

PhD Degree Requirements



Kaiyuan Temple, Chaozhou, Guandong. Photo by Brian Lander.

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1. Course Requirements

EALAC offers three tracks: the EALAC PhD program, East Asian History PhD (History-East Asia) program, and the East Asian Religion PhD program. Many of the attendant requirements regarding degree applications, teaching responsibilities, dissertation defense, etc. are identical; however, there are slight differences in the program of coursework for each tract. Please consult the appropriate coursework requirements below.

EALAC PhD Program Course Requirements

The student must take twelve one-semester courses for grade credit, at least six of which must be graduate-level colloquia or seminars. One of the twelve courses must be outside the student's East Asian country of specialization. The student is strongly urged to take a methodology course appropriate to his or her discipline to be determined in consultation with the advisor. The student should take a bibliography course dealing with or appropriate to the country of specialization when available. The methodology and bibliography courses are counted as two of the twelve required courses. The choice of courses must be approved by the student's advisor and by the DGS. The second semester of first-year classical Chinese can be counted toward the twelve courses for students whose specialty is not Chinese literature/history or premodern Korean history. If you take two semesters of second-year classical Chinese you may count these two courses as one seminar to fulfill your graduate seminar requirements.

Grades of A are considered to be truly positive. Grades of A- indicate acceptable academic progress, but register that the work can be taken a step further in future. Grades of B+ signal work that raises concerns, and a pattern of B+ grades would indicate someone who should not go on in the program unless he or she is doing significantly better work in other courses. Under exceptional circumstances, B is the minimum grade for counting a course toward degree requirements.

East Asian History PhD Program (History-East Asia Program) Course Requirements

Students in East Asian History are required to enroll in a total of twelve one-semester courses for grade credit. Of these, one must be History GR8910 (Introduction to History and Historiography), to be taken in their first year, and one must be a bibliography course or the equivalent. Of the remaining ten courses, eight must be colloquia or seminars or the equivalent selected in consultation with the advisor. The remaining courses may include directed-reading courses. The second semester of first-year classical Chinese can be counted toward the twelve courses for students whose specialty is not Chinese literature/history or premodern Korean history. If you take two semesters of second-year classical Chinese you may count these two courses as one seminar to fulfill your graduate seminar requirements. Additional courses above the required twelve may be taken in consultation with the student's advisor.

East Asian Religion PhD Program Requirements

The student must take twelve one-semester courses for a grade, at least six of which must be graduate-level colloquia or seminars. One of the twelve courses must be outside the student's East Asian country of specialization. The student is required to take Religion GR6901, the primary methodology seminar of the Religion Department. Students are also strongly encouraged to take a bibliography course dealing with or appropriate to the country of specialization when available. The methodology and bibliography courses are counted as two of the twelve required courses. The choice of courses must be approved by the student's adviser and by the DGS. Courses in first-year classical Chinese, first-year classical Japanese and Kanbun can be counted toward the twelve courses. Second-year classical Chinese can be counted as a graduate colloquium/seminar.

2. Research Papers and MA Degree

All students, including those already holding an MA, write a research paper to be completed by the end of the third semester. Students who enter the program without an MA in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University should apply to receive the MA degree upon completion of this paper (which will count as the MA thesis, 25 to 30 pages in length) and course requirements. Any student who has already received an MA in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University is exempt from having to apply for another MA from us, as well as from the first research paper requirement. However, two additional papers must be completed by all students by the time of the oral examination: one paper based on research in primary sources, and one paper outside the student's primary specialization to be chosen in consultation with, and submitted to, the advisor.

This is done by completing the following two steps:

1. [Apply for the MA degree with the Registrar.](#)
2. Submit the completed, typed [MA Degree Requirements Checklist for PhD Candidates form](#), signed by your advisor along with a copy of your Columbia academic transcript (unofficial or official) to the EALAC office, 407 Kent Hall.

3. Language Requirements

Entering students are required to take the language placement examination in the East Asia language of specialization at the beginning of the semester in which they enter the program, unless that language was the primary language of instruction at the institution from which they received the BA degree. The student must fulfill the following language requirements listed below by field as applicable to his or her work.

