

RHETORIC PHD REQUIREMENTS AND TIMELINE (REVISION DATE: JUNE 12, 2025)

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The [Guide to Graduate Policy](#) outlines policies governing the sequence of steps involved in completing a graduate degree at Berkeley. This guide offers a normative pattern for a typical course of study within the Rhetoric PhD program. Adjustments will be possible depending on the circumstances and in consultation with the Head Graduate Advisor. Further details about the program (teaching, foreign language exams, mentoring, QE's, prospectus, and dissertation) can be found in our [Rhetoric PhD Guidelines and Best Practices for Students and Examiners](#) document.

COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS

***To be completed by the end of Year 2 (excluding RHETOR 221).**

Course Number	Units
RHETOR 200: Classical Rhetorical Theory and Practice (Fall, Year 1) *Must be taken during the first semester in the first year.	4
RHETOR 205: Contemporary Rhetorical Theory and Practice (Spring, Year 1) *Must be taken during the second semester in the first year.	4
RHETOR 221: Rhetoric Graduate Research Seminar (Fall, Year 3) *Completion of a first draft Research Statement. The Research Statement (circa 3,500-4,000 words) is required for the PhD Preliminary Examinations that occur in Spring of Year 3. This seminar offers students the opportunity to draft a provisional document indicating current and future research dissertation interests as well as the opportunity to write grant applications.	2
Four elective graduate seminars (three in Rhetoric and one outside of Rhetoric) *Students are required to enroll in three Rhetoric seminars by the end of Year 2. Students must also enroll in a minimum of one seminar outside the Rhetoric Department. Substitutions for Rhetoric electives are not permitted. It is strongly recommended that students enroll in more extra-departmental seminars with the idea of exploring research fields and identifying faculty for the Preliminary and Qualifying Exams as well as eventual members of their Dissertation Committee.	16
RHETOR 375: Teaching Rhetoric *Pedagogy course is required only for current GSI's, but it is open to all interested students. All students must take Rhetoric 375 or the equivalent during their first semester of their first teaching appointment, whenever that occurs. (For some this may be in Year 2, for others it may be earlier.)	2

GUIDELINES FOR INDEPENDENT STUDY (295, 299, 602)

Students can register for independent study to fulfill the 12-unit minimum requirement for maintaining full-time status each semester. These courses (295, 299, 602) do NOT involve formal class attendance. These units are open to all Rhetoric students, regardless of any teaching commitments. Before registering, it's recommended that you consult with the Rhetoric faculty member(s) overseeing the units and obtain their approval. If you are teaching and require additional units to meet the 12-unit minimum, please consider registering in 299 (if advanced), 295, or 602.

If you have **ADVANCED** to candidacy:

- Register for 12 units of 299 (Dissertation Research) with your dissertation committee chair or another dissertation committee member.

If you have **NOT** advanced to candidacy:

- Register for up to **6 units of 602 (Study for the Qualifying Exam)** with each of your **set** internal field examiners (this is recommended for students in **Year 3+** with **set** QE committees and fields).
- Register for up to **4 units of 295 (Independent Study)** with your **potential** internal field examiners.
- If you are working as a GSI for an **undergraduate Rhetoric course (10, 20, 103A, or 103B)**, register for up to **4 units of 295 (Independent Study)** with the **instructor on record**.
- If you are working as a GSI for a **R&C course (R1A or R1B)** and your fields are **set**, register for up to **4 units of 602 (Study for the Qualifying Exam)**.
- If you are working as a GSI for a **R&C course (R1A or R1B)** and your fields are **NOT** set, register for up to **4 units of 295 (Independent Study)**.
- **When completing the Supervised Research or Independent Study form, specify your activities for the units.** Instead of vague phrases like "for teaching," specify how you're progressing toward your degree. Examples include conducting an in-depth study of specific materials, creating annotated bibliographies, engaging in preparatory reading or exploratory writing, examining rhetorical practices, or drafting a teaching philosophy.
- You may also register for independent study units with the **external faculty member** with whom you are working on a field. You must contact that specific department GSAO for the appropriate course number. The Rhetoric GSAO does NOT have access to external course numbers.

YEAR 1

Fall

Rhetoric 200 (Classical Rhetorical Theory and Practice) and at least **one other seminar** either in Rhetoric or outside of Rhetoric.

