Guidelines for the English PhD
Foreign Language Advanced Competency Exam

General Description. The purpose of the “Advanced Competency” exam is to assess students’ ability to read and write in a foreign language as a tool for scholarly research in their major field of study. Toward that end, the exam has two parts:

- First, students must translate a text of approximately 500 words in length from a foreign language into English. To the extent that LLC faculty are able to identify texts related to students’ fields, the text may represent a piece of scholarship they might encounter. The text may otherwise be more general in nature, but appropriate for demonstrating students’ ability to utilize the foreign language as a research tool.
- Second, students are asked to write a brief essay in the same language as the excerpted text in question, on a topic or theme related to that text. This portion of the exam will not assume that students have special expertise in a particular field; instead, it will suggest a concept or set of concepts on which they can draw in developing a thoughtful, cogent discussion of their own design.

Available Languages. The current LLC faculty are able to assess reading and writing knowledge of the following languages: Arabic, Catalan, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. Requests or arrangements regarding other languages must be made by the student’s advisor.

Special Requests. Students who are native speakers of languages other than English may petition to translate a text into their native language, and then to compose an essay in the text’s original language. For example, subsequent to an approved petition, a native speaker of French might be granted permission to translate a German text into French rather than English if an examiner were available to assess that work. Only students who have been given prior approval will be allowed to translate into any target language other than English.

Terms of Evaluation. The LLC faculty member reviewing an exam will evaluate it in terms of two general criteria:

- For the exam’s first part, the evaluator will be looking for evidence that a student’s knowledge of the structure and vocabulary of the foreign language is sufficient to allow him or her to understand, with the help of a dictionary if needed, the text that has been assigned. The evaluator will be primarily concerned with the accuracy of the translation in conveying what the author intended and with the student’s ability to convey the text’s meaning in comprehensible English.
- For the exam’s second part, the evaluator will focus on the student’s demonstrated ability to write grammatical, well-structured, and coherent prose in the language of the translated excerpt. The evaluator will be primarily concerned with the student’s formal skills in composing the essay, rather than with issues regarding the essay’s specific thesis or argument.
Logistics. Some specifics on how the exam is conducted:

- The exam time limit is three (3) hours. Students will be expected to complete their translation and essay in the time allotted; how much time they devote to each part of the exam is up to their own discretion.
- The exam will be handwritten. Please note that the exam must be reasonably neat and written legibly. If the faculty member assessing an exam cannot easily read it, it will be marked as failing.
- Students may bring a bilingual dictionary (only books, not electronic versions) to the exam. Other aids such as reference grammars are not permitted.
- Students may take the Advanced Competency exam only once during any academic year; they are limited to a total of two (2) attempts to pass it.

Preparation. Since this exam tests advanced language competency, it is highly recommended that, in preparing for it, even students with past language training take relevant courses that are offered by LLC. These can include advanced undergraduate as well as graduate courses.

Test Results. The results of the exam will be mailed to students as soon as they are available, usually within two to three weeks after the exam has been completed.

For questions regarding the Advanced Competency Exam, contact the English Graduate Office (442-4099) or the LLC office (442-4222).

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