

Language, Literacy, and Culture Program Comprehensive Field Examination

Information for Students

Taking the Comprehensive Field Examination is a required, standardized process that all LLC students must complete. Students are permitted to begin their Comprehensive Field Examination after completing all LLC Program course requirements. As part of program advisement, a student's LLC Program Advisor determines eligibility to initiate the process. The student's most current Progression Report should be utilized to document this.

Purpose of the Comprehensive Field Examination

The Comps compel you to integrate information you have learned throughout your time in the LLC Program into two substantive papers that extend your scope of inquiry in ways that directly connect to your envisioned dissertation project. In other words, the culmination of the Comps process should yield two solid scholarly papers that are designed to directly inform your prospective dissertation.

Policies and Procedures

1. Your Intention to begin the Comprehensive Exam Process

Comps Intention Form

As soon as you know the semester you intend to take the Comps, you should email the Comps Intention Form to your Program Advisor (and cc the Program Coordinator). This form requires that you attach your updated Student Progression Report (from your student Box folder) *showing you have completed all of your coursework*.

2. Choosing Comprehensive Exam Readers

In consultation with your Program Advisor, identify two "Readers" (reviewers/evaluators) for your Comprehensive Exam. The Readers will work with each other and you to plan the focus of the two exam questions, review and provide feedback on the associated bibliographies used for completion of the exam, craft the two specific exam questions, and then grade the exam. It is the student's responsibility to contact these potential Readers to see whether they are interested (after first consulting with your Program Advisor). This should be done well in advance of the start of the Comprehensive Exam start date, but *no less than six weeks prior to the start of the Exam*.

Sought after Reader Characteristics:

- The Readers have the appropriate academic background and expertise to develop the two Comps questions and evaluate your answers
- You already know the professors through a lecture or independent study class
- Ideally the first Reader becomes your dissertation chair while the other Reader becomes your co-chair or a committee member

- All Readers should be UMBC faculty members. If at all possible, an LLC core faculty member should be one of the readers; otherwise, an LLC affiliate faculty member.

3. Preparatory Work with your Readers

a. Areas of Inquiry

Working with your two Readers, you will identify the broad areas of inquiry for your two Comps questions. Some Readers may ask you to provide input into the design of the questions; others may take input at their discretion.

Nature of the Questions:

- One area of inquiry is intended to relate to the theoretical frameworks in the disciplines and fields in which you are working and may synthesize different strands of literature. The essay should be a comprehensive survey of the scholarship in the fields agreed upon.
- The other area of inquiry may also be theoretical or may relate to a review of methodological issues that other scholars have addressed and approaches they have used in the fields and disciplines of your envisioned dissertation project. The essay should focus on the methodological approach the student expects to utilize for the dissertation research.
- Above all, the two areas of inquiry will be selected based on their direct relevance to your envisioned dissertation topic.

b. Reading Lists

In consultation with your Comps Readers, you will often finalize two reading lists of key sources that are relevant to each of the two areas of inquiry agreed upon by you and your Readers. A typical bibliography or reading list is usually comprised of approximately thirty to fifty sources (depending on the ratio of books to articles and the preferences of the Readers). You may be asked to generate annotated bibliographies or bibliographic entries broken out by conceptual themes or keywords.

Once the readers agree that your two reading lists are sufficient in breadth and depth, these reading lists will serve as the foundation of your exam responses. You are not required to utilize every source.

4. Comps Application Form

Once you have finalized your Readers and have established that they are prepared to finalize your questions by the start date guidelines below, you are ready to initiate the Comps Application Form. This form gets routed to your Program Advisor and your two Readers for signature. This form must be turned in to the Program Coordinator ***at least one week before your start date.***

⇒ Your start date must be within the first 10 days of the Fall or Spring semester, or on Spring Graduate Commencement Day if you plan to take your Exam during the summer session.

⇒ Your due date is 90 days from your start date.

5. Completing your Exam

**[PLEASE INITIAL HERE _____
INDICATING THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE EXPECTATIONS/CONTENT/SUBMISSION]**

On the start date of your Exam, you will be emailed your two questions by the Program Coordinator.

a. Expectations

At this point, you should have no further discussions with your Readers or Program Advisor or ask for feedback on your Comps unless there is a serious problem. You are expected to work alone on these Comps and to follow the UMBC honor code as you prepare and write them. No editorial assistance is permitted. You alone must write and edit your Comps responses. You are allowed to have social interactions with other students as long as you do not discuss any aspect of the Comps with others.

b. Content of your Responses

You will write 30 to 40 pages for each question (written in Word with 12-point font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins). Note that the page limit does not include your bibliography, but the bibliography must be included and footnotes should be used where appropriate. Extensive quotes from your sources are discouraged. *Comps rules are firm, especially with regard to deadlines and page counts.*

c. Submitting your Exam Responses

Email your two separate Word files to your Comps Readers and cc the Program Coordinator no later than 11:59 pm on your due date. In order to pass your Exam, you must meet this deadline.

