

From: NELC Department  
To: Graduate School/Council on Academic Affairs Curriculum Subcommittee  
Date: 3/9/2016

This is a response to the queries sent by the Graduate School/Council on Academic Affairs Curriculum Subcommittee, based on its meeting on Friday, February 19, 2016, about the proposal for curricular changes to the Near Eastern Languages and Culture (NELC) graduate program.

Please find below the six numbered queries that we received and the responses immediately following each one.

1. The proposed curricular changes appear to increase flexibility within the NELC graduate program in response to both student needs and faculty expertise. In many ways, the changes enable the development of customized graduate programs of study. The proposal acknowledges the importance that will be placed on assessment of final qualifications. Please elaborate the approach that will be used to ensure consistency in rigor and quality across all programs of study and program graduates. Accordingly, please share the average graduate student-faculty ratio (or simply average graduate student enrollment, and average graduate faculty FTE) to inform our understanding of the impact of these changes. This will also help us understand the statement on the first page of the proposal that the curricular changes are “designed to suit a graduate program which will focus more energy and attention on fewer students.”

Consistency and rigor across our PhD program will be enhanced by several of the changes we have proposed. These include

- a smaller faculty/student ratio, now with a duo of regular advisors for each student (rather than a sole advisor);
- required language proficiency exams (with alternative means of satisfying proficiency requirements as described in the proposal, and further below here);
- the inauguration of a new specific required course for all NELC graduate students, NELC 5101: Introduction to the Field of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures;
- planning graduate course offerings in line with student-specific needs, by cohort wherever possible.

The consistency and rigor of the program was not at issue before, and the NELC PhD program has not narrowed the scope of subjects possible within it. Therefore, most of our past practices will continue alongside the newly proposed ones. The proposed changes are not intended to be a complete overhaul of the PhD program; that is not needed.

With regard to faculty/student ratio, over the last five years, the NELC faculty FTE has fluctuated only a little, as departures counterbalanced additions. Two of the additions were unplanned hires resulting from accommodations to spouses hired in other units. In FY2011,

NELC had 14.5 FTE. This dipped to 13.5 FTE in FY 2013 and 2014, rose to 15.5 in FY 2015, and then dropped again to 14.5 this year.

Late in 2014, then-Provost Steinmetz asked for graduate programs to be reduced by 20%. This coincided with serious required budget cuts. By allowing students to graduate without adding a like number, NELC went well beyond this goal. The positive side of the outcome is that we reoriented to focus on recruiting a small and selective group, with greatly further enhanced attention to quality and promise.

In the NELC response of 2011 to the external review of 2010, it is reported that there were “over 30 graduate students” in NELC. Two thirds of these were MA students. Today we have 16 graduate students. Only one of these is enrolled for the MA, and he is expected to continue with our PhD upon finishing that. The rest are all PhD students who have earned Master’s degrees with us or at other institutions.

With respect to the number of graduate students enrolled, we therefore have a program 50% of the size it had in 2011. Two of the remaining PhD students are self-funded by their home countries; one finds regular funding in another unit; two are on fellowships this year. We are therefore funding only eleven students as GTAs. This reflects our greatly tightened budget constraints.

And so, we have moved from a 1-2 ratio of faculty to graduate students to a nearly 1-1 ratio.

The change was engineered mostly by reducing the number of admitted students. This allows us to devote more resources to recruiting high-potential students and to focus on the ones we already have.

Reducing the number of graduate students in our program has meant reducing our departmental teaching capacity. (We have fewer GTAs teaching and supporting large lecture courses.) It also means lower enrollments in our own graduate courses. We would prefer to maintain high teaching capacity and high enrollments in graduate courses. That said, we wish to emphasize the positive aspects of diminishing the size of our graduate program. We will now be able to devote more attention to individual students. This accords with our vision to facilitate more independent research paths among our PhD students.

