

The Pennsylvania State University
Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese
Graduate Student Handbook
Program in Spanish Linguistics (M.A., Ph.D.)

Introduction

This Graduate Student Handbook provides information on the policies and requirements of the graduate program in Spanish Linguistics in the Department of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese (SIP) at Penn State. While most of the policies detailed in this handbook are established at the departmental level, others are policies set by the Graduate School and the University. For further details on Graduate School and University-level policies, please consult the most recent Penn State Graduate Bulletin at the following URL: <http://www.psu.edu/bulletins/whitebook/>.

Whether you are a new or continuing graduate student, it is always important to be familiar with the handbook. Our goal is to design a handbook that will be a useful reference for you as you progress through your program, and we hope that with your feedback, we can continually refine the handbook to best serve your needs. With this in mind, please be aware that *the policies in this handbook are subject to change*. We believe that a strong program requires feedback, evaluation and revision. Accordingly, from time to time, the policies in this handbook will be updated. The Director of Graduate Studies will notify you of any such changes and of their date of implementation.

The faculty understands that as graduate students you make crucial contributions to the mission of the department. We hope that you will participate fully in the intellectual life of the department, that you will be active participants in helping to improve our graduate programs, that you will be active learners, and that you become independent scholars over the course of your graduate studies. We also hope that you will stay in touch with us after you graduate, and that you will let us know of your progress in your career.

The Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese extends to you its best wishes for a productive and rewarding stay as a graduate student in Spanish at Penn State.

Overview of the Linguistics Program

The linguistics division of the Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese ranks among the strongest in the nation. Our strengths are focused in bilingualism and language contact, areas in which our faculty work from distinct perspectives and which connect to other language researchers at Penn State. Our faculty encourage excellence in scientific research by engaging in collaborative projects with students and other scholars here and abroad that examine questions related to dialectology, language contact and language variation, as well as the linguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of bilingualism.

Our department is committed to maintaining a low student-to-faculty ratio. Our graduate students typically teach three basic Spanish courses per academic year, though qualified students often have the opportunity to teach culture, literature, or linguistics courses not only in Spanish, but also in Latino Studies, Comparative Literature, Italian, and Portuguese. The intellectual environment of the department is regularly enriched with guest lectures, colloquia, conferences, and institutes.

Many of the faculty and graduate students in our program have received external funding, including awards from the *Guggenheim Foundation*, the *National Science Foundation*, and *National Institutes of Health*. We have an outstanding placement record, both in tenure track positions and, recently, in post-doctoral appointments of the kind not traditionally available to Spanish Ph.D. students. This success is a direct reflection of the national visibility of our faculty and of the cutting-edge research we are pursuing. Our faculty also play a central role in the cross-disciplinary Center for Language Science (<http://cls.psu.edu>). The increasing methodological sophistication of our experimental research, including investigation through eye-tracking and neuro-imaging, provides a transformative model for Hispanic Linguistics programs.

University SARI (Scholarship and Research Integrity) Requirement for All Entering Graduate Students

All entering graduate students at Penn State are required to complete comprehensive, multi-level education concerning the responsible conduct of research, training tailored to address varied issues faced by individual disciplines. For graduate students in our department, this training will be structured in accordance with the two-step process outlined below:

PART 1: Completion of the CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) Online RCR (Responsible Conduct of Research) Training Program

<http://www.research.psu.edu/training/sari/program>

All entering students will be expected to complete this online training module by no later than October 1 of their first semester in residence. Students will be responsible for providing the Graduate Program Assistant with a copy of the certificate of completion received upon completing the training. The Director of Graduate Studies will be responsible for verifying that all students are in compliance as of the stipulated date of completion.

PART 2: Completion of an additional five hours of discussion-based RCR (Responsible Conduct of Research) Education

This portion of the required training involves two separate components:

A) Participation, as early as possible during the first year in residence, in *two* centrally-sponsored RCR workshops organized by the Office of Research Protections (ORP) at Penn State. These workshops will provide students with opportunities to engage in cross-disciplinary conversations about research ethics.