Spring

Rhetoric 205 (Contemporary Rhetorical Theory) and at least **one other seminar** either in Rhetoric or outside of Rhetoric.

One of your elective seminars in Year 1 should be an elective in Rhetoric (i.e., not Rhetoric 200 or 205).

By the end of Year 1, students are required to have completed at least four seminars in total. This includes Rhetoric 200 and 205, as well as an elective seminar in Rhetoric. It is strongly recommended that students enroll in seminars outside of Rhetoric beyond this minimum requirement to begin exploring and identifying faculty and fields in their own areas of study with a view to the Preliminary and Qualifying Exams and the dissertation.

Summer

Learn/study foreign language. All students are expected to fulfill the language requirement by the completion of the fall semester of the third year.

Begin contemplating potential members for your qualifying exam and dissertation committees. You'll have the opportunity to discuss these possibilities during your Second Year Review in the fall.

YEAR 2

Fall

2 seminars (minimum). Students are required to enroll in three Rhetoric seminars by the end of Year 2. Students must also enroll in a **minimum** of one seminar outside the Rhetoric Department. It is strongly recommended that students enroll in more extra-departmental seminars with the idea of exploring research fields and identifying faculty for the Preliminary and Qualifying Exams as well as eventual members of their Dissertation Committee.

Rhetoric 375 (Pedagogy, 2 units) is required only for current GSI's, but it is open to all interested students. All students must take Rhetoric 375 or the equivalent during their first semester of their first teaching appointment, whenever that occurs. (For some this may be in Year 2, for others it may be later.)

Second Year Review (within first 2–3 weeks of the semester; 30-45 minutes). Committee to be composed of the Head Graduate Advisor (HGA) and two Rhetoric faculty of the student's choice with whom the student has taken seminars in Year 1. *The review is not an exam.* The purpose of the review is to retrospectively assess the progress made in Year 1 and to consider future studies, fields, and research topics of potential interest for the Year 3 Research Statement and for the dissertation. This review offers students the occasion to discuss, if so desired, their continued enrollment in the PhD program.

Spring

2 seminars (minimum). See detailed explanation above.

Rhetoric 375 (Pedagogy, 2 units, if teaching or not taken in fall).

By the end of Year 2, students are required to have completed a minimum of three elective seminars in Rhetoric (usually Rhetoric 240G), Rhetoric 200 and Rhetoric 205. Additionally, students who have served as Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs) must have finished Rhetoric 375 or its equivalent by the first semester in which they taught. It's highly recommended that students also take additional seminars outside of the Rhetoric department. (Refer to the requirements outlined for Year 1 above for further details.)

An MA degree is optional for continuing PhD's and mandatory for non-continuing PhDs. A terminal MA, if chosen, is contingent on fulfilling all requirements for the first two years of the program. Course requirements for the MA are completion of: Rhetoric 200, 205, three 4-unit Rhetoric electives and one 4-unit external elective. In addition, students must fulfill the capstone requirement by completing the MA thesis. The capstone (MA Thesis) can be fulfilled either with an expanded version of an existing seminar paper (ca. 40 pages) or with a separate research paper, to be approved by a committee of two Rhetoric faculty. Final capstones are submitted electronically (with title page and sign off form) to the GSAO by 5pm on the last day of the semester in which the MA is awarded. Please consult with departmental advisors for additional due dates and for possible [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#) review requirements. Required forms and examples can be found via Box: [Rhetoric MA](#).

By the end of the Spring Semester: **Identify Qualifying Examination Committee** (including the Committee Chair), submit eForm and begin to prepare reading lists. **NB:** [The Graduate Division](#) calls the written component the **Preliminary Examination** (= "prelims") and the oral component the **Qualifying Examination** (= "QE.") There is only one examining committee, which assesses both the written and the oral components.

The **Qualifying Examination Committee**, chosen by the student, must consist of four to five members. This includes two faculty with voting rights in the Rhetoric Department (one serving as Chair), a representative from the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate, and one additional member (from Rhetoric or elsewhere). An optional fifth member can be added at the student's request, ensuring Rhetoric members make up at least 50% of the committee. Three members will supervise and examine one statement each. Co-Chairs are not permitted.

If essential research expertise is lacking from the Berkeley Division, the student may petition to include an external member. For more details, consult the [Rhetoric PhD Guidelines and Best Practices for Students and Examiners](#).