2. Page 5 of the proposal describes two ways to demonstrate research competence in a Near Eastern language in lieu of a translation exam. The two options are labeled ‘course work in lieu of one examination’, and ‘waiver of one exam for native speaker of Near Eastern research language’. Please clarify if it would be possible for both translation exams to be waived in the situation where an enrolled student were both a Native speaker of one language and had completed at least nine units of credit in courses in the language with a grade of B+ or higher in each course, or whether, at most, one translation exam may be waived for any given enrolled student.

As before, so also under the revised program, NELC PhD students will have to demonstrate research competence in two Near Eastern languages. One language is considered primary and the other, secondary.

Currently, NELC does not require translation exams for its students. Course work alone is required to satisfy the requirement in language proficiency. In the proposed revisions, we are adding exams to ensure more uniform outcomes. This is also in accord with practices in NELC departments at other research universities.

Primary research language. Demonstrating research proficiency in the primary language will now require a translation exam. This exam is waived only for native speakers of the research language who have a university degree from an institution in which that language is the medium of instruction.

For example, we currently have two PhD students with BAs and MAs from universities in Saudi Arabia. They are both highly educated native speakers of modern Arabic. One of them is a published poet in Arabic. Both are studying modern Arabic literature. It should not be necessary for them to take an exam to demonstrate proficiency in modern literary Arabic.

Secondary research language. Under the current, unrevised rule, students are required to take nine units of a language at any level, with grades of B+ or higher, to demonstrate basic research proficiency in a secondary Near Eastern research language. Note that taking nine units of courses in a language entails taking numerous different language quizzes and translation exams.

The proposed revisions add the alternative of satisfying this requirement by translation examination. This is useful, for example, where students have enough background in a secondary research language (as perhaps from a prior MA degree) that they do not need to develop further proficiency by means of more coursework.

Therefore, *it is possible that some students will not need to take either of the newly-proposed translation examinations prior to their candidacy exams.* That said, these situations will be rare: only if a student happens to be a native speaker of his or her primary research language and then satisfies the secondary language requirement with coursework (which includes course exams and other regular assessment of language ability).

Our current graduate program does not require translation examinations prior to candidacy exams (although some candidacy exams have included portions involving translation). We are adding exams to the program to enhance our evaluation of PhD students' language abilities. It is questionable whether the current 24-unit requirement of graduate course work in a primary Near Eastern research language has uniformly accomplished the goal. We believe that the examinations will ensure a more uniform evaluation across the department than the current situation in which each student takes a wide variety of different courses of varying language content.

3. The first page of the proposal mentions an external review in May 2010 and the second page of the proposal mentions a vote to approve the "new vision" in 2014. Please provide the context around the sequencing of events and activities that result in the proposal for curricular changes being forwarded in January 2016.

The changes recommended by the external review of May 2010 were under intense discussion in Autumn 2010. The outcome was an official faculty-authored departmental response in February of 2011, which was a "prelude to a plan of action." That plan did not materialize, along with

specific changes to the graduate program, when the long-standing department chair, Dick Davis, retired at the end of Spring 2012, and was followed by two different interim chairs, one of whom left OSU for another institution after one semester (Autumn 2012). In the midst of these changes, the department staff was also reduced by the College and there was a complete turnover of personnel. There was almost no administrative continuity.

The current chair, Kevin van Bladel, was recruited for the job from another institution; he began in Autumn 2013. One of the new chair's priorities has been to lead revisions to the graduate program. The "new vision" for the graduate program referred to is specifically the text included under that rubric on page 2 of the proposal for program revisions under review. This was approved by NELC faculty vote in Au14, a year after the new chair's arrival at OSU. The vision in itself did not create curricular changes, but it asserted our priorities for the program we deemed most suited to our department and to the future of the field and to foster competitive outcomes. We spent the subsequent year discussing (among many other issues) how to realize this vision in programmatic terms. The proposal that has reached you is the result of those discussions. We submitted these proposed revisions for approval in Au15. It reached your committee in January 2016; your response came on 26 February.

