Hows and Whys: Guidelines for the M.A. in Japanese Literature

MA students in the Department of Asian Languages and Literature must adhere to (1) the University of Washington’s Graduate School regulations, (2) the Department of Asian Languages and Literature policies and procedures, and (3) all program specific regulations.

The information below is meant only as a reference. Final authority in all cases remains with the official regulations.

General Aims

The goal of graduate study is to train students to make original contributions to scholarship in their field. Therefore, the graduate student needs to build a solid awareness of the publications in the field of specialization, the major questions that are being (and could be) researched, as well as the methodology for answering such questions. In addition, the student should have a solid grasp of the broader academic context in which the field of specialization is situated (i.e. "the big picture").

The following explains the rationale behind the each of the general requirements for Ph.D. students in the department, and outlines the procedure students should follow to satisfy them. It also contains, in bold, the specific rules of the Japanese literature program over and above those of the department. Finally, notes in boxes are explanations, examples, and additional commentary.

Admissions

In addition to the general department admissions requirements, an undergraduate grade point average of 3.0 in the junior and senior years is a prerequisite for admission to the program in Japanese.

Admission to the M.A. program with specialization in Japanese language and literature requires that a student have strong undergraduate preparation in one of the following: Japanese language and literature, another foreign language and literature, Asian Regional Studies, Comparative Literature, Linguistics, English, Philosophy, or History. He or she will, in addition, be expected to have completed four years of modern Japanese and one year of classical Japanese. Students lacking such preparation may be admitted to the M.A. program provisionally, and will be required to make up the deficiencies during their first year of residence.

How to Proceed

The following explains the rationale behind the each of the general requirements for M.A. students in the department, and outlines the procedure students should follow to satisfy them.

1. Meeting with the Advisor

Each new student is assigned an interim advisor, that is, a graduate faculty member with whom the student can discuss the course of his/her study in the initial stages. Upon arrival, the student should meet as soon as possible with the assigned interim advisor to chart a plan of course work and the student should meet quarterly with the advisor to keep him/her apprised of his/her progress. It is the
 student's task to take the initiative for these meetings, and the advisor's to file a formal progress report once a year. Once the student has determined the area of specialization and the faculty member he/she would like to work with, he/she should discuss this with the interim advisor and appoint a permanent advisor.

2. Filing a Program of Study

Practically, the graduate student should start by carefully planning a program of study that will contribute to achieving the skills mentioned above. Each of the department’s programs has its own required graduate courses. The student should carefully plan when to take which courses, keeping in mind that many courses are not offered every year, and that some courses will not be offered when faculty are on leave. Ideally, students should take at least one course with every faculty member in their program, so as to familiarize themselves with the full range of scholarship and expertise available to them.

The student should submit a feasible proposal of study to the advisor, which, after approval, will be filed by the department secretary no later than the third quarter of graduate study. The plan of study should be viewed as a guideline rather than a straitjacket; specifics of the plan are likely to change as the student proceeds, but the general course of study should be clear.

There is a minimum course requirement of 45 credits, and the student must take classes and examinations relating to both the linguistic and literature aspects of the language of specialization. Classes in other disciplines might also be advisable (e.g., religion or anthropology), depending on the student’s chosen field of specialization. Please note that a graduate student is required to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA.

The student’s file will contain a checklist of the required courses in his/her program and the student will be responsible for checking off each requirement as the courses are completed. When all courses are taken, the student will present the completed list to the Program Coordinator and ask him/her or his/her designated representative to sign off the box “course work completed” on the checklist. If there are any irregularities (such as course substitutions), an explanation will be placed in the file along with the signature.

Program Description. The Japanese literature program offers work in the history and criticism of Japanese literature from the earliest period to the modern age. Students normally concentrate on fiction, poetry, and drama, supplementing their reading and analysis of original works with readings in secondary critical and historical sources. For example, a student interested in Japanese aesthetic concepts might wish to devote a major portion of study to the history of criticism, while students with other specific interests might wish to pursue a linguistic, philosophical, biographical or comparative literature approach. In any case, the student and adviser plan a course of study that concentrates on the language and literature training offered by this department, and may also include course work in other departments when this is deemed necessary to develop the academic resources of the student for his or her research in Japanese literature.

Course Work and Credits

The M.A. program requires a minimum of 45 credits above the 300 level which are to be earned through a combination of course work and research. At least 18 credits of course work must be completed in numerically graded courses at the 400, 500 level, and 18 credits at the 500 level and above. The following courses normally constitute a minimal level of training: Japanese 321-2-3 (Japanese Literature I, II, III: no graduate credit), Japanese 421-2-3 (Fourth-year Japanese), Japanese 431-2-3 (Readings in Modern Japanese Literature), Japanese 471-2-3 (Introduction to, and Readings in Classical Japanese Literature). Students whose undergraduate training has provided them with a background comparable to this may enter more advanced courses. Students who lack such preparation may require a program considerably in excess of the minimum 45 credits.

Students may present research in either of two ways: (1) by submitting a thesis and taking at least 36 course credits and 9 thesis
credits, or (2) by submitting two research papers that have been written either independently or for courses or seminars, in which case all 45 minimum credits will be in course credits.

3. Taking the MA General Examination

When the language exams have been taken and passed, and the required course work is completed, the student should prepare for the General Examination, which is a written test, consisting of two two-hour exams to be taken in the same week. The purpose of this test is to demonstrate the student's general competence, that is, the aforementioned "broad picture" view. At the latest during the quarter prior to the exam date, the student should meet with the advisor to discuss exam preparation. In preparation for this meeting, the student should compile a list of classes taken and readings completed, so as to give the advisor a good idea of what the student already knows and what needs more work. On the basis of this information, an effective strategy for exam preparation can be devised.

The student will take one examination in pre-modern (pre-Meiji) literature, and the other in modern literature. These are intended to examine the student's general mastery of the respective areas. The student will meet with his or her academic adviser at least one quarter prior to the quarter in which the examination is taken, in order to discuss the student's preparation for the examination. In connection with this, the student will usually be asked to compile a list of courses taken and readings during the program of study.

4. Writing a thesis or two research papers

Officially, it is only after passing the General Examination that the student will proceed to work on a thesis, but it is advisable for the student to start thinking about a topic of specialization and start working on it as soon as is practical. Alternatively, if the advisor approves, students can submit two in-depth research papers in lieu of one thesis.

The MA thesis should make an original contribution to existing research in a given field and present it in a coherent form with the conventional scholarly apparatus. In this department, demonstrating the ability to work with primary sources in the language of specialization is a requirement of the thesis.

In practical terms this means that the graduate student will go through a study process to familiarize him- or herself with the publications in the field of specialization, the major questions that are being (and could be) researched, and the methodological approaches to answering such questions. The end product of this process, the thesis itself, demonstrates the mastery of these materials and approaches. The MA thesis differs from the PhD thesis in that it is narrower in scope, and it typically is comparable to a lengthy article rather than a book.

As soon as the General Examination is passed, the student should make a time schedule to organize the writing of the thesis. The student should meet regularly with the advisor to discuss progress and submit chapters of the thesis for comment. A final draft should be submitted to the other member of the examination committee as soon as possible, no later than three weeks before the last day of the quarter in which the student seeks to graduate.

5. Graduating

Once the thesis is nearing completion, the student should apply for the Master's degree at the Graduate School office. Note that this has to be done within the first two weeks of the quarter in which the degree is expected to be conferred. The final revised version of the thesis has to be submitted to the Graduate School on the last day of that quarter.

Department of Asian Languages & Literature