<http://www.research.psu.edu/training/research-protections-workshops>

B) Participation, by the end of the first year in residence, in one three-hour discipline-specific RCR workshop organized by the Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese, another department within the School of Languages & Literatures, or (with approval from the Director of Graduate Studies) another department of relevance to the student's intended program of study.

Workshops will generally be focused on case studies, and will seek to generate dialogue related to issues surrounding ethical decision-making skills. Specific topics to be addressed may include: morality in the search for truth, the defensibility of knowledge claims, appropriate sharing of credit in collaborative research, the ethical mentoring of research assistants, conflicts of interest in research, the possible consequences of the irresponsible conduct of research to the researcher, ethical responsibilities of those involved in peer review of research, proper citation, self-citation, interviewing ethics, intellectual property rights, untruthful reporting of research results, and proper C.V. preparation.

The M.A. in Spanish Linguistics

The purpose of this section of the handbook is to explain the requirements and procedures for the completion of the M.A. degree in Spanish within the linguistics division of our graduate program. This section provides information on credit requirements, specific course requirements, residency requirements, credit transfer, and the design of the M.A. Exam.

Credit Requirements

The Graduate School requires the completion of a minimum of 30 credits for the successful completion of an M.A. degree. The Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese requires that of these 30 credits, a minimum of 27 graduate credits must be taken at the 500-level. Under special circumstances, the Director of Graduate Studies may authorize a student to take a 400-level course and have it count towards the 500-level requirement if, for instance, a relevant course in a particular area is not regularly offered.

Course Requirements

All M.A. students in Spanish that serve as Teaching Assistants are required to take Spanish 502, a course on teaching methodology, during their first semester in the program.

In addition, M.A. students in linguistics follow a structured curriculum, the purpose of which is to provide students with training in theoretical and psycholinguistics, to expose students to diverse areas of potential interest within Hispanic linguistics, and to prepare students for the rigors of independent research at the doctoral level.

The particular courses that comprise the curriculum of an incoming class will vary by year, depending on the selection of graduate seminars offered in past academic cycles, in addition to other factors including faculty-leave schedules. M.A. students should select their courses only after consulting with either the Director of Graduate Studies or a designated advisor from the linguistics faculty. The following provides a general overview of the structure of the coursework that students will pursue in the M.A. program.

Semester 1:

- Theory and Techniques of Teaching Spanish (SPAN 502) (1 credit)
- Generative Syntax (Linguistics 508)
- Phonology (Linguistics 504)
- Hispano-Romance Linguistics (SPAN 507)

Semester 2:

- Acquisition of Spanish (SPAN 513)
- Spanish Phonology (SPAN 510)
- Functional Syntax (SPAN 509)

Semester 3:

- Spanish Dialectology (SPAN 514)/ Sociolinguistics (LING 548) or similar course
- Psycholinguistics (Linguistics 520) or similar course
- Statistics (in consultation with graduate faculty in linguistics)

Semester 4:

- Course dealing with bilingualism as offered (in consultation with the designated graduate faculty in linguistics)
- Elective (in consultation with the designated graduate faculty in linguistics)
- Elective (in consultation with the designated graduate faculty in linguistics)

Residency Requirements

The university requires that at least 20 credits must be earned in residence at the University Park campus.

Credit Transfer

A maximum of 10 credits may be transferred towards the credit requirement for the M.A. As a rule, the department believes that success in our program requires the completion of the training that students receive at Penn State, both in terms of course content and contact with the professors who will serve as advisors and committee members for exams. With this in mind, we do not readily approve transfer credits. However, some courses taken at another institution of high caliber may, with the permission of the Director of Graduate Studies, be granted transfer credit towards the M.A. degree on a case-by-case basis.

The M.A. Exam in Linguistics

The M.A. exam consists of two parts: 1) a paper submitted early during the student's 4th semester (exact date will be determined yearly) and 2) an oral exam administered by the M.A. Exam committee in linguistics. Each of these elements is explained in this section of the handbook.