Our proposed revisions to the graduate program respond specifically to the external review of 2010. This review found fault with the NELC graduate program at the time for lacking a distinctive identity and for what they perceived in their brief visit as low ability of some of the admitted students. At the time of that external review, the PhD program was quite new—inaugurated in 2007, it was new enough that nobody then had finished it.

Our vision for the PhD program and our proposed revisions to the structure of the program respond to the constructive criticism of the external review. What we have proposed to you now is a program the structure of which will increase our national and international competitiveness. Whereas most NELC PhD programs require their students to follow a subfield "track," we are fostering interdisciplinary research encapsulated by the expression "Make discoveries bridging fields." This model is both desirable to our faculty and realistic in the face of a fluctuating faculty roster, which is tied to the fluctuation of areas of expertise we have to offer in a given year. We believe that our proposed model will foster innovation on the part of graduate students as they become independent researchers.

Simultaneously, the reduced size of our graduate program (by 50%) allows us to invest more energy and attention to recruiting selected high-potential students and to mentoring them as they progress through the program.

This is the context and sequence of events leading to the proposal under your review.

4. The proposal describes the departure and retirement of seven faculty members, and recruitment of five new faculty "in areas not covered before." Please provide a brief explanation of how language instruction and proficiency is developed in doctoral candidates. In particular, do the five newly hired faculty teach language courses? How is the balance between language and culture maintained in the graduate program?

It is not a goal of the department to "balance" instruction and research in language and culture. All graduate students (as all NELC faculty) require advanced research competence in Near Eastern languages, but the path to this competence is different for different students because of

their varying backgrounds, prior education, and research subjects. The goal is to use the languages to research cultural (and linguistic, historical, etc.) phenomena. The languages themselves require quite different kinds of training and students each come from a different language background. Some students use in their research a variety of ancient languages no longer spoken; others need spoken fluency in a modern unwritten vernacular to interview subjects; others have other needs entirely. We now select our graduate students and plan their curriculum to facilitate their stated research goals as suited to faculty mentoring capabilities. No single plan can accommodate the training for all researchers on the languages and cultures of the human territory from Mauritania to Bangladesh, the region NELC covers for The Ohio State University, and subjects from a range of five thousand years of history. Some students need time studying abroad to master a spoken language; others need a series of seminars reading several different ancient languages not spoken by anyone today; others need a steady series of seminars to learn precision in the reading of individual literary languages of centuries-long traditions such as Arabic, Hebrew, and Persian under the close watch of faculty members.

We therefore request approval for our proposed, revised PhD program, which is flexible enough to be realistic with respect to the variety in types of training required and to the varieties of training we have to offer.

It is true that the newly-hired faculty have more expertise in, and teach more, cultural and historical material than language pedagogy. This is a standing issue in the department, as a review of departures and hiring over the last five years will show.

### **Departures**

#### **FY12**

Margaret Mills, Professor, Persian folklore, retired.

Dick Davis, Professor, Persian poetry, retired.

#### **FY13**

George Tamer, Professor of Arabic and Sofia Chair in Arabic Studies, returned to previous employer in Germany.

Bruce Fudge, Associate Professor of Arabic, moved with family to University of Geneva, Switzerland.

#### **FY14**

Parvaneh Pourshariati, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, transferred to another university (joining spouse).

#### **FY15**

Bilal Orfali, Associate Professor of Arabic and Sofia Chair in Arabic Studies, returned to previous employer in Lebanon.

Youssef Yacoubi, Assistant Professor of Arabic, non-renewal decision in fourth-year review, left OSU.

\*Ongoing non-availability

Snjezana Buzov, Associate Professor of Turkish and Ottoman Studies, incapacitated by severe illness since December 2013 (but still a tenured faculty member).

### Arrivals

FY13

Nada Moumtaz, Assistant Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Researches and teaches Islamic law and anthropology of modern Middle East (teaches Arabic minimally, with teaching divided with International Studies and Comparative Studies).

