**REVISIONS TO NELC PhD PROGAM:**

**PROPOSAL APPROVED BY NELC FACULTY VOTE**

The graduate curriculum in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC) must undergo formal changes in its requirements to meet the changing realities of funding patterns, student admissions, and the faculty roster. The changes proposed here aim to foster flexibility, multi-disciplinary research, and innovation, and to improve both recruitment and placement of graduate students, all without compromising our existing high standards in fundamental skills such as mastery of research languages. They are also designed to suit a graduate program which will focus more energy and attention on fewer admitted students.

In its last revision (Autumn 2012), the NELC graduate curriculum was designed for students aiming at research in one major Near Eastern language and its affiliated culture, with a “minor” in a second language. In effect this meant an unofficial system of tracks, whereby students specialized in Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, or Turkish, with intermediate ability in an ancillary second Near Eastern language.

Since that time, many changes have disrupted the utility of that pattern of one-track specialization. The department faculty roster has been reshaped by the departure and retirement of seven faculty members (almost half of the faculty) and the recruitment of five new faculty members, several as hires of opportunity of different sorts, in areas not covered before, with further faculty recruitment anticipated in the future. NELC has not been granted a replacement hire in the area of Persian for four years, while our sole professor of Turkish is presently on long-term medical leave. This means that the only “language tracks” available, by the existing requirements, with regular graduate courses, are in Arabic and Hebrew. The focus on just Hebrew or Arabic for the PhD does not employ the full benefit of the gradual diversification of approaches in research taken by faculty, which now include more anthropological, literary-critical, and comparative approaches side by side with historical and philological studies and studies of textual and scriptural traditions that have been most typically characteristic of NELC departments. The graduate students actually admitted in the midst of these changes can meet roadblocks where the requirements in place do not match the reality of our graduate offerings and prevent them from being rewarded for working assiduously with NELC faculty in PhD courses.

The reality is that students and faculty in NELC have broader and more interdisciplinary interests than the standing graduate curriculum reflects. Students pursue widely varying topics, from the anthropology of modern Turkey to the philology of the Hebrew Bible to the intercultural transmission of medieval science. Revisions to the graduate program must render it highly flexible to make such diversity of approaches possible.

The last external review of the department (May 2010) found fault with the graduate program for lacking distinctive identity. The changes proposed here address the concerns of that external review.

Our **learning goals and expected outcomes** remain unchanged. The revisions proposed here are improving the pattern for achieving those goals. The program for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in NELC at The Ohio State University still has as its aim a concentration and breadth of study designed to foster productive and independent scholarship. Students finishing the PhD in OSU NELC are able to conduct independent advanced research in their areas of concentration. This includes the ability to use Near Eastern languages for the purposes of research in original documents, texts, or live interviews. The new vision for the NELC graduate program outlined below illustrates the distinctive character of our approach within these broad learning goals.

**The New Vision for the NELC Graduate Program**

The following description of our graduate program was approved by all faculty members in a meeting in 2014. It expresses our intention with the words “Make discoveries bridging fields.” We want our students to be able to do just that.

**Make Discoveries Bridging Fields**

Our graduate program in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures is distinguished among its peers by its versatile, genuinely interdisciplinary curriculum and the breadth of its language offerings.

Our curriculum is designed to foster innovative projects in the study of the Near East that arise when materials from different established specialties are put together in productive ways. New avenues of research are discovered through training in more than one area or set of methods that may not have been brought together before. This prepares students to answer questions in Near Eastern studies that fall between traditionally configured sub-fields.

Our students are not restricted to one area or track. This is by design. Here you will benefit from the combinatory possibilities made available by the shared expertise of our sixteen core professors in widely-ranging fields and dozens of associated professors in other departments. Together our research materials range from ancient Mesopotamian cuneiform inscriptions to modern Near Eastern novels, our geographic range runs from the Maghrib to Central Asia and India, and our methods in themselves represent a history of modern scholarship in the humanities and beyond, from philology, historical linguistics and manuscript studies to folklore, critical theory, and anthropology.

