University of Pittsburgh

Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Slavic Languages & Literatures

Graduate Student Handbook

October 2026

I. Requirements

Literature MA

- 36 graduate credits, including Proseminar I and II.
- One course in Slavic historical linguistics or one course in descriptive Russian linguistics.
- A reading knowledge of either French or German.
- The Comprehensive Examination

Literature PhD

- 72 graduate credits (36 beyond the M.A.), of which 12 may be dissertation credits; at least 60 credits must be completed by the end of the semester in which the examination is to be taken.
- One course in Slavic historical linguistics and one course in descriptive Russian Linguistics.
- 9-15 graduate credits (but in the 72-credit total) in an approved second area (e.g. Cultural Studies, Women's Studies, European Literature, Area Studies, a second Slavic language/literature/culture).
- A reading knowledge of French and German
- The Qualifying Examination

PhD in Film Studies with a Concentration in Slavic (as the Associated Department)

The PhD in Film Studies at the University of Pittsburgh is an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental degree that stresses the history, theory, and aesthetics of international cinema, video, television, and new media. While the student will earn a PhD in Film Studies (granted by the Film Studies Program), he or she will also be a full member of the Slavic Department, fulfilling its requirements (many of which will overlap with those in Film Studies). The name of the Associated Department will appear as an Area of Concentration on the student's transcript. Thus, we do not anticipate that there will be any significant delay in time-to-degree.

The name of the Associated Department will appear as an Area of Concentration on the student's transcript. Thus, the student graduating with a PhD in Film Studies will be doubly qualified: in film studies as well as in a secondary area. See the Film Studies website (http://www.filmstudies.pitt.edu/) for more information about the PhD in Film Studies with a Concentration in Slavic. Applicants interested in this program should apply through Film Studies.

Film Studies Student Funding:

Funding (for fellowships and/or TA-ships) will come in the form of that department's existing funding.

The comprehensive exam for the Film PhD student consists of examinations in three areas chosen by the advisor and the faculty:

- Film Genre(s) or medium/media
- Film Author(s) or producer(s)
- Historical Period(s)

Film PhD students who concentrate in Slavic should take the Department's four graduate offerings in Film Studies:

- RUSS 2648 Lumiere to Lenin
- RUSS 2639 Stalin at the Movies
- RUSS 2640 Cinema of Thaw and Stagnation
- RUSS 2642 Perestroika and Beyond

Graduate Certificates

Most graduate students earn Certificates in Cultural Studies, Russian and East European Studies, and Film Studies in addition to their degrees.

More General Information

Recent literature seminars have included the following topics:

- Russian Journals
- Folklore
- Silver Age
- Symbolist Prose
- Formalism and Structuralism
- 20th Century Drama
- Literature and Society in the 19th Century
- Autobiography and Memoirs
- Russian Women's Culture
- Solzhenitsyn
- Pushkin
- Russian Narrative Poem
- Bakhtin and the Novel

The M.A. degree may be awarded only after one of the required research language requirements has been satisfied and the Ph.D. degree may be awarded only after both requirements have been satisfied. Entering students should be prepared to a) pass a reading examination in French or German; or b) enroll in a French or German language class until the research language requirement has been satisfied in one of the following three ways:

- A grade of at least B+ in the final (fourth) semester of study of the language;
- The regular research-competence exam;
- A graduate level course in the chosen language including a) foreign-language research for a paper and b) a letter from the instructor (3-4 sentences maximum) to the effect that the student is competent to conduct research in the language.

Students may apply to replace the French and/or German examinations with examinations in other languages. Any such application must be submitted in writing to the student's advisor, and must be based on an argument that the proposed substitute language is more important for the student's research than the language it would replace. Applications will then be evaluated by the advisor and two other members of the faculty to be selected by the advisor.

II. Advisement

It is the responsibility of all degree students to consult each term with the graduate advisor concerning courses to be taken during the following term, and to review current progress toward the degree. While effort will be made to accommodate student interests and preferences, the graduate advisor has the authority to exercise judgment as to course load and selection.

Only the graduate advisor is authorized to sign registration forms. The chair will not sign registration forms when the student has failed to consult with the graduate advisors during the regular advising period.

III. Independent Study

Independent Study courses of various sorts, and with various credit loads, are regularly included among Department course listings. The purpose of such automatic listings is in part for clerical convenience and is not to be construed as a blanket right to take an Independent Study course in a given term. In principle, students will be advised to take regular department offerings unless these clearly coincide with courses already taken. This principle holds regardless of the status of the student concerned.

