

Department of German  
Kresge Hall 3-305  
Northwestern University  
Evanston IL 60208 USA

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## **Handbook for the Graduate Program in German Literature and Critical Thought**

The Department of German Literature and Critical Thought offers a graduate program that focuses on the theoretical and cultural foundations for the development of German literature and critical thought from 1750 onward. In order to acquire a thorough understanding of these foundations, students take a two-year sequence of six required (core) courses and two pro-seminars. Working closely with an academic adviser, students also choose seven electives based on their own interests and the direction of their individual program. In addition to Yiddish studies, which is an integral part of the department's graduate-course offerings, Northwestern houses a wide group of related disciplines in which students in the German program are encouraged to participate, including Art History, Comparative Literary Studies, Gender Studies, History, Philosophy, Religion, and Screen Cultures.

The graduate program is home to the annual Northwestern University Department of German Speaker Series. The lectures, which take place approximately once a month over the academic year, are organized entirely by the graduate students, who invite scholars from around the world to discuss papers or pre-distributed materials with the academic community in Chicago.

### **Program Overview**

The graduate program is designed to provide a framework within which students can develop their interest in the relationship between modern German culture and the broad array of discourses—whether in philosophy, literary theory, history, or media studies—that can be broadly described as critical thought. The interaction between German writers or filmmakers, on the one hand, and German philosophers or critics, on the other, has been and still remains immensely productive. Instances of this interaction include Kant and Kleist, Fichte and Novalis, Hegel and Hölderlin, Schelling and von Platen, Marx and Heine, Nietzsche and Rilke, Freud and Schnitzler, Mach and Musil, Scholem and Kafka, Benjamin and Brecht, Heidegger and Jelinick, Adorno and Celan, Arendt and Lessing, Wittgenstein and Bachmann, Krakauer and Lang, Mitscherlich and Fassbinder. The work of these and many other poets, writers, philosophers, critics, and filmmakers are regularly discussed in our seminars and graduate colloquia, as we seek out the complicated connections between literary texts and other forms of reflection and representation.

Seminars in the German graduate program alternate between specific literary topics and more wide-ranging explorations of themes and problems, that engage with, and are often principally concerned with, non-literary texts. The aim of each seminar is to make it possible for

students to acquire the skills to develop a complex and compelling project of their own, which can then provide the basis for an innovative dissertation.

The department includes experts in a variety of fields in modern German literature and thought, from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment to the most recent literary productions in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. As home to Yiddish studies at Northwestern, the German department regularly trains students in German-Jewish literature, culture, and thought.

The graduate program as a whole is constructed to develop the two principal dimensions of scholarship: new research and enlivening teaching. Close attention is paid to the graduate student's skills as a writer and as a communicator. The department includes a highly acclaimed group of instructors, who are themselves committed to fostering an engaging pedagogical environment, to which graduate students contribute as both language instructors and teaching assistants.

## **Admissions**

The Graduate School (TGS) at Northwestern requires all prospective students to apply for admission. Please see the [TGS Admissions page](#) where you will find the online application. In addition to the Application for Admission and Financial Aid, the German department also requires the following documents for application to the Ph.D. program.

- Copy of transcripts;
- Three letters of recommendation;
- A statement of purpose in which the student indicates the reason why he or she would like to pursue graduate studies in the German department and outlines some of the major lines of inquiry that he or she would like to develop;
- A paper or writing sample representative of their work.
- We do NOT require the GRE from our applicants.
- TOEFL requirements:
  - Internet-Based Test Score minimum requirement of 90; Minimum for the Computer-Based Test is 213 and the Paper-Based Test is 550. The minimum score for the IELTS is 7.
  - International students need NOT take the TOEFL or IELTS if
    - they can provide official transcripts verifying an undergraduate degree from an accredited four-year institution or equivalent, where the language of instruction was English or
    - they can provide official transcripts verifying a graduate degree from an accredited institution where the language of instruction was English.
  - International students who have received a degree from an accredited, English-speaking institution will not be required to take the new language test (Versant) or attend language course work.

Prospective students are welcome to visit campus informally and to stop by the department for general information. Admitted students are encouraged to attend a Visiting Weekend in early March, during which time they meet with faculty and current graduate students, tour the library and other campus facilities, and if possible, attend a graduate seminar.

## Coursework

### Language of Instruction

Courses offered in the department of German are sometimes taught in English and sometimes in German. Graduate students are expected to have near native fluency in English and advanced knowledge of German in addition to a third language relevant for their research area.