The QE Chair has three administrative roles: coordinating exam fields and timing, providing intellectual guidance to the student, and ensuring a smooth transition from qualifying exams to the dissertation process. Ideally, the QE Chair should be closely aligned with the student's dissertation committee, but they are not required to be part of it.

The QE Chair may not serve as Dissertation Committee Chair but can be a Co-Chair if the other is from the same program.

For committee composition requirements, refer to the [Guide to Graduate Policy: F4.5 Faculty Committees for Higher Degrees](#) and our [Rhetoric PhD Guidelines and Best Practices for Students and Examiners](#) document. The committee composition and field names must be submitted via an eForm in [CalCentral](#): My Dashboard > Submit a Form > Higher Degrees Form > Application for the Qualifying Exam. Committee members will help the student establish a reading list for the three examination areas, which must be submitted to the GSAO three weeks before the Qualifying Examination.

Summer

Begin reading for Prelims, continue to think about a Research Statement as preparatory for the Prelims, the QE, and the dissertation.

YEAR 3

Fall

Rhetoric 221 (Research Seminar, 2 units), the outcome of which will be a **statement of research interests**. The statement is intended to be a provisional first stab at the Research Statement (around 3,500–4,000 words) to be submitted as part of the PhD Preliminary Examinations in Spring of Year 3 (see below). It does not commit students in any way; its purpose is merely to look ahead and to help focus current and future research *en route* to an eventual dissertation.

Seminars (Rhetoric or external) as needed. Otherwise, enroll in Independent Study courses (Rhetoric 295, 299, or 602) as an alternative.

Register for Independent Study (295, 299, 602; see guidelines above)

Apply for **internal and external funding** where applicable. Feel free to delve into the extensive array of resources offered in our [Student Financial Support and Employment](#) section on our website.

Prelim Review: Continue preparation for field and research statements.

Complete Foreign Language Requirement. The language exam must be completed before QE orals are taken, in keeping with Graduate Division policy.

To fulfill the PhD foreign language requirement students must demonstrate advanced reading knowledge in one language either by coursework (2 semesters at the upper-division level or the equivalent at UC or elsewhere, taken within four years of admission to the PhD program at Berkeley*) or through a two-hour long written examination. The examination will consist of a translation into English of a passage of around 500 words and a paraphrase of the argument of a second passage from another text likewise of around 500 words. A dictionary may be consulted. Examinations will be conducted by the Rhetoric Department whenever possible, and otherwise by another department, a graduate group, or an outside agency upon approval by the HGA. The language requirement must be completed before advancing to the oral QE.

*A petition to Grad Div for coursework taken more than four years prior to admission to the PhD program is possible, at the discretion of the HGA.

NB: This is the minimum standard for completing the language requirement for all students. Students are encouraged to qualify in languages that are closest to their research foci. Those students who need more extensive language skills to pursue their research projects should seek advice early on in their graduate careers from their mentors and advisors on how best to achieve this goal.

Spring

Seminars (Rhetoric or external) as needed. Otherwise, enroll in Independent Study units (see detailed description above).

Apply for **internal and external funding** where applicable. Feel free to delve into the extensive array of resources offered in our [Student Financial Support and Employment](#) section on our website.

Preparation preliminary to the Qualifying Examination.

Preliminary Examination will be based on work carried out in **3 areas of study**, culminating in **2 Field Statements** (demonstrating comprehensive coverage of two areas of study appropriate to future teaching and research, each embodying a discursive argument about the field) and **1 Research Statement** (oriented towards a more focused research project, and identifying an area that can eventually lead to a dissertation prospectus). The three statements (around **7,000 to 8,000** words each, including notes but not a bibliography), once successfully completed, will form the basis of the QE at the end of spring semester. The **QE** is an oral examination given by all members of the Examination Committee; it tests the breadth and depth of knowledge in all three areas of study (duration: approximately 3 hours).