FY14

Ila Nagar, Assistant Professor of South Asian Studies. Researches and teaches Hindi, South Asian sociolinguistics (not specialties of previous faculty; teaches Hindi to undergraduates, a language previously taught only by a lecturer).

Kevin van Bladel, Associate Professor of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and Chair. Researches and teaches ancient Iranian languages and history, Syriac, and early Arabic scholarship (two areas not specialties of previous faculty; teaches languages not taught in NELC before).

FY15

Hadi Jorati, Assistant Professor. Researches and teaches Arabic and Persian historiography and the history of science (not specialties of previous faculty; teaches language minimally). *Spousal accommodation hire.*

Lynn Kaye, Assistant Professor. Researches and teaches Jewish law and Babylonian Talmud (not specialties of previous faculty; teaches language minimally). *Spousal accommodation hire.*

Bilal Orfali, Associate Professor and Sofia Chair in Arabic Studies. Researched and taught classical Arabic literature. *Departed after one year of budget-cutting environment.*

FY16

Sean Anthony, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies. Researches and teaches Islamic studies (replaces Pourshariati with different research and teaching interests; does not teach languages).

The net results of these faculty fluctuations are:

- Our faculty roster devoted to Arabic has diminished by about half, to the point that the department chair has taught a voluntary free overload in order to ensure that undergraduate Arabic majors could graduate on time. We do have several faculty members not devoted solely to teaching Arabic but who use Arabic constantly in their research and can supervise students using Arabic.
- We have no faculty devoted to Persian and advanced instruction in Persian (although we have faculty who use Persian regularly in their own research).

- Our faculty member in Turkish and Ottoman studies is not available due to illness. Therefore, advanced instruction in Turkish is not available, either.

Consequently, our department is not able to offer graduate-level instruction in Persian or Turkish, as we did before. Our strength in Arabic is much reduced, with three full-time Arabic specialists having left, two or three part-time Arabic specialists with ongoing teaching reductions having been added.

Since his arrival in 2013 (i.e. for two years in a row), the NELC chair has requested the authorization to hire in both Persian and Arabic. Of these, we have been authorized to conduct searches for our endowed Sofia Chair in Arabic studies. We have not been allowed to replace Prof. Yacoubi after his position was not renewed during his fourth-year review, and this loss of a position has been particularly damaging to our curricular offerings. We have not been authorized to replace retired faculty devoted to Persian since they retired in FY2012. We were, however, allowed to conduct a search to replace a departure in Islamic Studies (not language-teaching faculty).

These losses of coverage are a major factor in the loss of Title VI funding to OSU's Middle East Studies Center.

We have remained unusually strong in Hebrew and Jewish studies and Islamic studies; we now have unusual strength in Late Antiquity and in anthropological approaches to Middle Eastern studies, both of which are also now extraordinary interdepartmental strengths for ASC; and we have added strength in South Asia and the study of law in Middle Eastern traditions.

These added areas are important to NELC and to the College but they coincide with losses in advanced language teaching capacity. One set of new subjects came with the hire of the new chair, who was not hired to fill a specific field. Another set of strengths came with the unplanned hire of two faculty members as spousal accommodations to other departments, which then-divisional dean of Arts & Humanities assured us would *not* count against our future hiring plans.

**We are convinced that the proposed changes to our PhD curriculum would be beneficial even if there had been no faculty departures or arrivals.** That said, the changes in the faculty roster that have occurred, along with the changes in faculty expertise available, practically compel us to make these beneficial changes to our PhD Program.

5. Student Advising Sheet: You are encouraged to develop a student advising sheets that clearly communicates to students the program requirements as well as enables them to document completion of program requirements.

**Please find the student advising sheet attached (as well as the current advising sheet, for comparison).**

6. Finally, please obtain a letter from Dr. Peter Hahn, Divisional Dean, Arts and Humanities, confirming knowledge of and support for the proposed curricular changes.