### Course Requirements

There are a total of 15 courses required for the PhD.

#### Core Courses (6 courses)

GERMAN 401 German Literature and Critical Thought, 1750-1832 (1 Unit)  
 GERMAN 402 German Literature and Critical Thought, 1832-1900 (1 Unit)  
 GERMAN 403 German Literature, Critical Thought, and New Media, 1900-45 (1 Unit)  
 GERMAN 404 German Literature, Critical Thought, and New Media since 1945 (1 Unit)  
 GERMAN 405 Basic Issues in Foreign Language Teaching (1 Unit)  
 GERMAN 406 Contours of German History since 1750 (1 Unit)

#### Pro Seminars (2 courses)

German 407 Pro Seminar

Pro Seminars are spring quarter courses in which students develop a research-level paper, often in conjunction with previous or contemporaneous work in other courses. Students will present their own work in at least one Pro Seminar within the first three years of study.

#### Electives (7 courses)

Students will choose seven electives, graduate level courses either in the Department of German or in related disciplines.

### Additional Degree Requirements for the Ph.D.

- Participation in the various departmental colloquia throughout the year, including those devoted to professional development;
- Qualifying Examinations—generally taken in winter quarter of the 3rd year;
- Dissertation Prospectus—must be completed by the end of fall quarter of the 4th year;
- Third-language Examination, which can be accomplished by taking a graduate or upper-level undergraduate course in the relevant language; by passing a reading exam; or by taking an intensive language course during the summer equivalent to second year of college study;
- Ph.D. Dissertation, a body of original independent research; and
- Oral Defense of the dissertation.

### Typical Course of Studies

- **First Year: Fellowship Year.** Students take three courses in the fall and winter quarter, and two courses plus one Proseminar in the spring quarter. The first-year review will take place at the end of the spring quarter.
- **Second Year: TA-Ship.** Students take two courses in the fall and winter quarter, and one course plus one Proseminar in the spring quarter. In addition, students assist with a large lecture-course in English each quarter.
- **Third Year: TA-Ship.** Students take the qualifying examination in the winter quarter, and they participate in one Proseminar in the spring quarter. In addition, students teach the German 101 sequence.
- **Fourth Year: Fellowship Year.** Usually taken at a German University and supported either by Northwestern funds or outside grants for which students are required to apply. Prospectus in the fall quarter, work on the dissertation.
- **Fifth Year: TA-ship.** Students teach the German 102 sequence. They continue work on the dissertation, and they take the third-language examination. The dissertation defense will take place in the spring quarter.

## About Teaching as a Graduate Student

Teaching is an essential element of the education and training experience of graduate students at Northwestern in general and the German Department specifically. At least one year is required by the Graduate School. We engage in active discussions with students at the end of each year concerning teaching possibilities and assign courses with a view toward creating the best teaching portfolio as possible.

### Brief Course Descriptions

#### **GERMAN 322** German Contributions to World Literature (1)

Investigation of literary texts from diverse genres and periods which are marked by a sense of constraint apparently at odds with the view associated with Western modernity of the individual as the locus of freedom and autonomy. The “German contribution” as a somber corrective to Enlightenment optimism.

#### **GERMAN 324** Modern German Drama (1)

Modern drama of the German stage as a “moral institution,” as defined by Friedrich Schiller and echoed by Erwin Piscator. Works by authors ranging from Heinrich von Kleist to Peter Weiss.

#### **GERMAN 401** German Literature and Critical Thought, 1750-1832 (1)

This course begins with the formative aesthetic discussions undertaken by Lessing and Mendelssohn, turns to Kant’s program for critical self-reflection, and considers a wide range of responses, including those of Schiller, the early romantics, Kleist, Hölderlin, and Goethe.

#### **GERMAN 402** German Literature and Critical Thought, 1832-1900 (1)

Thematic approach to key texts of 19th century German literature between Goethe and Gottfried Keller, tragedy and the Bildungsroman. Literary and philosophical texts are read side by side in order to interrogate traditional concepts of realism, mimesis, and interpretation.

#### **GERMAN 403** German Literature, Critical Thought, and New Media, 1900-45 (1)

Built around selected key texts on the aesthetic theories of modernism (e.g., by Nietzsche, Adorno, Bürger, and Kittler), this course explores the relationship of literature and the visual arts and scrutinizes the status of literature within aesthetic production in modernity. Particular attention to works by Rilke, Kafka, Brecht, Lasker-Schüler, Benn, Musil, and Mann.