M.A. Exam: Paper requirement

The Graduate School at Penn State requires that each M.A. program at the university culminate in a significant capstone experience that demonstrates evidence of the student's analytical skills, and which shows an ability on the part of the student to synthesize material. To satisfy this requirement, as part of M.A. exam, all degree candidates must turn in an original paper written for one of their classes in our program. The deadline for submission of this paper will be early during the student's fourth semester.

Students are encouraged to revise this paper beyond its form as originally turned in for the course. We strongly recommend, moreover, that students consult with faculty members for whom they have written papers if they have any doubts about whether a given essay would be suitable for this particular requirement. Students are advised to select what they believe to be the best paper that they have written in the program.

M.A. Exam: The Oral Exam

The M.A. Oral Exam consists of an oral examination lasting up to two hours. Questions on the examination will focus, in part, on issues arising from the paper submitted for the written portion of the M.A. Exam. In addition, M.A. students will be provided with a list of study questions by the end of December of their third semester. These questions will be related to areas and issues covered in their core curriculum coursework. The study questions are not meant to be answered in rote fashion. Rather, we intend them to serve as points of departure for a general range of questions during the oral exam.

The oral exam should be seen as an opportunity to display flexibility and breadth while fielding a variety of questions relevant to a mastery of the discipline. In this sense, though certainly an occasion for the student to highlight his or her knowledge of central areas, trends, and themes in Hispanic Linguistics, the oral exam should also be seen as a moment to connect to broader issues in linguistic scholarship. Demonstrating this latter skill is essential, especially for those students who wish to move on to the Ph.D. program. As a means of facilitating strong preparation for this portion of the exam process, we encourage students to consult with peers in our linguistics program who have advanced successfully beyond the M.A. to the Ph.D. level.

M.A. Exam: Exam Dates

As noted above, the due date for the paper component of the M.A. exam is early during the student's 4th semester in the program. The oral exam will be administered during the 4th semester as well (the exact date will be determined yearly).

M.A. Exam: The Exam Committee

The M.A. Exam committee is generally comprised of all of the linguistics graduate faculty members. On some occasions, especially if there is a large number of M.A. candidates or if faculty members are unavailable due to travel or sabbaticals, smaller committees will be assigned by the Director of Graduate Studies . All M.A. Exam committees will have a minimum of three faculty members.

M.A. Exam: Grading

The M.A. paper and responses at the oral exam are graded by the members of the M.A. exam committee in linguistics with input, if necessary, from other members of the department. The exam as a whole—in sum, the oral exam along with the submitted paper—will be assigned an overall grade of pass or fail. In general, the student will be informed of this grade one week after the oral exam.

It is important to note that a passing grade on the M.A. exam does not automatically qualify a student for admission to the Ph.D. program in linguistics. This grade refers strictly to the exam committee's decision regarding the student's performance on the M.A. examination. A passing grade, assuming all other departmental and university requirements have been met, qualifies a student to earn the M.A. degree. For information pertaining to the Ph.D. program in linguistics, please consult the corresponding section of this handbook.

M.A. Exam: Failing grades

Failure of the M.A. exam will result in termination from the graduate program. No retake will be permitted.

M.A. Annual Letters of Evaluation

Students will receive a letter of evaluation at the end of each academic year, which addresses their overall performance in the program, in addition to their development, in the broadest sense, as potential future members of the profession. The letter will reflect input from all available faculty members in the linguistics division. Students are advised to address any concerns and suggestions which arise in the annual evaluation as actively as possible, and to do so in a timely fashion. They are also encouraged to discuss the letter's contents at any time with the Director of Graduate Studies and/or any other faculty advisors in the department.

