from within the broad disciplines of literary studies, Composition/Rhetoric studies, Digital Humanities studies, and/or interdisciplinary studies, certain fields/issues/methodologies in which they aim to acquire a long scholarly view as well as special expertise, both as teachers and scholars;

2. to demonstrate, through a formal two-hour conversation with faculty members, a solid knowledge of chosen readings and pertinent critical issues in three distinct areas, as well as a familiarity with a range of relevant published scholarship, including both older and more recent approaches; also to demonstrate, during this conversation, verbal facility and fluency in discussing texts and in making connections among them;

3. to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and critical sophistication in one or more chosen areas of specialization as the groundwork for teaching undergraduate courses and for writing the dissertation prospectus.

B. Data Collection and Findings

Our Second Examination is a two-hour Oral Examination in which the student is asked to discuss material from three distinct lists each separately prepared in consultation with a faculty member. Students are strongly encouraged to take the Second Examination no later than a year after having completed coursework, but, ideally, in the semester after having completed coursework.

In Fall 2016, the Curriculum Committee distributed a survey [Appendix 1] to all Program faculty and students asking for feedback about the Second Examination Learning Outcomes and format. Students were also asked if, in their experience, the exam produced the stated learning outcomes and if the English Program offered adequate support in preparing them for the exam (through workshops and on-line guides). Students were also asked to comment on two changes we made to the Second Examination during our last review: the addition of a 300-word rationale explaining the relationship among the three lists and the elimination of the grade of Distinction. Of the thirteen responses we received from faculty and students, none recommended that we alter the format of the exam. All respondents felt that the format and general goals of the Second Examination were appropriate, although several respondents suggested that the Learning Outcomes be modified more accurately to reflect the experience of the exam and the range of desired outcomes (more on this below). Some faculty recommended that we require students to take the Oral Examination within a year of coursework. Students generally felt sufficiently prepared for the exam [see Appendix 2], understood and appreciated the purpose of the 300-word rationale, and approved the elimination of the grade of Distinction.
Since the surveys indicated greatest concern about the language of the Learning Outcomes, the Curriculum Committee met to revise that language as per the suggestions we received. The changes we made to the Learning Outcomes emphasized that the Second Examination helped students to acquire “a long scholarly view as well as special expertise”; that it tested familiarity with “older” as well as more recent methods and approaches; that it provided the opportunity to display “verbal facility and fluency”; and that it provided the groundwork for “teaching undergraduate courses and for writing the dissertation prospectus” as opposed to the dissertation itself. In sum, these changes emphasized and clarified several goals of the Second Examination: 1) it required familiarity with traditional, broadly defined scholarship, as well as expertise in particular fields; 2) it required the capacity to discuss texts articulately, not merely a knowledge of the content of those texts; 3) it prepared students for advanced work as teachers and scholars without necessarily defining or determining the shape of the dissertation.

The Curriculum Committee presented these changes to the Learning Outcomes to the Executive Committee, who suggested some minor revisions and approved the changes. The revised Learning Outcomes appear at the head of this report; the previous Learning Outcomes appear in the survey [Appendix 1].

C. Next Steps
As we expected, there was no faculty or student interest in radically altering the format of the Second Examination, which we feel generally succeeds in meeting the Learning Outcomes. We will distribute the new Learning Outcomes to students and faculty, with a rationale of the changes. The English Program will continue to sponsor an annual workshop to help students prepare for the exam; usually, we ask three or four students who have recently passed the exam to discuss their reading and studying strategies. We will also continue to encourage students to take an individual or small-group “Pre-Orals AIR,” in which they can receive course credit for working on an Orals Examination reading list with a professor.

D. Appendix 1: Survey

Dear Students and Faculty:

The Curriculum Committee met recently to begin an assessment of the English Program’s Second Examination: the Oral Examination. The Oral Examination comprises a formal two-hour conversation with three faculty members, each of whom asks questions about a previously prepared list of texts in a particular field (the lists are designed by the student, in consultation with the faculty member). We are inviting all members of the Program to share their thoughts about the current Orals Examination and about the benefits of any possible changes. The Curriculum Committee will consider all suggestions.

You are free to include your name or respond anonymously. Please email this survey as an attachment to Nancy Silverman [NSilverman] by Monday, NOV 7.

YOUR NAME [optional]_________________________________
**QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY**

1. Below are the current learning goals for the Second Examination. Are these the goals that the Second Examination should be testing? Should any goals be eliminated, added, or revised?

Students who complete the Second Examination will be able:

1. to identify, from within the broad disciplines of literary study and/or Composition/Rhetoric studies, certain fields or issues in which they aim to acquire special expertise, both as teachers and scholars.