**GERMAN 404** German Literature, Critical Thought, and New Media since 1945 (1)

Overview of the most influential texts that reflect the mounting concern with media in German literary and critical theory since the Second World War. Emphasis on the effects of the rise of media studies and theory on the understanding and interpretation of literature.

**GERMAN 405** Basic Issues in Foreign Language Teaching: Theory and Practical Applications (1)

This course focuses on basic principles of second language acquisition and language teaching methodology. It introduces students to the major trends and theories in language teaching. The critical reflection of pedagogical practices is emphasized.

**GERMAN 406** Contours of German History since 1750 (1)

Partly thematic and partly chronological approach to familiarizing graduate students with the social and cultural contexts of major intellectual and literary developments. Focus on the end of the early modern order, industrialization, urbanization, unification, utopianism, expansionism, the burden of the National Socialist past, and the vexed question of national identity.

**GERMAN 407** Proseminar (1) Spring quarter writing workshops in which students complete a research-level paper in conjunction with work in others courses.

**GERMAN 431** Contemporary German Literature (1)

Readings from authors representative of literature in the former East and West Germany's. May be repeated for credit with change of topic.

**GERMAN 441** Studies in Communication and Culture (1) Content varies. Samples; feminist literature, media studies, the history of literary journals, and other specific topics representative of current research interests. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Sample TOPics: Trauma; Nietzsche.

**GERMAN 490** Independent Reading (1) May be repeated for credit. Permission of instructor and department required.

**GERMAN 499** Independent Study (1) May be repeated for credit. Permission of instructor and department required.

**GERMAN 590** Research (1) Independent investigation of selected problems pertaining to dissertation. Permission of instructor and department required. May be repeated for credit.

## Requirements

Successful completion of the Ph. D. degree in German requires:

- Obtaining approval of a dissertation prospectus by the end of the fall quarter of the fourth year;
- Submission of a dissertation approved according to the rules of The Graduate School; and
- Defending a completed dissertation.

### Regular Assessments

Graduate students have a right to periodic evaluations of their academic progress, performance, and professional potential. In order to do so students are required to submit an annual progress report and have it approved and signed by their advisor and the DGS. Students are encouraged to discuss their progress with their professors, to exchange ideas for research projects, to submit any plans for future research and/or papers in advance for evaluation at any

stage in the quarter. Students are also encouraged to maintain regular contact with their professors for academic consultations throughout the course of their studies at Northwestern.

### **First-Year Review**

At the end of the spring quarter, first-year students submit two papers that they have completed during the course of the year. The papers will be reviewed by the tenure-line faculty as a whole, who make a recommendation concerning the students' progress over the previous year and potential during the second year (with specifications of lacunae, if any are detected). The point of submitting the two papers should demonstrate that the student is prepared to write publishable scholarly essays. A written report concerning the student's progress is sent at the end of the spring quarter to the student, and it serves as the basis of a discussion with the Director of Graduate Studies and at least two other members of the graduate faculty of the Department. If it becomes apparent during the review process that the student is not making sufficient progress during the first year, a second review will be scheduled before the beginning of the fall quarter of the following year with the same procedures (the submission of two papers, either new or revised versions of the previous ones). If the members of the Department judge that insufficient progress has been made at the conclusion of the second review, the Director of Graduate Studies arranges with the student and The Graduate School to convert the second year into a terminal year, which includes the possibility of an appropriate terminal M.A. degree.

### **Second-Year Review**

By the end of the spring quarter of the second year, students must have organized (in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies) their qualifying examination committee. The names of these three advisers are submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies and the chair of the German department along with a brief outline of the three areas under which the examination will take place.

### **Qualifying Exam (usually taken in the winter quarter of the third year)**

The examination is principally concerned with literary works. In consultation with their advisers, students develop three independent lists of works. The three lists should, as a whole, include representatives of all major genres (drama, prose, poetry), and they should include literary works from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries (both pre- and post-War). Students generally develop three kinds of list: one devoted to a particular genre, another to a particular period, and a third that concerns a particular author, including his or her influences. The idea that animates the drafting of the three lists is the following: each list should be the basis for a middle- or upper-level class on the relevant topic, a class, moreover, which introduces advanced undergraduates to some of the major works in modern German literature.

Students generally work with committees composed of three advisers, each of whom helps develop a single list, although occasionally the entire committee helps with all three. Once a student is confident that he or she is fully in command of the lists, the members of his or her committee pose three questions in writing, and the student is given two weeks to write out 12- to 15-page "position papers" about each of the questions. (There is no need for bibliographical

material.) An oral examination (lasting around two hours) takes place within a week of the submission of the papers. The examiners will notify the student whether he or she has passed no later than five days after the examination. The qualifying exam must be passed before the beginning of the fall of the student's fourth year.