The Primary Language

- **Chinese language requirements:** Fifth-year modern Chinese, or the equivalent; two years classical Chinese, or the equivalent.
- **Japanese language requirements:** Fifth-year Japanese, or the equivalent, for all students; one year of classical Japanese, or the equivalent; one semester of Kanbun or one year of classical Chinese.
- **Korean language requirement:** Fifth-year Korean, or the equivalent; Korean GR8010, "Advanced Korean in Mixed Script"
- **Tibetan language requirement:** Third-year modern Tibetan, or the equivalent; second-year classical Tibetan. Chinese language training also relevant (see below).
- **Vietnamese language requirement:** Fifth-year Vietnamese, or the equivalent. For students of premodern Vietnam, two years classical Chinese, or the equivalent.

PhD language examination requirements: language exemption is fulfilled by earning a B+ or better in required courses. Those with equivalent course(s) completed elsewhere still must pass the placement examination.

Second and Third Languages

- **Required for the study of China:** For Pre-Qing history and premodern literature: three years of Japanese or the equivalent. For Qing and later history, three years of Japanese or another preferred Asian language chosen in consultation with the advisor. For modern Chinese literature, three years of Japanese or two years of a European language. All students are encouraged to take a reading course in French (FRENS UN1204) or German (German UN1115) and pass the reading exam, but the advisor should decide whether this is necessary.
- **Required for the study of Japan:** For all students: Two years of a European language, or two years of a second Asian language in their classical or modern form, in consultation with the advisor. Pre-1800 history: two years of Classical Chinese.
- **Required for the study of Korea:** For all students: three years of Japanese or the equivalent; for students in premodern literature: one year of classical Chinese or the equivalent. If necessary, reading knowledge of a European language in consultation with the advisor.
- **Required for the study of Tibet:** For all students: reading knowledge of one European language or Japanese, chosen in consultation with advisor. For all students: three years of modern Chinese or two years of modern Chinese and one year Classical Chinese, chosen in consultation with advisor. In exceptional cases in which Chinese is not necessary for research interests, this requirement may be waived in consultation with advisor.
- **Required for the study of Vietnam:** For students of premodern Vietnam: three years of Chinese, or the equivalent, or another Asian language in consultation with advisor. Reading proficiency in French (in consultation with advisor). For students of modern Vietnam: three years of French or the equivalent. In special cases, depending on topic and in consultation with advisor, two years of Classical Chinese, three years of Japanese, or three years of Chinese, or the equivalent of these, may also be required.

Second European Language Requirements

A second European language, if required by the advisor.

4. Teaching Requirement

Beginning in their second year, PhD students gain teaching exposure through teaching assistant (TA) positions in the undergraduate East Asia program, largely offered by EALAC and the Committee on Asia and the Middle East. These assignments are determined by the Fellowship Renewal and TA Assignment Committee, chaired by the DGS.

5. Registration Requirements

All doctoral students are required to maintain continuous registration as long as they are enrolled in the program and are not taking a [Leave of Absence](#). This means that every semester, regardless of funding source or physical location, you are required to register (via SSOL) for one of the registration categories below.

Please Note that students must register each semester. Failure to do so may result in incorrect tuition charges and/or lapses in insurance coverage. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences requires the completion of two full Residence Units for the MA earned as part of a PhD degree; four additional Residence Units, for a total of six overall, are required for conferral of the MPhil and PhD degrees.

First-year through third-year students: register for a full Residence Unit (RU) during both semesters.

Fourth-year students and beyond:

After completing six residence units:

1. If you are either (a) registered for a course or (b) hold a University teaching or research appointment (e.g. TAs, RAs, Research Fellows, Teaching Scholars), register for Extended Residence (ER).
2. If you are not teaching or taking classes, and will instead hold a dissertation fellowship or another fellowship, or are beyond your years of guaranteed funding, register for Matriculation and Facilities (M&F).

Students on external (non-Columbia) funding: If you are receiving external funding within your first six semesters in the program, you still must register for a full residence unit each semester you use the external funding. If you are beyond your first six semesters in the program, you must register for Matriculations & Facilities (M&F) in each semester during which you have external funding.

Students on CU Fellowship but not teaching (Dissertation Fellows): If you are using a year of your Columbia University fellowship and have already completed your teaching duties, you must register for M&F for both semesters.

Registration Call Numbers:

Residence Unit (full RU): 99991

Extended Residence (ER): 77771

Matriculations & Facilities (M&F): 88881

For more information, please consult the [GSAS registration page](#).