**Please find the letter from Dr. Hahn attached.**

**From:** Montalto, Catherine  
**Sent:** Friday, February 26, 2016 10:42 AM  
**To:** van Bladel, Kevin T.  
**Cc:** Herness, Scott; Montalto, Catherine  
**Subject:** Near Eastern Languages & Culture (NELC) Curricular Changes

Good morning Dr. van Bladel,

The Graduate School/Council on Academic Affairs Curriculum Subcommittee met on Friday, February 19, 2016 and reviewed the proposal for curricular changes to the Near Eastern Languages and Culture (NELC) graduate program.

The committee's feedback and requests are summarized below.

1. The proposed curricular changes appear to increase flexibility within the NELC graduate program in response to both student needs and faculty expertise. In many ways, the changes enable the development of customized graduate programs of study. The proposal acknowledges the importance that will be placed on assessment of final qualifications. Please elaborate the approach that will be used to ensure consistency in rigor and quality across all programs of study and program graduates. Accordingly, please share the average graduate student-faculty ratio (or simply average graduate student enrollment, and average graduate faculty FTE) to inform our understanding of the impact of these changes. This will also help us understand the statement on the first page of the proposal that the curricular changes are "designed to suit a graduate program which will focus more energy and attention on fewer students."
2. Page 5 of the proposal describes two ways to demonstrate research competence in a Near Eastern language in lieu of a translation exam. The two options are labeled 'course work in lieu of one examination', and 'waiver of one exam for native speaker of Near Eastern research language'. Please clarify if it would be possible for both translation exams to be waived in the situation where an enrolled student were both a Native speaker of one language and had completed at least nine units of credit in courses in the language with a grade of B+ or higher in each course, or whether, at most, one translation exam may be waived for any given enrolled student.
3. The first page of the proposal mentions an external review in May 2010 and the second page of the proposal mentions a vote to approve the "new vision" in 2014. Please provide the context around the sequencing of events and activities that result in the proposal for curricular changes being forwarded in January 2016.
4. The proposal describes the departure and retirement of seven faculty members, and recruitment of five new faculty "in areas not covered before." Please provide a brief explanation of how language instruction and proficiency is developed in doctoral candidates. In particular,



do the five newly hired faculty teach language courses? How is the balance between language and culture maintained in the graduate program?

5. Student Advising Sheet: You are encouraged to develop a student advising sheets that clearly communicates to students the program requirements as well as enables them to document completion of program requirements.
  
6. Finally, please obtain a letter from Dr. Peter Hahn, Divisional Dean, Arts and Humanities, confirming knowledge of and support for the proposed curricular changes.

Once this information is received, the committee will return to the review of the proposal.

Please let me know if you have additional questions.

Thank you.



Chair

Graduate School/Council on Academic Affairs Curriculum Subcommittee



**Catherine P. Montalto, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor

College of Education and Human Ecology Department of Human Sciences

115 F Campbell Hall, 1787 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210

614-292-4571 Office / 614-688-8133 Fax

[montalto.2@osu.edu](mailto:montalto.2@osu.edu) [osu.edu](http://osu.edu)

*Buckeyes consider the environment before printing.*

### Student Information

Name (last, first)	Current program (MA / PhD / other)	year in current program

### Committee Members [min. 2 current Graduate Faculty members for MA, 4 for candidacy exams, and 3 for dissertation]

role	name	home department
advisor/Chair		
co-advisor		
members		

### Core Coursework

requirement	Course	Title	term	grade
required	NELC 5101	<i>Introduction to Field of NELC</i>		
minimum 2	NELC 5401	<i>Methodologies for the Study of Ancient Religions</i>		
	NELC 5568	<i>Studies in Orality &amp; Literacy</i>		
	NELC 7301	<i>Theorizing Literature</i>		
	CS 7360	<i>Theorizing Culture</i>		
	CS 7370	<i>Theorizing Religion</i>		
	HIST 7900	<i>Coll. in Philosophy of History, Historiography (...)</i>		

### Specialization 1

requirement satisfaction (CHECK ONE): <input type="checkbox"/> Native speaker, with relevant previous degree (can only waive 1 exam) <input type="checkbox"/> qualifying exam

### Specialization 2

requirement satisfaction (CHECK ONE): <input type="checkbox"/> Native speaker, with relevant previous degree (can only waive 1 exam) <input type="checkbox"/> second qualifying exam <input type="checkbox"/> 9 credit hours coursework (if checked, list below)				
course	title	credit hours	term	grade

[continued on reverse...]