The opportunity to take Independent Study courses is usually extended to advanced (normally, Ph.D.) students with special needs and interests not met by departmental offerings. Occasionally a student who, through no fault of his or her own, has been unable to take a course required for a degree may petition to take such a course through Independent Study. Otherwise, Independent Study is not offered in subject areas regularly taught by the Department. In order to obtain approval for an Independent Study course, a student must present to the graduate adviser a) sufficient rationale; b) a statement from the faculty member who has agreed to undertake and supervise the Independent Study.

A faculty member agreeing to undertake supervision of Independent Study should, as a minimum, provide a list of readings or agree to supervise progress through a student-provided list. Except for dissertation research, the Independent Study course should typically result in a graded research paper of significant length or in a graded comprehensive examination.

An exception may be made when the student has satisfied all course and credit requirements (at least 60 credits) for the comprehensive examinations and wishes to enroll for 3 credits toward preparing for examinations scheduled in the same term. In such a case, the student registers for 3 credits of Independent Study with the examination chair, and receives a grade for the course (Credit/Audit) according to whether or not the examinations are passed.

Students may not undertake study under the rubric Dissertation Research until they have been formally advanced to candidacy.

IV. Transfer & Credit Policies

- Transfer credit from another institution will be allowed for no more than 12 credits total toward the M.A., and an additional 6 toward the Ph.D.
- In certain cases (for example, when the credits are old or from an institution with which the department is not familiar), the matter of transfer credit is decided only after the first semester of work or by examination.

- M.A. transfers from other institutions may be required to take the Departmental M.A. examinations, should their training prove inadequate for doctoral-level work. Until such time as these examinations are successfully passed, the student will be considered to be on provisional status in the Ph.D. program. What constitutes "inadequate training" is to be decided by Departmental committee.
- Credits earned in five-year Russian or East European programs will not be counted toward graduate credit unless a) a particularly strong case is made by the candidate; b) the departmental M.A. examinations are passed within one year of study, in which case the credit provisions of point 1 apply, i.e., a maximum of 12 credits toward the M.A. and 6 credits toward the Ph.D. will be allowed, justified on a course-by-course basis.
- Students desiring to spend an academic semester abroad in pre-approved programs may have credit from such programs applied at the rate of no more than 9 credits per term of study. Typically, such study is undertaken to establish a second area or to improve language ability. Students whose fulfillment of specific course requirements is made more difficult by participation in approved study-abroad programs may apply to the graduate committee for a waiver of requirement, to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

V. Teaching Assistantships & Other Awards

- Teaching assistantships and fellowships, and other Department awards, are determined by the graduate studies committee. Those wishing to be considered should submit a request to that effect, in writing, to the chair by February 15. The following general policies are in effect.
- Once awarded at any given fraction, whether full or part-time, a teaching assistantship will not usually be changed either up or down.
- For graduate students entering as M.A. candidates, the usual tenure is three years.
- For graduate students entering as Ph.D. candidates, the usual tenure is two years. In exceptional cases, financial support by the department may be extended by one year.
- Teaching assistantships are awarded according to an overall strategy of providing support to as many qualified graduate students as possible, including incoming students. Any graduate fellowships under the specific control of the department (currently, the Elagin Fellowship) are awarded as part of this overall strategy: i.e., they are considered interchangeable with teaching assistantships and carry the same time limitations. When calculating time limitations on departmental support, the Department historically has taken into account outside fellowship support as well, but there is no established policy on this matter.

VI. Examinations

Examination Format

Graduate students will, as part of their Ph.D. program, pass two batteries of examinations: the Comprehensive Examination and the Ph.D. Qualifying Examination. They shall be taken in this order and in conformity with the time line given below.

The Comprehensive Examination will be a typed examination given in take-home format. The exams shall be typed in English. The questions will address the following three discrete historical periods:

- Russian literature through the 18th Century
- The 19th Century and Early 20th Century
- Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian literature (1917-present)

The Comprehensive Examination will be based on the Departmental MA Reading List.

The Ph.D. Qualifying Examination will consist of typed and oral segments. The typed examination will be administered in take-home format and completed within two weeks. All sources used in the composition of answers will be documented according to the standards of scholarly writing in the field. The exams shall be typed in English. The typed questions will be organized to address three discrete areas of specialization, formulated individually for each student within the following parameters:

- Genre(s) or medium/media
- Author(s) or producer(s)
- Historical period(s)

Candidates are expected to demonstrate mastery of the appropriate body of theory relevant to each area.

The typed examinations will be followed by an oral examination, to be administered by the candidate's examination committee and all members of the Slavic department graduate faculty who wish to participate. The oral examination will be scheduled to follow the typed examinations in as timely a fashion as possible.