2. to demonstrate, through a formal two-hour conversation with faculty members, a solid knowledge of chosen readings and pertinent critical issues in three distinct fields, as well as a familiarity with a range of relevant published scholarship.

3. to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and critical sophistication in one or more chosen fields of specialization as the groundwork for dissertation research and writing.

2. Assuming that we retain certain of the above learning goals, is the current format of the Second Examination (a two-hour oral examination) best suited to assess the achievement of those goals (e.g., acquiring “special expertise” in certain fields, demonstrating “solid knowledge” of readings and issues in distinct fields, demonstrating “sufficient knowledge” of “one or more chosen fields” as the “groundwork for dissertation research and writing”)? Is the suggested timing of the Oral Examination (within one year of completing coursework) appropriate?

3. If you feel that we should move to a different format for the Second Examination, please explain why and suggest alternatives.

**QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**

1. If you have already taken the Oral Examination, please explain whether or not you found it a successful instrument for determining your acquisition of “solid knowledge” of the major issues in three fields as well as “sufficient knowledge and critical sophistication in one or more chosen fields of specialization as the groundwork for dissertation research and writing.” Was the purpose of the 300-word rationale clear to you? Did studying for and taking the Oral Examination prepare you to undertake the dissertation?

2. If you have already taken the Oral Examination, did you feel sufficiently prepared? Did the English Program offer sufficient support in helping you to prepare? If you
consulted the “Organizing the Orals” guide or attended Program workshops, did you find them helpful?

3. If you have not yet taken the Oral Examination, do you believe that your experiences in the Program (e.g., coursework, mentorship) and specific Program resources (the “Organizing the Orals” guide, workshops) are adequately helping you to prepare for the exam?

4. In our last review of the Second Examination, we eliminated the grade of Distinction, leaving only the grades of Pass and Fail. Do you understand the criteria for earning a passing grade on the Oral Examination?

FINAL COMMENTS (FACULTY AND STUDENTS)
Please use this space for any comments not addressed above.

E. Appendix 2: English Program Guidelines on the Second Exam Process

ENGLISH PROGRAM GUIDELINES ON THE SECOND EXAMINATION PROCESS:

Students more thoroughly demonstrate their powers of discernment, analysis, and eloquence on the Second Examination, commonly referred to as "Orals." To read the Learning Goals of the Second Exam, click here.

This is a two-hour examination in three fields, administered by a committee of three professors. All examiners must hold appointments to the doctoral faculty in English at The Graduate Center; any exceptions - for a student doing interdisciplinary work, for example - require the Executive Officer's approval. Students take the Second Examination within one year of completing all their course work and meeting other Program requirements.

In planning for the Second Examination, students should:

1. Decide upon three fields of inquiry. A field list may be organized around a genre, a historical period, a major author or set of authors, or a theoretical approach. Fields should be broad enough to constitute the framework for an undergraduate course, and focused enough to provide a basis for advanced scholarly research. Make lists of primary and secondary sources that seem appropriate to each field. In order to ensure scholarly and professional range, the student should avoid overlap among the lists. Talk to as many members of the Program as possible, students as well as faculty, about topics, fields, reading lists, and appropriate faculty members who might supervise the
dissertation and/or sit on the Examination Committee. Take advantage of faculty office hours.

2. Ask a member of the faculty, probably the person who will serve as Dissertation Supervisor, to chair the Examination Committee and to offer advice in refining the field lists and in writing the rationale (of no more than 300 words) explaining how the 3 Orals lists will contribute to preparation either for a dissertation project or a teaching career. Some students work successfully with professors without having taken their seminars, but most members of the faculty will want to see evidence of a student’s ability to write research papers if they have never had that person in class.

3. Choose other examiners with the assistance of the Committee Chair, and ask for guidance in establishing the final reading lists and rationale. Each examiner must approve his or her field list and the rationale and sign the contract. Ideally, examiners should be familiar with the other two lists before signing off on their own. The Chair of the Examination Committee must review the contents of all lists and the rationale before signing off as chair. The completed lists, rationale and signed Second Examination Contract must be submitted to the Assistant Program Officer at least six weeks before the examination date. The Executive Officer will contact the student if there is any objection to the lists. At the examination itself, each of the three examiners is normally allotted 40 minutes to ask questions based on the list he or she supervised. Students may begin the examination by commenting briefly on their choice of readings and the relationship of the three topical lists to each other. Immediately following the examination, the Committee members consult and award the student a "pass" or "fail" on the examination. A student who fails the examination, or one part of it, must retake the relevant section(s) with the same field lists and examiners(s). Students who wish to make any changes must secure the approval of the Executive Officer.

For more detailed information about the Oral Exam, please refer to the student-authored Organizing the Orals.