6. Grading your Exam

After you submit your completed Exam to your Readers, they will review and provide feedback on your responses within three to four weeks. Both Readers will give feedback on both questions. The feedback will be in writing (in various forms and degrees of detail) and may include a face-to-face meeting, at their discretion. Your grade is final and not negotiable. In addition to their feedback, the Readers will grade your Comps Exam as: Pass, Revise & Resubmit, or Fail.

a. Pass

A passing grade is a sign that you have mastered two key aspects of your eventual dissertation. You will receive course permission for LLC 890, Research Proposal Seminar, and begin preparing your research proposal.

b. Revise and Resubmit

If you receive a grade of Revise and Resubmit, you will have up to 60 days from the date of your grade notification to complete the revisions required by your Readers. You will turn in your revisions in the same manner as your original essays and your Readers will have up to four weeks to provide you with feedback and a new grade. If your revisions are completed within the new deadline and are deemed satisfactory by your readers, the grade of Revise and Resubmit will convert to a Pass. If your revisions are not completed within the new deadline or if they are not deemed satisfactory by your readers, the Revise and Resubmit will convert to a Fail.

Some students with a Revise and Resubmit provisional grade may be allowed to register for LLC 890, Research Proposal Seminar, while revising their Comps responses. This is discretionary and not automatic. Due to the serious consequence of a Failing grade, the determination to allow you to take LLC 890 concurrently with Comps revisions will be made in the context of your prospect for submitting a Passing Exam on time.

c. Fail

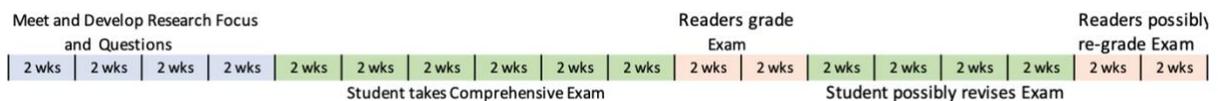
Students who receive a Failing grade must wait three months (during which time they should consult with their LLC Program Advisor) before they can begin a new comprehensive exam process. Students will be required to answer two new questions and possibly find new Readers. No student may take the Exam more than twice. Any student who fails twice will be withdrawn from the LLC Program.

Students with a Failing grade may take LLC 898, Pre-Candidacy Research, as they chart a path to retaking the Exam.

In the event that your two Readers cannot come to consensus on whether you passed or failed, the LLC Director will be contacted and a third reader of the Director's choosing will be assigned to evaluate your responses and break the stalemate.

[PLEASE INITIAL HERE _____ Indicating that you understand the Comps Timeline]

Comprehensive Exam Timeline



7. Enrollment Requirements during the Comps Process **[PLEASE INITIAL HERE _____]**

a. Semester before beginning Comps

At the completion of required coursework, some students find it beneficial to take a semester to prepare for their Comprehensive Field Exam. Before the Exam process can begin, students need to have refined their dissertation research focus, be well-read on their research area, and have prepared an annotated bibliography.

During this semester, students will register for one or two sections of LLC 898, at the direction of their Program Advisor.

b. Semester during Comps Exam

If you are taking your Comps Exam during the Spring or Fall semesters, you will enroll in up to three sections of LLC 898 (billed at one credit each), at the direction of your LLC Program Advisor, who will supervise the entire Comps process.

If you are taking your Comps Exam during the summer session, you will enroll in up to three sections of LLC 898 during the Fall semester.

c. Semester after Comps Exam

Students who receive a final grade of “Pass” or a provisional “Revise and Resubmit” grade can register for LLC 890, Research Proposal Seminar, in the semester after their Exam. Those with a provisional grade will need to simultaneously work on revising their Comps while completing the expectations of the seminar class. In some cases, it is advisable for a student to delay LLC 890 and devote their full attention to revising their Comps. In that case, they would register for LLC 898.

8. Making the Most of your Comprehensive Exam experience

This portion of your doctoral journey can feel stressful and isolating. Those students who have made a point to begin preparing for it well in advance can lessen these feelings. It requires a great deal of preparation to produce two thesis-worthy essays that can propel you to the most important stage of your journey, your dissertation.

a. Preparation is key

If after reading this document, you do not feel you’ve prepared well enough, please consider taking a semester to better situate yourself. While it may seem as though you are adding a semester to your journey, it may actually save you time by increasing the likelihood of a clean passing grade and of producing a research proposal by the end of LLC 890.

b. Combatting Isolation

You are allowed to set up a support group of friends and fellow students who you can turn to for general encouragement and fellowship during this period. You are allowed to attend LLC or campus events. You are not encouraged to self-isolate.

c. Ninety days

You have 90 days to complete the Exam. It was designed to accommodate students with a full schedule outside of the Program, whether with work, caregiving, or a combination of things. It was also designed with the expectation that you have read everything in your bibliography ahead of time. Still, it will require you to work diligently and make regular progress on your essays, while allowing for days off for incubation or to deal with urgent matters. **To keep you on track (and to feel you are making adequate progress), we encourage examinees to set up a schedule in advance (your Program Advisor is a good resource for this) so you can gauge your progress.**

Good luck!