6. Transfer Credit/Advanced Standing (For students who have already received an MA from EALAC)

Students who enter the PhD program having already received an MA in East Asian Languages & Cultures from EALAC may be eligible for transfer credit. Eligibility is determined by the Director of Graduate Studies in consultation with the student's academic advisor. During the first semester in which they register, students requesting transfer credit should submit the [Application for Transfer Credit form](#) as well as any relevant materials to the Associate Director of Academic Programs. **It is critical that students interested in applying for transfer credit schedule an**

appointment to meet with the DGS and their academic advisor prior to submitting an application. If approved, students should be aware of the following policies related to transfer credit:

- No amount of transfer credit (whether credits or RUs) will affect the number of years of funding guaranteed in the offer of admission.
- Requests for transfer credit must be made by the student and endorsed by the Director of Graduate Studies/Program Director.
- Under no circumstances will undergraduate courses (for Columbia courses, those at the 3000-level and below) be accepted as transfer credit toward a master's or doctoral degree.
- Students granted transfer credit must have an accelerated timeline for completion of the MPhil and PhD degrees. Students should discuss this timeline with the DGS prior to submitting their application for transfer credit.
- Once granted, transfer credit cannot be revoked.

Students awarded transfer credit must take eight (instead of twelve) one-semester courses for grade credits at least four of which must be graduate-level colloquia or seminars. Specific course requirements may be waived, if taken for the MA, subject to the approval of the DGS. All other requirements remain the same.

7. Annual Fellowship Renewal Form

The PhD student must fill out the annual fellowship renewal form in the spring of each year in order to be continued in the program for the following year. The EALAC office will announce the deadline for submitting the form at the beginning of the spring. This form contains a checklist of the program requirements and is used for tracking student fulfillment of those requirements. It also allows the student to indicate preferences for TA appointments. The forms, which must be signed by the respective advisors, are reviewed each spring by the Committee on Fellowship Renewals and TA Assignments. For instructions on retrieving your TA evaluations, please follow [this link](#).

8. MPhil. Oral Examinations

The student must take a two-hour comprehensive oral examination in three or four subject areas defined in consultation with the advisor and the DGS. Normally, one of these subject areas is outside the student's country of specialization. The committee for the oral examination, which is put together by the advisor, consists of three or more faculty members. It is up to the student to consult carefully with the advisor and DGS in constructing an effective program and schedule. The oral examination is normally taken at the end of the third year (but no later than the end of the fourth year) of PhD study.

Please complete the following form and submit it to the EALAC office in 407 Kent **no later than two weeks before your scheduled oral examination.**

- [Orals Scheduling Form](#)

Before your oral examination, please make sure to complete the following **four** documents, to be submitted to the EALAC office in 407 Kent. Please note that the first two forms **MUST** be typed and will not be accepted otherwise. These forms should be brought to your oral examination already filled out. If you have any questions while filling out these forms, consult with the Academic Coordinator.

- [Application for the MPhil Degree](#)
- [Report of the Dissertation Proposal Committee](#)
- [MPhil. Degree Requirements Checklist](#)
- [Oral Examination Form](#)

9. PhD Dissertation Prospectus

In order to receive the MPhil, the student must pass an oral defense of the dissertation prospectus before his or her MPhil oral examination committee or before a dissertation prospectus committee selected by the advisor. The prospectus is usually a revision of the grant proposal submitted to outside funders at the beginning of the third year for dissertation research in Asia. The prospectus defense is normally carried out in conjunction with the MPhil oral examination, but it may be taken afterwards, either within six months of the oral examination or before leaving for field research (whichever occurs first). For the purpose of fellowships requirements, it is possible to defend the prospectus in advance of the oral defense.

For the Report of the Dissertation Proposal Committee Form, see [8. M.Phil. Oral Examinations](#).

10. Dissertation Workshops

All post-MPhil students are required by GSAS to participate in [dissertation workshops](#) at least once per year between their fourth and seventh years. The workshops provide students with the opportunity to receive feedback on their dissertation work in a group setting. EALAC offers a colloquium series as one option for fulfilling this requirement. The format of the colloquium is flexible and can take the form of a formal presentation of a dissertation chapter, a group discussion of a pre-circulated draft, or a mix of the two. The requirement may also be fulfilled through a range of other options, such as participating in student-run writing groups, presenting at non-EALAC dissertation workshops, or receiving feedback through job talks.

Students wishing to sign up for an EALAC workshop date should contact the department office. Please provide your name, year, field, preferred dates (once the dates of the colloquium have been decided), provisional title of the presentation (may be changed at a later date), and discussant name (you may find someone at a later date).

11. Dissertation Distribution

See the [GSAS Dissertation page](#) for all University rules about dissertation preparation, defense, and deposit.

Students must be registered in the semester in which they distribute their dissertation, so please plan accordingly.