Our present strengths are in the study of the **Hebrew Bible** and **Jewish literary traditions**, the **Late Antique and Medieval Near East**, **modern literature** in Arabic and Hebrew, **Islamic Studies**, and **anthropological approaches** to Near Eastern societies (with three or more faculty specialists for each of these areas). We have further concentrations of expertise (with at least two faculty mentors) in **Judaeo-Arabic** and **comparative Semitics**, subjects offered in only a small number of other graduate programs. Our resources for students wishing to combine the study of Arabic and Hebrew, or Islam and Judaism, are especially strong. We especially welcome applicants interested simultaneously in more than one of these various areas of study and who have research projects that will combine them.

Pursuing graduate study at one of the largest Colleges of Arts and Sciences in the United States provides a wealth of opportunities to work in an interdisciplinary environment with many faculty members in other departments as well. Here you can work towards your PhD in Near Eastern studies while integrating offerings by faculty in other departments. OSU has strengths in fields such as late antique and Byzantine studies, in the history and religions of the ancient Mediterranean, in cultural studies and critical theory, and in a wide range of other fields that fruitfully intersect with those of our department. We encourage students with such interdisciplinary interests to apply.

Our department maintains an unusually wide range of language offerings. Besides our regular curricula in Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, Turkish, Uzbek, and Hindi, we offer courses in ancient Near Eastern languages such as Akkadian, Syriac, and Ugaritic, and ancient Iranian languages, such as Middle Persian and Parthian.

Summary of Current PhD Program Requirements and Proposed Revisions:

**Revising Current Category Requirements:** The current requirements stipulate that students take two specific three-unit courses (one called “Orality and Literacy,” the other being one of three “Theory” courses), 24 units of graduate credit in a “primary language and culture area,” 9 units of graduate or non-graduate credit in a “secondary language and culture area,” and 15 units in a “minor area” intended to be interdisciplinary or interdepartmental, together with other courses for credit all leading to the sum of eighty units sufficient for the PhD as set by the Graduate School.

One problem arises in the actual definition these areas. The original rationale was that students take 24 units of graduate credit in one language at an advanced level, although graduate courses in that “culture area” have been included. While originally intended to promote interdisciplinary study and to emphasize language training, the differences between the “minor area” and the “primary” and “secondary” areas become blurry in practice.

**Addressing Native Speakers, etc., in the Curriculum:** Another challenge comes from the variety in the prior preparation and the goals of our graduate students. As our international profile rises, some students now come as native speakers of the languages in which they are pursuing research. These students will not always benefit from 24 units of graduate study in their own language as much as by courses in theory and method. Other students are not native speakers but are not able to find 24 units in their primary research language because the changing faculty roster has not facilitated their offering. Still others are pursuing ancient languages which tend to be learned intensively in one or two semesters each, in larger numbers, making it infeasible to pursue any one of them for 24 units of credit.

**Proposed Shift to Final Qualifications Assessment:** The solution is to dissolve the grouping of requirements by *area* and to emphasize *final qualifications* instead, something to be ensured by close monitoring of a duo of faculty advisors and by language translation examinations. This will have the benefits of encouraging just the sort of boundary-crossing, multidisciplinary graduate studies and scholarship promoted by the department, matching student interests to faculty offerings more closely, creating flexibility in the curriculum in the face of unexpected changes to the faculty roster, and enabling the faculty to plan more carefully to deliver graduate-level courses that meet the needs of as many graduate students as possible at once.

In exchange for loosening the grouping of credits by language area, students face increased scrutiny at the stage of examinations, particularly with respect to their language proficiency. Language proficiency will be ensured through examination rather than by a fixed number of course units; this reflects the variety of goals and prior preparation our students have.

Details of Proposed Revisions to Graduate Program Requirements:

The 80 units of post-BA coursework in total required for the PhD must follow this plan:

1. NELC 5101 Introduction to the Field of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (1 unit)

NOTE: PhD students who have already taken this course at OSU while pursuing BAs or MAs, or MA students who have taken this course at OSU while pursuing a BA, are not required to take it, nor may they repeat it for credit.