M. A. Program: Summary Check List

Credit and course Requirements

- Spanish 502 taken in the 1st semester
- Minimum of 30 credits
- Minimum of 27 credits at 500-level
- Core curriculum coursework (see above)

M.A. Exam:

- Paper submitted to the Graduate Program Staff Assistant by early during student's 4th semester in the program (exact date will be determined yearly)
- Study questions received by student during the fall semester prior to the exam.
- Oral Examination during the student's 4th semester

The Ph.D. in Spanish Linguistics/ Ph.D. in Spanish with Dual Title in Language Science

Admission to the Ph.D. program

Students who successfully complete an M.A. in Spanish within the linguistics division at Penn State may apply to continue on to the Ph.D. program. Admission to the Ph.D. program is not automatically granted upon completion of the M.A. Rather, admission is contingent on two factors: 1) the student expressing interest in continuing by submitting a Statement of Purpose early during the spring semester in which they take the M.A. exam (described below), and 2) the recommendation of the linguistics faculty that the student be allowed to continue. This re-admission process is internal to the department, and will be administered by the entire linguistics faculty.

Statement of Purpose Guidelines: 1 - 2 page paper describing the student's reasons for applying to the Ph.D. program, their research interests and agenda during doctoral training (including names of SPAN faculty they are interested in working with), and their future academic and professional goals once the degree is acquired. It is recommended that potential doctoral students contact SPAN professors prior to submitting the statement of purpose; however, a faculty member's tentative agreement to work with this student does not mean that the student will be accepted to the Ph.D. program.

All students entering the Ph.D. program are required by the university to pass a candidacy examination within the first three semesters of their Ph.D. studies. If a student is accepted from our M.A. in linguistics into the Ph.D. program, then successful completion of the M.A. exam itself satisfies the university's Ph.D. candidacy examination requirement.

Credit Requirements

The Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese requires that a minimum of 30 credits of coursework at Penn State be completed in courses offered by the department in order to earn the Ph.D. in linguistics. Of these, a minimum of 27 graduate credits must be taken at the 500-level. Under special circumstances, the Director of Graduate Studies may authorize a student to take a 400-level course and have it count towards the 500-level requirement, if, for instance, a course in a particular area is not regularly offered.

Course Requirements: Ph.D. in Spanish Linguistics

All graduate students in Spanish who serve as Teaching Assistants are required to take Spanish 502, a course on teaching methodology, during their first semester.

In addition, Ph.D. students in the linguistics division follow a curriculum offering rigor and depth in linguistic studies, the goal of which is to prepare them for scholarly work of a professional caliber. The linguistics seminars that students take during their Ph.D. program are designed to provide exposure to the diverse areas of study within our department, and to give students the opportunity to study with as many members of the linguistic faculty as possible.

The particular courses that comprise the curriculum of an incoming class will vary by year, depending on the selection of graduate seminars offered in past academic cycles, as well as other factors including faculty-leave schedules. Ph.D. students should select their courses only after consulting with either the Director of Graduate Studies and/or their designated advisor. Generally speaking, students will be enrolled in three graduate linguistic seminars per semester.

Course Requirements: Ph.D. in Spanish with a Dual Title in Language Science

A dual-title degree program in Spanish and Language Science will prepare students to combine the theoretical and methodological approaches of several disciplines in order to contribute to research in the rapidly growing area of Language Science. This inherently interdisciplinary field draws on linguistics, psychology, speech-language pathology, and cognitive neuroscience, as well as other disciplines, to address both basic and applied research questions in such areas as first and second language acquisition, developmental and acquired language disorders, literacy, and language pedagogy.

Dual-title degree students will receive interdisciplinary training that will enable them to communicate and collaborate productively with a wide range of colleagues across traditional discipline boundaries. Such training will open up new employment opportunities for students and give them the tools to foster a thriving interdisciplinary culture in their own future students. The dual-title program will facilitate the formation of a cross-disciplinary network of peers for participating students as part of their professional development. To obtain the Dual Title Certificate, student must complete the following course requirements and training requirements, in addition to the requirements for obtaining the Ph.D. in Spanish. Some courses will count for both the Ph.D. in Spanish and the Dual Title Certificate.

- Language Science Proseminar courses (LING 521 and LING 522; 6 credits)
- Research Methods/Statistics (LING 525 or equivalent; 3 credits)
- Generative Syntax or Functional Syntax (SPAN 508 or SPAN 509; 3 credits)
- Cognitive Neuroscience or Psycholinguistics (LING/PSY 520, PSY 511 or equivalent; 3 credits)
- Research Internships with two different Language Science faculty members (CSD 596, GER 596, LING 596, PSY 596, SPAN 596; 6 credits)

Additional Language Requirement for the Ph.D.

