

**Comprehensive Exams, Products of Learning, and Portfolios**  
**Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures**  
**MA in Romance Languages, Teaching Tracks in Spanish and French**

*September 2008*

The following information will help you understand the Department's requirements for the comprehensive exam for the MA in Romance Languages, Teaching. We want the exam to be a learning experience for you and one in which you can demonstrate all you have achieved in our program.

Please read the guidelines carefully and be sure you are referring to the set that obtains for your specific teaching track (K-12 or Community College), because the requirements differ. Also, note that the guidelines have changed substantially from previous years. Please rely on this document rather than on advice from earlier graduates as your best source of information on what is expected.

**The “Comprehensive Exam” and Oral Presentation**

The culminating experience for your degree is the “MA Comprehensive Exam,” which can take different forms, depending on your degree track and interests.

In all cases, the **comprehensive exam combines a written product** with your **oral presentation on this product**, followed by questions from the graduate faculty on topics related to your presentation and courses. Each exam lasts one hour and is completed in the last semester of your enrollment at Appalachian.

The comprehensive exam for students in the K-12 Teaching track is a written and oral presentation of a student's **Product of Learning** (see overview, pages 2-5)

The comprehensive exam for students in the Community College Teaching track is a written and oral presentation of the **MA portfolio**. (see overview, page 5)

**Comprehensive Exam Requirements, K-12 Teaching Track (Product of Learning)**

Candidates for the K-12 track complete their comprehensive exam by completing a “Product of Learning.” Usually you will enroll in a course with this name (graded on a pass/fail basis) in which you plan, ideally with other students who are at a similar point in their studies, the Product of Learning option you prefer.

If you are able to schedule the Product of Learning in your final semester at App, you must present your product before the final exam period begins in order to graduate at the end of that semester.

**Product of Learning Types:**

**Option 1: Classroom-based Research**

Candidates may choose to conduct classroom-based research on an issue of pedagogical interest, designed in conjunction with the professor for the Product of Learning course. The final Product of Learning in this case is a formal, written report of the student's research, and an oral presentation of this project, including all major sections typical for classroom-based research.

Candidates completing classroom-based research do not also have to complete a teaching portfolio of their work from multiple classes—the in-depth research on a single issue and the broad review of literature in preparation for it substitutes for this and meets the Product of Learning requirements of the state. Normally such research projects are approximately 45-50 pages in length (please see an overview of the likely contents on pp. 3-5).

### **Option 2: Teaching-related Portfolio**

K-12 candidates who are not interested in doing classroom-based research may instead prepare a comprehensive portfolio in which they demonstrate how they have used the insights from the MA program to inform their language teaching. The result is a teaching-related portfolio that shows the breadth of a candidate's coursework and how this is applied in the classroom.

### **Requirements for all K-12 Products of Learning:**

- Your Product of Learning must be presented in a public forum with at least one practicing NC public school teacher in your language attending. For this reason it's important to schedule your presentation well in advance so that you, your committee, the graduate program director, and your practicing teacher are all available to attend.
- Starting Fall 2008, your Product of Learning presentation will also require you to give a portion of your oral presentation (5-7 minutes) in the target language.
- Starting Fall 2008, you should submit with your Product of Learning one sample of your best work from a SNH or FRE course, written in the target language and revised based on faculty feedback.
- Both Product of Learning options require you to submit one written copy of your product to the department, and both culminate in a 20-30 minute presentation by you on this project, followed by a 30-40 minute session of questions and answers from the graduate faculty attending.