Qualifying Examinations: Candidate and Committee Responsibilities

- Each graduate student not already having an advisor will choose an adviser as soon as possible after passing the Comprehensive Examination.
- Each student will choose three areas of specialization in which he/she will be examined. These areas should be chosen within the parameters listed above under Examination Format. The three specific areas must be approved by the advisor.
- The advisor will chair the student's examination committee, which will include all members of the graduate faculty currently in residence who are competent to read and write examinations in the student's areas of specialization. Any member of the Slavic Department's graduate faculty who wishes to serve on the examination committee will be permitted to do so.
- The student will develop reading lists for the three areas of specialization. These lists will constitute a minimal basis upon which the student will be tested and are not to be considered exhaustive. The development of these reading lists is to be supervised by the student's adviser in consultation with the members of the examination committee. Both the adviser and the committee must approve these lists in their final form.
- All members of the committee shall submit questions for the examinations. The adviser shall write the examination and make a draft available to the committee for approval. The student will have two weeks to produce answers to the examination questions.
- All members of the examination committee are expected to participate in the reading and grading of the exams and in the administration of the oral exam.

Graduate Examinations and “Satisfactory Progress”

- Graduate students entering the program with no advanced preparation beyond the undergraduate degree will be expected to complete 9 credits of course work each semester until satisfaction of departmental and FAS course requirements for the Ph.D. degree.
- Generally, students should attempt the Comprehensive Examination as soon as they feel they are sufficiently prepared. To remain in good standing, students must take the Comprehensive Examination before the third year of full-time study begins. Students who fail any of the Comprehensive Examination's three sections will be put on academic notice status until the failed sections are retaken. Students entering in the Fall semester will be in bad standing if they have not passed all three sections by 15 April of the third year of full-time study; i.e., after 6 semesters of course work.
- The reading lists for the Qualifying Examinations must be approved by the adviser and committee by 15 December of the fourth year of full-time study.

- The typed section of the Qualifying Examination must begin no later than 20 March of the fourth year of full-time graduate study.
- The oral examination and all three typed sections of the Qualifying Examination must be taken before the beginning of the fifth year of full-time study. Students who fail any portion of the Qualifying Examination, including the oral examination, will be put on academic notice status until the failed portion is retaken. Students entering in the Fall semester will be in bad standing if they have not passed all parts of the Qualifying Examination by 15 April of the fifth year of full-time graduate study; i.e., after 10 semesters of course work.
- This series of deadlines will be adjusted appropriately for students entering the program in the Spring semester.
- In the event of a documented medical or family emergency during the examination period, the examination may be rescheduled. Computer failure is not considered an emergency, and students are responsible for making timely back-ups of their work.
- Should a student fail any section of the Qualifying or Comprehensive Examination, it may only be retaken once. The timeframe for retaking the examination will be determined by the exam coordinator.

Grading

Examiners assign traditional Pass/Fail marks, which will be translated into a 0–4 point scale:

- Fail – 0/1 (examiners may specify level of failure)
- Low Pass – 2
- Pass – 3
- High Pass – 4

Averaged numerical marks are translated back into prose according to the same scale:

- 0 – 1.75: Fail – “failure”
- 1.76 – 2.75: Low Pass – “minimal achievement”
- 2.76 – 3.75: Pass – “adequate achievement”
- 3.76 – 4: High Pass – “superior achievement”
- The overall rating of a passing exam (Low Pass, Pass, or High Pass) will be calculated using the same scale, averaging the score of all sections.
- Failure will not be determined by the total average score, but by the failure of any individual exam section (which may then be retaken once).

VII. Dissertation

General Note:

All correspondence and documentation pertaining to a student's dissertation will be kept in a special dissertation file, attached to the student's graduate file, so that advisers and committee members may have ready access to pertinent information.

The Topic

- Students should begin thinking about possible dissertation topics long before taking their Ph.D. comprehensives. The topic should be in an area in which the student is already reasonably well grounded.

- Before requesting faculty members to become dissertation advisers and committee members, students should conduct a preliminary investigation of their topic to verify that their choice is a) feasible and b) not previously investigated.

The Advisor and Committee

- The selection of the dissertation advisor should be practical; it is to the student's advantage to work with a professor conversant with the given subject. Conversely, the faculty member should not agree to be a dissertation advisor unless s/he considers him/herself competent to guide dissertation work in the given area and on the given topic, and unless s/he considers the dissertator to be sufficiently knowledgeable in the given area to write a competent dissertation. The responsibilities are considerable, and this role should not be undertaken without careful consideration.
- Once a student makes a choice of a topic, s/he should type up a brief one-page preliminary description of the project and present it to the proposed adviser.
- If the advisor accepts the role and agrees that the topic is sound, the student, with the help of the advisor, should request a minimum of two other departmental professors and one professor outside the department to form the dissertation committee. The requests should be made formally, in writing, and should include a brief description of the proposed topic. Faculty members will respond to the request in writing.