For the Ph.D. degree, students must demonstrate reading proficiency in a language other than English or Spanish. This requirement must be satisfied prior to the student taking the oral portion of the Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam. This requirement may be satisfied in one of several ways:

1. By passing an appropriate graduate-level reading course, while in residence at Penn State, in a language other than English or Spanish.
2. By passing a reading proficiency examination offered by a language department at Penn State in a language other than English or Spanish.

3. Demonstrating native or near-native fluency, or long-term formal education in, a language other than Spanish or English.

If an individual case does not fall neatly within any of these categories, please consult with the Director of Graduate Studies.

Note: Depending on the student's area of specialization, his or her advisor may require additional proficiency in more than one language above and beyond Spanish and English. The student's advisor, in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies, will determine how any relevant courses taken in this regard will count towards the total credits required for completion of the Ph.D.

Residency Requirements

The university requires that at least 20 credits be earned in residence at Penn State's University Park campus.

Credit Transfer from another institution

A maximum of 10 credits may be transferred towards the credit requirement for the Ph.D. Generally speaking, we believe that success in our program requires the completion of the training that students receive at Penn State, both in terms of course content and contact with the professors who will serve as advisors and committee members for exams. With this in mind, we do not readily approve transfer credits. However, some courses taken at another institution of high caliber may, with the permission of the Director of Graduate Studies, be granted transfer credit towards the Ph.D. degree on a case-by-case basis.

Credit Transfer from the M.A. at Penn State

Ph.D. students continuing from the M.A. program in Spanish at Penn State often earn more than the 30-credit minimum required for the M.A. Up to 9 discipline-relevant credits above the minimum 30 credits earned in the M.A. program may be counted towards the satisfaction of the additional 30 credits required for the Ph.D. Technically, these are not "transfer" credits, but if a student earns 39 credits at the M.A. level, for example, 9 of these may be used towards satisfying the credit requirements of the Ph.D.

If a student has doubts regarding whether a particular course is "discipline-relevant", she or he should consult with her or his advisor and with the Director of Graduate Studies. Within the linguistics division, discipline-relevant coursework is primarily found in linguistics courses taken in one of the other language departments, in coursework in the Linguistics program, in language-related courses in Psychology, and in coursework in the Department of Applied Linguistics.

Ph.D. Peer-Review Essay Requirement

All Ph.D. students in linguistics are required to submit at least one single-authored or first-authored essay of outstanding quality to a peer-reviewed journal in their field by at least one

month *prior to taking the Ph.D. Comprehensive Exams*. The paper and journal should be chosen in close consultation with faculty mentors, ideally at a point well before the weeks and months leading up to the comprehensive exam. This requirement seeks to encourage scholarly engagement and eventual competitiveness on the job market, as well as to foster students' greater understanding of the rigor and benefits of the peer-review system. Failure to comply with this requirement will be taken into consideration at the level of yearly funding, teaching assignments, and conference-travel support. In order to document compliance with this requirement, students should present the Director of Graduate Studies with a copy of any correspondence with the journal, which confirms the essay's submission.

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam

Ph.D. candidates must satisfy all course requirements and pass regular departmental evaluations in order to schedule the Ph.D. comprehensive examination. Any deferred or incomplete grades must be resolved before scheduling the exam.

Note: If a period of more than eight years has elapsed since passing the Ph.D. candidacy exam (or more than six years since passing the Ph.D. comprehensive examination), students wishing to defend the dissertation must first take a new Ph.D. comprehensive exam.

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam: Exam Dates

In order to have ample time for dissertation research and writing, as well as career planning, it is strongly recommended that the Ph.D. committee be formed during the first semester of the first year in the Ph.D. program. The Comprehensive Exam should be taken by the 3rd semester in the program (during the fall semester of the second year of the Ph.D. program). It is the student's responsibility to contact potential committee members (in consultation with their advisor).