The **Preliminary Examination** consisting of the three statements must be completed and circulated no later than **three weeks** before the date of the Qualifying Examination (the oral). Completion means that each examiner signs off on a **final** version of the statement that they are individually supervising. (It is recommended that the statements be completed and approved for circulation on a staggered schedule as the three-week date approaches.) Once all three statements are individually approved and the committee Chair has been notified of this approval by the examiners, the final statements should be released to the committee for review (see [Qualifying Exam Steps](#) > "Step 4: Circulate QE Statements QE Committee"). The Qualifying Examination must be completed by the end of spring semester. QE Reading Lists and Statements will be archived on the departmental Box folder for consultation by students and faculty with prior written permission from their authors. For sample QE Reading Lists and Statements see this Box folder: [Rhetoric QE Questions and Readings](#).

Students who have **passed the Preliminary and Qualifying Examinations** are eligible for **Advancement to Candidacy** for the PhD. Upon successful passing of the Qualifying Examination, the Advancement to Candidacy (including Dissertation Committee) must be submitted immediately via eform in [CalCentral](#) to the Graduate Division: My Dashboard > Submit a Form > Higher Degrees Form > Advancement to Candidacy

Identify dissertation Chair (or Co-Chairs) and committee. The dissertation committee must consist of at least three members. Among these, one must represent the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate but not be a part of the Rhetoric faculty. Additionally, one member must serve as the chair and be a voting member of the Rhetoric Department. If there are two co-chairs instead of one chair, one must be from the Rhetoric faculty, while the other co-chair requires approval from the HGA. In exceptional cases where a crucial research expertise is absent from the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate representation, the student can petition the Department to include that individual on the committee. To understand committee composition requirements, please refer to: [Guide to Graduate Policy: F4.5 Faculty Committees for Higher Degrees](#) and our [Rhetoric PhD Guidelines and Best Practices for Students and Examiners](#).

Summer

Begin working on the dissertation prospectus statement. For sample prospectus statements, see this Box folder: [Rhetoric Prospectus Examples](#).

YEAR 4

Fall

Seminars (Rhetoric or external) as needed. Otherwise, enroll in Independent Study units (see detailed description above).

Apply for **internal and external funding** where applicable. Feel free to delve into the extensive array of resources offered in our [Student Financial Support and Employment](#) section on our website.

Submit prospectus statement by end of Fall; meet/discuss with full dissertation committee to approve prospectus. The standard timeframe entails submitting an approved prospectus one semester after the QE oral is successfully passed. Chairs notify the GSAO and HGA of the outcome of the prospectus meeting and send the approved prospectus to the GSAO. Prospectuses will be archived in a Box folder. Prospectuses will be provided by students and faculty with prior written permission from their authors.

Prospectus and Dissertation Workshop, The Prospectus and Dissertation Workshop is a writing support group open to all prospectus and dissertation writers. It runs for two hours every two weeks, meeting either in person or over Zoom, and is convened by a faculty member. Participation is highly recommended but optional, and no special course numbers are needed. Please consult with the convener of the workshop each year to get involved.

Spring

Seminars (Rhetoric or external) as needed. Otherwise, enroll in Independent Study units (see detailed description above).

Apply for **internal and external funding** where applicable. Feel free to delve into the extensive array of resources offered in our [Student Financial Support and Employment](#) section on our website.

Dissertation underway.

The [Doctoral Candidacy Review \(DCR\)](#) must be completed on an annual basis and submitted via eForm in [CalCentral](#) to the Graduate Division: My Dashboard > Submit a Form > Doctoral Candidacy Review initiated by the student and completed by the dissertation chair. To satisfy this requirement, the student must schedule a meeting with the chair and one other committee member on **an annual basis**. Although 2 members are the minimum required by the Graduate Division, a full committee in attendance (or as full as possible) is strongly recommended.

YEARS 5 AND 6

Fall/Spring

Enroll in Independent Study units – see detailed description in the previous section.

Dissertation underway.

Prospectus and Dissertation Workshop - see detailed description in the previous section.

The [Doctoral Candidacy Review \(DCR\)](#) - see detailed description in the previous section.

Apply for **internal and external funding** where applicable. Feel free to delve into the extensive array of resources offered in our [Student Financial Support and Employment](#) section on our website.

Apply for **jobs and postdoctoral positions**. Please explore the resources available on our website see [Careers](#).

The dissertation must be filed by the conclusion of the spring semester in Year 6. Students are required to adhere to the guidelines provided in the [Dissertation Writing and Filing Guide](#). For any questions, please contact our Graduate Student Affairs Officer (GSAO) at rfahgradadvising@berkeley.edu.