

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. Choosing Comprehensive Exam Readers

In consultation with your Program Advisor, identify two "Readers" (reviewers/evaluators) for your Comprehensive Field Examination. 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 started the semester **before** you intend to take your Comps 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.

2. 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.

3. Determine Your Start Date

Your start date must be within 10 days (either before or after) the start 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.

4. Comprehensive Field Examination Application

Once you have established your readers and start date, you are ready to initiate the *Comprehensive Field Examination* application link on the LLC webpage. This is a DocuSign form that is routed to your Readers, Program Advisor, LLC Director, and 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**. This form must be submitted by the following deadlines:

Semester you are taking comps exam

Fall
Spring
Summer

Application due by:

May 1
December 15
April 1

5. Completing your Exam

On the start date of your Exam, the Program Coordinator will email your two questions.

a. Expectations

You are encouraged to check in with either your LLC core faculty Reader or your LLC Program Advisor at least a couple of times during the 90-day writing window. The purpose of these check-ins is to ensure that you are making incremental progress and to receive encouragement.

Besides this interaction with your LLC reader during the Comps exam, you are expected to write and edit your own essays and to follow the UMBC honor code. However, you can discuss your research with others and maintain a presence within the LLC community. You are encouraged to utilize a writing group and, in order to facilitate this, we will provide you with the names of other LLC students who are taking the Comps at the same time as you.

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 the **Program Coordinator** no later than 11:59 pm on your due date. In order to pass your Exam, you must meet this deadline.

There is no penalty for completing the Comps exam early. The 90-day deadline for the Comps exam was established to ensure that all students would have adequate time to devote to their essays.

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.

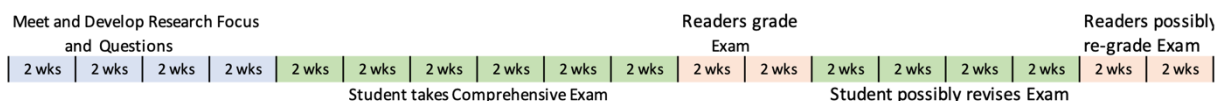
c. Fail

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.

Comprehensive Field Exam Timeline



7. Enrollment Requirements during the Comps Process

a. Semester before beginning Comps

At the completion of the 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

You may feel stressed and isolated during this portion of your doctoral journey. 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. We encourage you to not 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.

9. Special circumstances

a. Use of a language other than English

Comps should be submitted in English (excluding data, evidence, interview transcripts, and quotations which can be presented in another language and ideally translated if possible). On occasion, other languages may be used when there are sound academic reasons.

If the primary literature on a subject matter is in another language, and the Comps addresses a community of scholars who publish in a language other than English, a student may elect to write the comps in that language at the discretion and approval of the student's Comps readers in consultation with the other faculty of the LLC Program, and provided that the Comps readers read the language and support its use in the Comps.

Students wishing to complete their comprehensive exams in another language must petition the core LLC faculty in writing by emailing their Program Advisor.

b. Additional time due to extenuating circumstances

For health issues, emergencies, disabilities, or other extenuating circumstances, students may be granted additional time to complete comprehensive exams or to start and complete a revision for resubmission. Such additional time is granted within the scope of the student's needs as well as the availability of the faculty readers. The comprehensive exams must nonetheless meet the minimum standards in order to pass. Students must get approval for these changes from both of their readers AND the LLC program director.

Students wishing to be considered for an extension must petition their readers by email.