Note: It is the student's responsibility to inform the Graduate Program Staff Assistant of his or her intention to schedule the Ph.D. Comprehensive Exams. This should be done early in the semester prior to taking the exam.

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam: The Doctoral Committee

Immediately after passing the Candidacy Exam (or M.A. Exam), the student should make arrangements for the formation of a Ph.D. Doctoral Committee. This committee is charged with advising the student vis-à-vis the creation of a Ph.D. reading list and administering the Ph.D. comprehensive exam. Students pursuing a Ph.D. in the linguistics division of the department will meet with their faculty advisor to discuss the creation of the doctoral committee and the reading list.

The doctoral committee usually has five members, but shall have no fewer than four. Students may suggest members for their committee in consultation with their advisor. Generally speaking, the chair of this committee will be the eventual dissertation advisor. Members of the committee should reflect the student's research interests, while still maintaining a balanced representation of the entire linguistics faculty. Members of the doctoral committee must be

formally approved by the Director of Graduate Studies during the semester prior to taking the Ph.D. comprehensive exam.

It is the student's responsibility to contact potential committee members after consultation with the doctoral committee chair. Specific university policies regarding committee formation, including rules and definitions involving the required Outside Field Member and Outside Unit Member, can be found at the following website:

<http://bulletins.psu.edu/graduate/degreerequirements/degreeReq1>

For those students seeking a Dual Title in Language Science Certificate, the doctoral committee must include a minimum of four faculty members, i.e., the chair and at least three additional members all of whom must be members of the Graduate Faculty. The committee must include at least one member of the Language Science graduate faculty. The chair of the committee is typically a member of both Spanish and Language Science, however, if the chair of the committee representing Spanish is not also a member of the graduate faculty in Language Science, then the member of the committee representing Language Science should be appointed as Co-Chair.

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam: Exam Composition

The Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam consists of three parts: 1) two research papers submitted by the second week of the student's 3rd semester in the doctoral program (2) two examination papers written in the semester the exam is to be administered, and 3) an oral exam administered and graded by the linguistics faculty. Each of these elements is explained below.

Please Note: When a period of more than eight years has elapsed since the passing of the candidacy examination, or more than six years since the passing of the comprehensive examination, the candidate is required to pass a second comprehensive examination before the final oral defense will be scheduled.

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam: Paper requirements

Ph.D. students must turn in two original research papers of publishable quality. In most cases these will be revised course papers. Papers should be submitted to the Graduate Program Staff Assistant in the main office.

In addition, the student will submit two examination papers in which she or he addresses a set of questions or problems posed by the doctoral committee. The questions will be given to the student no later than two weeks after the student has submitted the research papers. The specific nature and requirements of the two examination papers will be left to the discretion of the committee members responsible for preparing this portion of the examination. The student will be given two months time in which to complete and submit the two examination papers.

The examination papers are expected to be submitted as originally-researched, full-length, properly-formatted research articles, but they are not expected to be of publishable quality. All

exams in Spanish linguistics may be written in English or Spanish as per the decision of the committee members responsible.

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam: Oral examination

The oral comprehensive examination should be scheduled for no later than two weeks after submission of the examination papers, and will generally last for two hours. Following successful performance in the oral examination, the student is required to submit and defend the dissertation proposal (explained below).

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam: Grading

At the end of the oral examination, the doctoral committee will come to a determination regarding whether the student has passed or failed the overall Ph.D. comprehensive exam. In general, the committee will inform the student shortly after the oral exam of its decision. Determination of the passing or failing grade will be based on the committee's assessment of the *combined quality of the written exams, and the student's performance on the oral portion of the exam*. In certain cases, the committee may not be able to reach an immediate decision. Under this scenario, the committee may delay its decision for a period of up to one week, after which point the committee will inform the student of its final decision.

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam: Failing grades

If a student fails the Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination, she or he may retake the examination once within the following six calendar months. However, if the student has been receiving financial support, she or he is not guaranteed continued support. Students will make arrangements on an individual basis with the Director of Graduate Studies should a retake be necessary. The primary responsibility to arrange for the scheduling of the exam resides with the individual student, who will work with the Chair of the Doctoral Committee. A second failure on the examination will result in termination of graduate student status in the department.

