The Executive Committee of the Ph.D. Program in Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Languages decided that for the 2015-2016 assessment cycle it would review the goals for the dissertation development and defense.

**Dissertation learning goals**

After completing their dissertation, students will be able to:

- analyze either linguistic data or a set of literary and cultural texts with originality and precision;

- demonstrate specialized competence in the data and literatures of a particular field;

- engage theories, methodologies, and scholarship relevant to the aims of the project; and

- produce a scholarly work that contributes to the development of knowledge within the student’s field and merits publication in part or in whole.

**HLBLL’s plan to meet dissertation learning goals**

In order to achieve these goals, the Program has developed a multi-stage academic program and support system that includes courses, advising, selecting and working with the committee, as well as prospectus and dissertation workshops.

All courses offered through HLBLL include a strong research component and introduction to research methods: students are expected to prepare academic presentations and produce research papers of publishable length (20-30 pages) and quality. Instruction and feedback gradually prepare students to identify appropriate and original topics of study, define theoretical and conceptual framework for their analysis, engage with relevant scholarship, and propose a pertinent methodology. They are guided in this process by faculty through in-class and individual discussion of their work, feedback, revision(s) of their writing, and advice on submission of manuscripts to scholarly journals. From the first semester the students are also encouraged to present their work at workshops and conferences, in order to expose it to a broader academic discussion/criticism.

Advising is one of the core components of the program’s dissertation process. The semester after taking the first examination, all students meet with the EO in order to discuss their research interests and identify an appropriate advisor. They are also encouraged to confer with different faculty members to obtain guidance and establish intellectual relationships on which their further work will be based. This stage of the process leads to the selection of the Examination Committee which, ideally, should later become the student’s Dissertation Committee.
The structure of the second exam in the literature and culture subspecialty of the program engages students in preparation, in consultation with the mentor and other members of the Examination Committee, of two bibliographical sets (literary/cultural texts; theory and criticism) that will form the cornerstone of their prospectus and dissertation. They are also expected to identify original topics of research within the area of their interest. Students in the linguistics subspecialty are required to designate and describe to areas of concentration, build an annotated bibliography for each, write a research paper that must be deemed publishable and give an oral defense of the paper. These form the cornerstone of their prospectus and dissertation.

During elaboration of the prospectus, students are invited to sustain a dialogue concerning their proposal through regular meetings with the mentor and, if deemed necessary and/or beneficial, with other members of the Dissertation Committee. The prospectus must describe the corpus of texts to be studied, the fundamental questions that will guide the research, the theoretical approach to be used, the relationship of the dissertation to established criticism, and an explanation of how the project will contribute to existing research on the topic.

The platform for these exchanges and a framework that builds research and writing habits have been created through implementation, in Spring 2015 of semester-long workshops on the preparation of proposal for dissertation project (to be taken during the first semester after the Comprehensive Examination) and on dissertation elaboration and writing (to be taken after the prospectus has been presented and defended).

Assessment

During the Spring 2016, HLBLL’s Executive Committee engaged in assessment of the program’s plan to meet the dissertation learning goals. All committee members—the EO, seven elected faculty members and three elected students—discussed the goals and the steps that we have taken towards meeting them. The committee’s experience with recent successfully defended dissertations, dissertations in progress and current student progress towards dissertation planning were taken into account. The overall assessment of faculty and students is positive. Students and faculty are aware of what the dissertation goals are and agree that the program structure and advising system are conducive to meeting these goals.

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