2. Two of these six courses (3 units each)

CS 7360 Theorizing Culture  
CS 7370 Theorizing Religion

HIST 7900 Colloquium in the Philosophy of History, Historiography, and the Historian’s Skills

NELC/CLAS 5401 Methodologies for the Study of Ancient Religions

NELC/CS 5568 Studies in Orality and Literacy

NELC/CS 7301 Theorizing Literature

NOTE: PhD students who have already taken two of these courses at OSU while pursuing MAs are not required to take more of them, but may do so for credit.

3. At least eighteen (18) units of credit at the 5000-level or higher must come from courses bearing the prefixes managed by the NELC department. (Such courses are found with the prefixes NELC, ARABIC, HEBREW, PERSIAN, and TURKISH.)

4. At least fifteen (15) units of credit at the 7000- or 8000-level among all the courses beyond the MA.

5. No more than twelve (12) of the eighty units in total may be taken as non-graded (S/U or PA/NP).

Beyond these restrictions, any course at the 5000-level or higher, if approved by the Graduate Studies Committee, may count towards the degree.

Beyond these restrictions, courses are chosen in consultation with the student's Advisory Committee.

**Modern Scholarship Language Requirement**. Furthermore, students must demonstrate reading competence in at least two languages of modern secondary scholarship, usually French and German. (Competence in English is assumed as it is the medium of instruction at OSU and does not satisfy the requirement.) This competence is demonstrated by the same procedures outlined for the modern research language required for the MA. Any substitutes to German or French requested by a student must be approved by the Graduate Studies Committee.

All of the individual requirements listed above should be met by or at the semester of achieving PhD candidacy. By that time, students should have accumulated at least 68 credit hours; this will leave 12 units of dissertation work over four semesters to count towards the PhD.

**Declared Specializations.** All graduate students in NELC receive PhDs in “Near Eastern Languages and Cultures,” not in Hebrew, Arabic, Islamic Studies, or another area. Nevertheless, students should designate two fields of study in conventional terms, in consultation with their academic Advisory Committee of two faculty members, as their fields of specialty. A few examples of possible fields are “Medieval Judaism,” “the Ancient Near East,” “Modern Middle Eastern Societies,” and “Pre-modern Iran,” with innumerable further possibilities. These specializations will guide students in their Candidacy exam topics and self-branding for the job market. Each student’s Advisory Committee consults with the NELC chair and affected faculty to ensure that advisees have sufficient graduate courses to train them for Candidacy exams in their two fields. The declaration of these specializations enables the faculty to plan appropriate offerings effectively. These declared specializations may change by agreement of advisors and advisees.

**Near Eastern research language requirements.** All students must pursue advanced training in the research languages required for their respective fields of specialization. Normally this entails at least one course per semester in the main research language for the duration of coursework and regular or sustained coursework in a second language. This is to prepare them for the Near Eastern research language exams and ultimately for conducting advanced research using these languages. *It is the student’s responsibility to prepare for these examinations by taking advantage of every opportunity for training and advancement in the language.* It is the responsibility of the student’s advisors to oversee the student’s preparation, by ensuring the offering of relevant courses, including independent study sessions where needed, to the student.

PhD students must demonstrate ability in two different Near Eastern research languages by examination prior to scheduling the PhD Candidacy exams. These translation exams should be taken as soon as the student is ready, without delay. Ideally, students are preparing for Candidacy exams throughout their graduate work, and students are encouraged to plan the date of their Candidacy exams as soon as they pass their translation exams. The Candidacy examinations must be taken by the end of the student’s third year, unless special provisions are made by the Graduate Studies Committee in consultation with the department chair. Students do not take the Candidacy exams and proceed to dissertation work without having passed the requirement of translation examinations, though they can be scheduled for the same semester

There are two ways to demonstrate research competence in a Near Eastern language in lieu of a translation exam.