*For detailed contents of the K-12 Product of Learning Options, see pages 3-5  
For detailed contents of the MA Community College Program Portfolio, see page 5*

*For other important details for anyone completing the comprehensive exams, see page 6.*

## Detailed Content of the Product of Learning for K-12 Teaching

### **Option 1: Classroom-based research**

In a classroom-based research you will examine an issue of interest to you, conduct a study to gather data, analyze and report on that data, and present your findings orally. Classroom-based research usually includes the following:

**Problem Statement** (this is the issue you are examining, and why)

**Review of Literature** (summarizes research that has already been conducted and places your study in this context)

**Research Methods** (a description of the subjects and what you did)

**Results** (what you found out through the research)

**Discussion** (clarifies what pedagogical implications can be drawn from your research, and what we still need to study more)

**Bibliography** (in MLA format)

**Appendices** (all materials, data sets from the study, sample surveys, etc., also a sample Informed Consent Form)

If you complete a classroom-based research Product of Learning, you do not also have to complete a teaching portfolio-- the in-depth research on a single issue and the broad review of literature in preparation for it substitutes for this and meets the Product of Learning requirements of the state, because it is extensive research with a pedagogical focus. Normally such projects are approximately 45-50 pages in length.

However, you will also need to demonstrate your writing proficiency in Spanish or French, so you submit one fully-revised paper written in the target language from one of your courses. Suggested length for the paper you choose: 10-15 pages

### **Use of Human Subjects**

Since classroom-based research involves gathering data from one's own or others' students, and it must be carried out in conjunction with the University's policies for the use of human subjects. Your students (and their parents) must give informed consent before they participate. Data cannot be gathered before informed consent is given, and students (or parents) wishing to opt out may not be required to participate in your study. Please refer to the web site of the Graduate School for Human Subjects/informed consent requirements, as these are updated periodically.

### **Oral Presentation**

Candidates choosing the classroom-based research option will make a formal presentation of the research itself, including each of the sections above, and submit their written report of this research. Usually this is done as a PowerPoint presentation in which the candidate discusses each section of the research project in turn.

Part of your Product of Learning presentation (ca. 5-7 minutes) should be presented in the target language. You may choose which part is most appropriate for this.

At the conclusion of your presentation, you should be prepared to answer general questions from the committee about your understanding of how this research connects with second language acquisition theory and/or best practices in teaching.

### **Final Written Product**

You will submit to the department at least ten days in advance of your Product of Learning presentation a copy of your research paper, on which you have completed at least one thorough round of revisions and corrections from your committee members. It is likely that your Product will involve multiple drafts of feedback, so you should allow time for this, both for professors and for yourself. Remember also that you must include a sample of your writing proficiency in French or Spanish by submitting one fully-revised paper from a course.

### **Option 2: Teaching-Related Portfolio**

K-12 candidates who are not interested in doing classroom-based research may instead prepare a comprehensive, teaching-related portfolio in which they indicate how they would use the insights from their MA program to inform their language teaching. The result is a teaching-related portfolio that shows the breadth of a candidate's coursework how this would be applied in the classroom.

The K-12 teaching-related portfolio should include the following components:

#### **1. Statement on Second Language Acquisition and Teaching.**

This is a statement of the candidate's understanding of how languages are learned in the K-12 setting, based on insights from second language acquisition theory and what are considered best practices for language teaching.

In this synthesis you should show for an interested but non-technical audience how you have come to view language teaching and learning as a result of your coursework for the MA. This is also a useful synthesis you might share with prospective employers later on.

#### **2. Examples of Applications of Spanish/French Coursework to Language Teaching**

This section should include 5-7 fleshed-out examples of how you have applied ideas and content from your language courses for use in your own teaching. You should include materials you have developed to use with your students, and in cases where you have had time to try these out, you should include your reflections on how well the activities worked and what could be improved for next time.

#### **Note on Number of Courses to include:**

Plan to include materials from at least five target-language content courses in your portfolio. If your materials are detailed and you have feedback on how they were received by students when you applied them in your classes, five examples will be sufficient. If you have had fewer opportunities to try out such lessons or have less extensive materials, you should include more topics/courses (up to seven).

#### **3. Insights from Curriculum and Instruction Classes**

Include a component that shows a direct connection from your C& I classes to current teaching practices. This section may contain one or two items at your discretion.