Dissertation defense, registration status, and deposit policies are as follows:

1. Defense applications should ideally be submitted four – *but no fewer than two* – weeks before the scheduled defense date: [Application for the Dissertation Defense](#) Applications received within two weeks of the proposed defense date will not be accepted, and the defense will have to be rescheduled. GSAS no longer requires students to file the form titled *Intent to Distribute and Defend*. In its place, all students who intend to participate in graduation ceremonies must complete the [register for Convocation](#).
2. In order to meet the Graduate School's requirement for [continuous registration](#), PhD candidates must register for full-time enrollment each semester until the semester of distribution. Once a dissertation has been distributed, students are no longer required to register. If a student intends to distribute during a specific term and does not do so before the end of that term, the student must register in the following semester.
3. To assist us in maintaining accurate information on the academic progress of our students, the committee that evaluates the dissertation proposal or prospectus must complete the [Report of the Dissertation Proposal Committee](#) form at the time of the defense of the proposal. The department should submit the completed form to GSAS immediately after the prospectus defense.

The forms used by the Dissertation Office are listed below:

- [Application for Master of Philosophy](#)
- [Report of the Dissertation Proposal Committee](#)
- [Application for the Dissertation Defense](#)

12. Dissertation Defense

Those students who complete the requirements for the PhD program except for the dissertation receive the MPhil degree. PhD candidates are then required to complete and submit a dissertation, which must be prepared through research by the student conducted in close consultation with his or her PhD faculty sponsor.

The dissertation defense is held before a committee of five faculty members, two of whom must be from outside the department. When a committee member can only participate from afar, an accommodation may be made by employing audio or video conferencing during the defense. A maximum of two members of the dissertation defense committee may participate remotely, but the committee chair and the sponsor must be present at the defense and GSAS must be informed of this arrangement at the time of application. Those preparing for the dissertation distribution and defense should also consult the relevant [GSAS guidelines and requirements](#).

The accepted dissertation (subject to whatever revisions the defense committee may deem appropriate) must be typed in conformity with the University's dissertation format and deposited with the Dissertation Office, whose template may be found [here](#).

13. Distinction Awarded to Dissertations in EALAC

EALAC recognizes superior academic work in dissertations that rank in quality in the top 10% defended by our students by formally designating them as “passing with distinction.” This nomination cannot be initiated by the sponsor. Following a unanimous vote by the members of a dissertation defense committee, the Chair of the committee must nominate the dissertation for distinction in a letter to the EALAC Chair and Director of Graduate Studies, who will determine whether distinction will be granted. Candidates are not to be informed that the committee has voted for distinction until the final decision has been made by the EALAC Chair and DGS. This recognition is conferred at the departmental level: GSAS no longer grants distinction to dissertations, but departments are free to grant it to superb work by their students.

Dissertations defended before Commencement but not deposited until afterward will be eligible for distinction if so recommended at the time of their defense.

14. Policy on Satisfactory Academic Standing

[Good academic and administrative standing](#) are required for continued enrollment in the PhD program. Good academic standing is constituted by:

- Acquiring an advisor (also called a sponsor), in consultation with the DGS
- Maintaining consistent contact with the DGS and the advisor
- Fulfilling the dissertation prospectus requirement
- Holding semesterly chapter meetings with the dissertation sponsor and at least one other member of the dissertation committee (beginning in the semester after the prospectus defense)
- Completing degree requirements and maintaining superior quality of work as determined by the department
- Maintaining a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.0*
- Holding no more than one mark of Incomplete at any given time
- Fulfilling pedagogical requirements and responsibilities as designated by the department and GSAS.

*The cumulative GPA is derived from all courses in which a student has registered and received a grade, except when the student takes a course again after receiving an F. In such cases, the F received for the original iteration does not count toward the GPA.

Good administrative standing entails being in compliance with all applicable administrative policies and procedures of the university.

Failure to maintain good academic or administrative standing may result in academic or administrative warning, probation, suspension, or dismissal. Students who are not in good standing will be advised regarding corrective steps to take, the deadlines for doing so, and the consequences of failing to remedy the matter. A student who fails to take corrective steps within the specified time limit will be terminated from candidacy for his/her degree. In cases of evident and extreme failure to achieve progress, a student may be dismissed from the degree program

without a probationary period. All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the EALAC policies and procedures. For more information regarding Good Standing please see the GSAS [Policy Handbook](#). Students can also reach out to the DGS and/or the Associate Director of Academic Programs.