* **Course work in lieu of one examination.** The examination for one of these two, conceived as a *secondary* language in the student’s research, may be replaced by coursework: at least nine units of credit in courses in the language with a grade of B+ or higher in each course. Typically this entails three semesters of work in the language. (Where possible, students are encouraged to pursue more than nine units of credit, proceeding to the highest level of ability attainable in the second Near Eastern research language, although this is not a requirement.)
* **Waiver of one exam for native speaker of Near Eastern research language.** The requirement of a translation exam is waived for *one* Near Eastern research language for students who speak one of their Near Eastern research languages natively (from childhood) *and* hold a degree from a university in which regular instruction is conducted in that language. The waiver does not hold when the research language is a pre-modern variety of the student’s native language (e.g., classical Arabic studied by a speaker of modern Arabic). Ability in different dialects or pre-modern varieties of a given language cannot be credited as more than one language for the purposes of these exams (e.g., modern and Ottoman Turkish do not count as two languages; classical Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic do not count as two languages).

**Administration of Translation Examinations.** Translation examinations are arranged by the student’s advisory committee (primary and associate advisor) but the examiners may include other faculty with the relevant language expertise. Translation examinations allow three hours for the translation of three passages of texts representing typical prose, poetry, or both, in one language. PhD students taking two such examinations do so on different days. At the discretion of the examiners, translation examinations may also include prompts for specific commentary or a short essay on the translated materials. Standards for the examinations in research languages necessarily vary according to the nature of the material extant in the different languages. The goal is to demonstrate the competence to conduct research on texts in the language. The student’s advisors decide whether the student may choose to employ a lexicon during the examination. Examinations written with the help of a lexicon will be evaluated more strictly.

Grades include Pass or Fail. Students who fail an exam may re-take the examination in that language once at a later date after suitable preparation, with different texts set by the examiners. Students who fail the translation exam twice cannot retake the examination, cannot complete the degree program, and will not register for the next semester.

Two faculty members designated by the student’s advisory committee, in consultation with the DGS, evaluate each translation examination. In case of a disagreement in results, a third faculty member is recruited by the DGS to review the examination and to decide. When only one faculty member is available having expertise in the language of the examination, a second faculty member nevertheless reviews the examination and its results for fairness. Extradepartmental graduate faculty may participate in the administration and evaluation of these examinations.

When no faculty member has expertise in a given Near Eastern language, examinations for that language are not available and will not be administered.

**Dissertation**

The requirements of the dissertation do not change with these revisions. In consultation with appropriate faculty, and with the consent of the Graduate Studies Committee, students constitute a committee of four approved NELC graduate faculty, including the student’s primary advisor. Students prepare a prospectus outlining the dissertation project and submit it to their Advisory Committee for approval. This approval ideally takes place in a meeting in which the faculty and the student discuss the plan, but such a meeting is not required.

The dissertation prospectus cannot be a statement of findings before the research is carried out and written. It raises questions and issues and outlines the methods by which the answers will be sought. Normally the dissertation prospectus ranges in length from five to twenty pages, including an extensive representative bibliography.

**Ongoing Assessment**

The changes proposed here are the result of our ongoing assessment of our PhD program. We have instituted (roughly) monthly convivial meetings for our graduate students, organized by the DGS and a student-elected student serving as Graduate Coordinator, in which faculty come to share professional advice. The department chair and DGS visit these meetings to take questions and to hear concerns. These NELC All-Grad Gatherings foster continual information sharing and the sense that all students are the collective responsibility of all faculty. We are also tracking the careers of our graduates.

**Curriculum Timetable and Transition Plan**

The foregoing program description and articulation of requirements will supersede all previous program descriptions and requirements as of the first Autumn semester after final formal approval. Program requirements will apply to all students who first enroll in the NELC PhD program after these requirements’ approval.

Continuing students may with the agreement of their advisor and the Graduate Studies Committee elect to continue to pursue a Program of Study governed by the requirements in place at the time of their first enrollment in the NELC PhD program or may instead transition to a Program of Study governed by the new requirements once they are approved and take effect.

Students transitioning to the new requirements must articulate and formalize these decisions in their annual Graduate Student Status report submission.