#### **4. Demonstration of your Writing Proficiency in the Target Language**

Finally, include a representative sample of your written work in the target language at or near the end of your course work at Appalachian, on the basis of a fully revised copy of a longer term paper you have completed for one of your courses. Include the final copy as you submitted it to your professor with his/her comments, as well as your final revision in which you have incorporated these comments. Suggested length for the paper you choose: 10-15 pages

### **Requirements for the Community College Teaching Track**

#### **Program Portfolio**

Candidates for the Community College teaching track will prepare and present a program-based portfolio that contains representative samples of all major projects from the degree program. The resulting course-based portfolio demonstrates the breadth of coursework the student has completed and the student's overall development as a scholar and teacher. The Community College Program Portfolio should contain the following components:

#### **1. Statement on Second Language Acquisition and Teaching.**

This is a statement of the candidate's understanding of how languages are learned by adult-aged students, based on insights from second language acquisition theory and what are considered best practices for language teaching.

In this synthesis you should show for an interested but non-technical audience how you have come to view language teaching and learning as a result of your coursework for the MA. This is also a useful synthesis you might share with prospective employers later on.

#### **2. Fully-revised Samples of major Papers from Content Courses**

This section should include your final (or major) projects from each content course you took in Spanish or French. The total number of entries: 8—one for each course you count as a Spanish or French content course.

Each entry should include the original final project as you submitted it to your professor with his/her comments, as well as your final revision in which you have incorporated these comments. If you revise some papers well after you originally submitted them (such as at the end of your MA program), indicate the date of revision.

Because it is likely that your entries will show growth in your language abilities, you may wish to organize this section chronologically. If you choose a topic organization instead, please include a cover sheet, which clearly indicates in which semester you were enrolled in each course (or the date the paper was submitted).

#### **3. Insights from Higher Education Classes**

Include a component in which you reflect on what you learned from your Higher Education classes and how this has informed your approach to working with adult learners in college settings. This section may contain one or two items at your discretion. Recent graduates have reported that completing this section helped them be well prepared for job interviews at Community Colleges.

### **Other Important Details regarding Comprehensive Exams of all Types:**

**Format and Submission:**

Your comprehensive exam for the MA is written project, but it is not an “MA Thesis” as defined by the Graduate School. For example, it is not necessary to print a classroom-based research project for the Product of Learning on thesis paper or have it bound, as a thesis must be. One copy for our archives (3 ring notebook) is sufficient, and you may include electronic media in the binder. All-electronic submissions are not accessible however; the most relevant core documents should be submitted in paper form.

**Timing of your MA Exam:**

You should complete your MA exam at the end of your formal study with us, but in advance of the deadlines as set by the University Registrar. Exam results are due in Registrar’s Office by Reading Day each term—which is **before** the regular period of final exams. Please schedule your MA presentation early enough to allow for the final documents to be processed and checked by the Registrar. This will ensure there are no sudden surprises before graduation.

If you need additional time, you can take your exam at the beginning of the following semester and delay graduation to the end of that semester. In this case, the university will charge you the equivalent of one credit hour for the term in which you take your exam.

**How to Schedule your MA Exam:**

Please schedule a date for your exam by the middle of the term in which you hope to graduate.

**Submitting your Written Materials: 10 days-2 weeks in Advance!**

Faculty need to receive the written materials for your comprehensive exam at least 10 days (2 weeks is optimal) before your oral presentation, to give everyone time to read and prepare questions and comments.

Once you submit a teaching-based portfolio for faculty to read (for example, the K-12 teaching portfolio or the Community College MA portfolio), you may not add additional materials or remove the portfolio from the department.

If you are doing classroom-based research (and especially if you are conducting the research in the same semester in which you are attempting to graduate), your committee will need to see your “best draft” of your paper 10 days- two weeks before the exam. It is typical to make minor corrections after your presentation for this project type.

**Who attends your MA Comprehensive Exam?**

All faculty members who have agreed to serve on your MA committee, as indicated on your Program of Study, will attend your MA presentation. The Department Chair and the Graduate Program Director will attend if they are not already members of the committee, and all other members of the Graduate Faculty will be invited. For K-12 teachers, a NC certified practicing teacher from your discipline must also attend your presentation.

In addition to these individuals, you are welcome to invite other guests to your presentation. We especially encourage you to include other graduate students in your invited audience, too.