

**Annual Key Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements**  
**Medieval and Byzantine Studies Program**  
**M.A. and Ph.D. Program in Medieval and Byzantine Studies**

**AY 2010-2011**

**Key Assessment Findings**

Both M.A. and Ph.D. students in the Medieval and Byzantine Studies Program are required to take comprehensive exams. Due to revisions and changes in curricular requirements in both the master's and the doctoral program, the faculty of Medieval and Byzantine Studies have updated the requirements and structure of the comprehensive exams to better reflect the goals of the revised graduate programs. Changes to the comprehensive exams have been implemented starting AY 2010-11, with the exception of M.A. students who entered under the old curriculum.

According to the old system, M.A. candidates were given a list of broad questions (in advance) which aimed to stimulate them to integrate the knowledge gained over the course of their studies. The comprehensive exam was drawn from that larger list of questions, answered over the course of two days. The exams were read and assessed by two faculty members. According to the new system, candidates have to generate reading lists in one major field (area of specialization) and two minor areas under the guidance of faculty experts and advisors. On day one they are examined in their major fields, on day two in their two minor fields, based on the reading lists. The exam is evaluated by three faculty members. In addition, in order to graduate, M.A. students are also required to complete a master's thesis or two interdisciplinary research papers assessed by two faculty members, chosen in accordance with their knowledge and expertise in the matters considered in the papers.

Similarly to the new M.A. comps, PhD comprehensive exams are created as part of a dynamic process in which the student and his major and minor concentration advisors devise and agree to a list of readings. Questions for the PhD comprehensives are then formulated to assess the student's critical engagement with and mastery of the material presented in those texts. On days one and two the student is examined in the major field, on day three in the minor field. The exam is evaluated by three readers.

In Academic Year 2010-2011 (between Summer 2010 and Spring 2011), the Center administered three M.A. comps (one in the M.A., two in the M.A./Ph.D. program) and one Ph.D. comps. One M.A. candidate registered for comps in spring 2011 but postponed his exams until Fall 2011. All candidates passed their exams, however, the small size of the program precludes detailed presentation of the data. Rubrics for assessing M.A. and Ph.D. comprehensive exams have been developed and applied. The results of the rubrics will be aggregated over time and discussed in future years to preserve confidentiality of students.

## **Curricular Improvements**

The 2008-09 and 2009-10 academic years saw a vibrant discussion among MBS faculty about the structure of academic programs at all levels, which resulted in the revision of our graduate programs (M.A., Ph.D. and Certificate). Perhaps the most far-reaching changes were made to the M.A. program which had previously been rather prescriptive, setting out numerous required courses, which made it challenging for students to focus on areas beyond medieval Christian Europe. Given recent changes in the field of Medieval Studies and the University's strengths in the medieval Islamic world (including Oriental Christianity) and Byzantium, there was widespread agreement among the MBS Curriculum Committee members and the Steering Committee members that greater flexibility should be introduced into the curriculum. The redesigned M.A. and Ph.D. programs have been approved by various committees and implemented as of Fall 2010. For descriptions see <http://mbs.cua.edu/graduate/ma-program.cfm> and <http://mbs.cua.edu/graduate/phd-program.cfm>.

In accordance with the revised graduate programs, the faculty of MBS, with the approval of the Steering Committee, have also redesigned the comprehensive exams (see above). The changes are effective as of AY 2010-11 but the old type of comprehensive exams will continue to be administered for students who entered before the revision of the graduate programs.

Submitted by Lilla Kopár