The Prospectus or Overview

- The student should submit to all four (or more) committee members a dissertation prospectus consisting of a) statement of thesis, b) tentative chapter outline, c) bibliography.
- Committee members will provide timely written response to the prospectus, after which the student should set a date for the prospectus overview.
- At the overview, the student will be asked questions about a) the tenability of the thesis, b) the methodology to be employed in the dissertation, and c) the sources with which the dissertator plans to work.
- Committee members are to resolve major disagreements regarding topic and methods at the stage of the overview, before advancing the student to full candidacy.

Writing the Dissertation

- If the student passes the overview, s/he should immediately embark on further research and begin writing the first draft. All dissertations, including drafts, must be written in competent English. No exceptions will be allowed. Although faculty members will advise on matters of style, substandard English prose will be returned to the student for further work. If a student feels s/he has persistent problems with writing, s/he should consult with the Writing Workshop, Department of English.
- Students should submit drafts to committee members one chapter at a time.
- Faculty members will a) promptly return to the student each chapter with comments, suggestions, and corrections, and b) submit a short summary of their evaluation to the advisor. If committee members are in strong disagreement, the advisor should convene a meeting of the committee members to discuss the conflict, so that, ideally, the student is not put in the position of responding to contradictory advice.
- Once the dissertator has revised the draft in line with the committee's recommendations, s/he should type up the final draft of the dissertation, give a copy to each committee member, and suggest a tentative date for the dissertation defense.

The Defense

- The date of the defense must allow the committee at least one month in which to read the final draft. If the committee believes that the dissertation needs further work, the defense should be postponed. If one or

more members of the committee are of the opinion that the dissertation is not ready for a defense, the advisor should try to work out the disagreement before the defense or, in cases where it is not possible to work out the disagreement in advance, inform the candidate of the disagreement. It is ultimately the choice of the candidate whether to go ahead with the defense in opposition to the opinion of one or more members of the committee.

- All departmental students and faculty are encouraged to attend the defense and should feel free to ask the dissertator questions related to the dissertation.
- Two Report-of-Examination-for-Doctoral-Degree cards should be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies in connection with each dissertation. One card relates to the dissertation itself, the other to the oral defense. In cases where there is ultimately a lack of unanimity among the committee members as to whether the dissertation is acceptable or whether the orals have been passed, this is so indicated on the card and the matter is referred to the Dean of Graduate Studies for resolution.
- It is possible to pass the candidate at the oral defense without signing the dissertation card. This is the appropriate action when the committee member feels that the defense has been passed and the dissertation is in principle acceptable, provided certain changes are made which the committee member would like to see before passing the dissertation. Signing the dissertation card indicates that the committee member both approves the dissertation and is confident that certain minor changes can be made without further checking of the pertinent pages.
- Whatever revisions the committee deems necessary for the candidate's successful completion of the degree should be made within one month of the defense. Only when all necessary changes have been made in the final copy of the dissertation will the dissertation card be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.

VIII. Academic Integrity

As a body of scholars in the humanities, department faculty recognize an obligation to define and exemplify high standards of professional conduct, and to uphold these standards in department courses, examinations, and dissertations.

Each student should become familiar with the University Handbook on Academic Integrity. Breaches of academic integrity will be dealt with severely and may be considered grounds for termination from the graduate program. Such breaches include the following:

- Plagiarism (see below);
- Relying in examinations on unauthorized notes or materials;
- Copying another's work in order to submit it as one's own;
- Soliciting aid or assistance in an attempt to cheat;
- Assisting in any way, including passive nonintervention, another's attempt to cheat.

It is everyone's responsibility to bring observed violations of academic integrity to the immediate attention of the faculty person in charge, whether openly or in confidence. In serious cases, a graduate-faculty committee will be convened in order to examine the matter and to recommend as to consequences. Departmental recommendations, as all administrative actions, are subject to University provisions relating to administrative adjudication and appeal.

Plagiarism, like most forms of academic-integrity violations, consists in relying on the work of another without giving due acknowledgment to it. Any of the following acts constitutes plagiarism:

- Copying the words of another without giving due credit;
- Copying the thoughts or ideas of another without giving due credit;
- Copying or relying on the products of another's research (whether data, methods, bibliography, references, etc.) without giving due credit;

- Understating the extent of one's indebtedness to the work of another.

One should be aware that laxity of scholarly method often results in the appearance of plagiarism, difficult to distinguish from plagiarism itself. In order to avoid misunderstanding, it is essential that one be fully conversant with the mechanics of scholarly citation and reference pertinent to a given discipline. A standard guide is the MLA Handbook.