If the student does not pass one of the components of the exam, he or she can retake that component within 30 days. In order to continue in the program, students must pass all three components. If the members of the student's committee judge that the student, after the second attempt with each component, has not made sufficient progress and is thus not in a position to write a doctoral dissertation, a written judgment to this effect is submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies, who convenes a meeting of the graduate faculty to determine whether the Department will terminate the student (with the possibility of a terminal M.A. degree).

### **Dissertation Prospectus (completed during the fall quarter of the fourth year)**

The dissertation prospectus should be conceived in the form of a grant proposal. It is composed of the following five sections:

- An abstract of the project, comprehensible to an audience of broadly educated humanists.
- A general description of the dissertation, which defines the topic under discussion, provides an account of the basic questions to which it will respond, and locates the project in the critical literature on the topic.
- Specification of the methodologies that will be used or developed in the course of researching and writing the dissertation.
- Articulation of the dissertation into its various chapters, each of which is briefly described.
- Bibliography of both primary and secondary sources.

The usual length is at least 15 pages, not more than 25 (not including bibliography).

The prospectus should be completed by the fifth week of the fall of the student's fourth year, whereupon it is submitted to the chair of the student's dissertation committee. By the end of the fall quarter the student defends the prospectus before the entire faculty of the department as well as any extra-departmental member of the dissertation committee.

### **Ph.D. Language Requirement (completed before the dissertation defense)**

The Department of German strives to provide their doctoral students with the best training and broadest practical experience possible in teaching and research. Knowledge of at least one other language besides German and English is required for both, research and teaching. Therefore, the language requirement entails:

- Native or near-native fluency in English;
- Advanced proficiency in German language (oral and written). For information see the page on German Language Proficiency.
- Knowledge of at least one further language. This can be accomplished by one of the following: a) taking a graduate or upper-level undergraduate course taught in the relevant language; b) passing a reading examination administered by the department; or c) taking an intensive

language course during the summer (equivalent to finishing two years of college language study).

## **Related Programs**

### **Work in Related Programs**

In addition to Yiddish studies which is an integral part of the department, there are a large number of related disciplines with which students are encouraged to associate themselves. Seminars corresponding to those in the department are regularly offered by graduate programs in several other literary traditions, Comparative Literary Studies, Classics, History, Art History, Political Science, Philosophy, and Screen Culture. The faculty at Northwestern is particularly noted for its expertise in such fields as continental philosophy, political theory, eighteenth-century studies, nineteenth-century narrative, the history of modernism, and media studies. The German department and associated graduate programs regularly invite distinguished international visitors for both concentrated colloquia and extensive seminars. During their course of study, we also encourage our students to apply for the Paris Program in Critical Theory.

### **Paris Program in Critical Theory**

The Northwestern University [Paris Program in Critical Theory](#) is directed by Professor Samuel Weber, Avalon Professor of the Humanities at Northwestern University. This program gives advanced graduate students from a wide variety of disciplines a unique opportunity to familiarize themselves with French and European theoretical research by spending one year in Paris. The Program provides full fellowship support for one year to up to five highly qualified graduate students from Northwestern. In the fall quarter, students participate in a weekly interdisciplinary seminar organized by Professor Weber. The Director also assists students in making contact with leading European scholars and researchers in their respective fields. Students spend the rest of the year in study and/or research according to their individual projects. Ph.D. students who have advanced to candidacy by the fall of the year they will spend in Paris and who have sufficient knowledge of French to be able to function in an academic setting can apply.

### **Graduate Interdisciplinary Cluster Initiative**

Graduate students in Humanities and related fields are encouraged to participate in the Interdisciplinary Cluster Initiative, a program designed to help graduate students during their academic career at Northwestern by fostering connections with students and faculty in other programs with whom they might have natural intellectual affinities. Interdisciplinary clusters in different areas of intellectual inquiry have been developed by faculty across schools and programs and will provide a second intellectual home. Clusters offer their own discrete courses as well as sponsor a number of activities and events for students and faculty. Prospective students have the opportunity to select on their application to graduate school the cluster with which they would like to affiliate, though choosing a cluster is not a requirement for admission. Students may affiliate with a cluster at any point during their study at Northwestern. For more information, visit the [website of the graduate school](#).