Ph.D. Dissertation: Dissertation proposal

Upon successful completion of the Ph.D. comprehensive exam, the student will schedule an oral defense of his or her dissertation proposal. The defense should take place before the end of the same semester or the following semester in which the student passes the comprehensive exam.

In consultation with the dissertation director, the student will prepare a dissertation proposal or prospectus of approximately 15-20 pages, in addition to a working bibliography of 5-7 pages. This document is then to be circulated among the members of the doctoral committee at least two weeks prior to the proposal defense.

During the proposal defense, the student will initiate discussion by presenting his or her project in detail to the committee, whose members will then offer questions and advice concerning central research questions, methodology, dissertation design, and the viability of the overall project. At the end of the session, the committee will either 1) approve the proposal (while still reserving the right to call for revisions to be addressed during the writing of the actual dissertation), or 2) formally call for a revised proposal and/or second proposal defense to be completed before granting permission to proceed.

Ph.D. Dissertation: Research and Writing

After the comprehensive examinations and during the writing of the dissertation, the chair of the doctoral committee normally serves as the dissertation director. This appointment is formally made by the Head of the Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese. Two or three additional faculty members from the Dept. of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese will also serve on the committee, though one of these, known as the “Outside Field Member,” must represent an area of expertise outside the Ph.D. candidate’s major field of study.

The dissertation director is normally the chair of the doctoral committee, but not always. He or she is, however, always a member of the doctoral committee. Both the director and the chair of the committee must normally be members of the Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese. Each Ph.D. doctoral committee must additionally include a faculty member from another department at Penn State. Note, however, that this “Outside Unit Member” must have a primary appointment outside of the administrative home of dissertation director.

It is possible, in exceptional cases, for faculty from outside Penn State to direct a dissertation, but the committee chair must still be from within the department. This must be requested and justified via a letter and curriculum vitae of the scholar, which are to be submitted to the Head of the Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese, as well as to the Graduate School. In the case of a former Penn State faculty member who agrees to continue as the director of a dissertation begun while they were still employed by the university, a similar arrangement is possible, as is a co-chairing arrangement. Again, this must be justified in writing by means of a letter to the Head and to the Graduate School. In both cases, the department and Graduate School must approve the request before the arrangement is put into effect, particularly because there are funding considerations involved (e.g., travel of the dissertation director to the defense).

For further information regarding the composition of the dissertation committee, please consult the University Bulletin at the following website:

<http://bulletins.psu.edu/graduate/degreerequirements/degreeReq1>

The dissertation must be written in English or Spanish. For norms concerning its physical presentation, please consult the latest copy of the Graduate School Thesis Information Bulletin, which contains complete information on the dissertation format, preparation, content constraints, etc. Thesis formatting templates are also available for standard word-processing software. Students should consult the Thesis Office of the Graduate School for further information concerning any issues in this regard.

When, after taking into account committee suggestions, the dissertation director and committee members are satisfied with the dissertation draft, the complete, revised thesis will be sent to each committee member. Committee members will then make any and all suggestions for revision within two weeks of receiving the completed draft. The director (or the doctoral committee chairman, if they are not the same) will then move toward setting a date for the final defense.

Both the dissertation director and the student are responsible for assuring the completion of the final draft, and for ensuring adequate consultation with all members of the thesis committee well in advance of the oral examination. The Graduate School formally requires three weeks' advance notice to schedule a doctoral defense, which is customarily advertised and open to the public. The defense is typically related in large measure to the specific contents of dissertation, but may also cover the candidate's whole program of study without regard to specific courses taken at Penn State or elsewhere.

A favorable vote from at least two-thirds of the committee is required to pass the dissertation defense. Should a candidate fail, it is the responsibility of the doctoral committee to determine what steps must be taken by the student before a second defense is to be scheduled. After being properly submitted to the Graduate School, the dissertation will also be made available to the public at Pattee Library.

Graduate Program Flow Chart