**Elective Coursework** [18 grad Arabic, Hebrew, NELC, Persian, or Turkish credit hours, incl. 5193 *Individual Studies*]

course	title	credit hours	term	grade

**Advanced Coursework** [15 credit hours at 7000- or 8000- level; can duplicate coursework for other requirements]

course	title	credit hours	term	grade

**Modern Secondary Scholarship languages** [French & German, unless approved by Grad. Studies Committee]

Language	Competency method (informal exam, departmental exam, etc.)	Date

**Completion Benchmarks** [ALL FIELDS REQUIRED - indicate "n/a" if not applicable]

	completed? (Y / N)	actual/expected term(s)
Master of Arts / MA		
Qualifying Exams, specialization 1		
Qualifying Exams, specialization 2		
Candidacy Exam		
Prospectus		
Field- / Archival Work		
Graduation		

**Comments / Notes**



**College of Arts and Sciences**

186 University Hall  
230 North Oval Mall  
Columbus, OH 43210  
614-292-1667 Phone  
614-292-8666 Fax

artsandsciences.osu.edu

March 4, 2016

Council on Academic Affairs Curriculum Subcommittee  
Graduate School  
250 University Hall  
230 N. Oval Mall  
CAMPUS

Dear Subcommittee Members:

On behalf of the College of Arts and Sciences, I write to express enthusiastic support for the proposal by the Department of Near Eastern Languages & Culture. I have reviewed the details of the proposal and support the adoption of the curricular changes as outlined.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Hahn', written in a cursive style.

Peter L. Hahn  
Professor of History  
Divisional Dean, Arts and Humanities  
College of Arts and Sciences

Department of Near Eastern Languages & Cultures  
Graduate Student status self-report form [for admission prior to Autumn 2016]

**Student Information**

Name (last, first)	Current program (MA / PhD / other)	year in current program

**Committee Members** [min. 2 current Graduate Faculty members for MA, 4 for candidacy exams, and 3 for dissertation]

role	name	home department
advisor/Chair		
members		

**Core Coursework**

requirement	Course	Title	term	grade
(before 2011/12)	NELC 5801 [680]	<i>Basic Bibliographic &amp; Reference Tools</i>		
(since 2011/12)	NELC 5568 [648]	<i>Studies in Orality &amp; Literacy</i>		
(minimum 1)	CLAS 5401	<i>Methodologies for the Study of Ancient Religions</i>		
	NELC 7301	<i>Theorizing Literature</i>		
	CS 7360 [716]	<i>Theorizing Culture</i>		
	CS 7370 [725]	<i>Theorizing Religion</i>		

**Primary Language/Culture Area** [24 graduate-level credit hours, incl. 5193 individual studies]

language area				
course	title	credit hours	term	grade

**Secondary Language/Culture Area** [9 graduate-level credit hours, incl. 5193 individual studies]

language area				
course	title	credit hours	term	grade

*[continued on reverse...]*

**Ancillary / Allied Disciplinary Field** [15 graduate-level credit hours, incl. 5193 individual studies]

field				
course	title	credit hours	term	grade

**Advanced Coursework** [18 credit hours at 7000- or 8000- level; can duplicate coursework for other requirements]

course	title	credit hours	term	grade

**Modern Secondary Scholarship languages**

Language	Competency method (informal exam, departmental exam, etc.)	Date

**Completion Benchmarks** [ALL FIELDS REQUIRED]

	completed? (Y / N)	actual/expected term(s)
Master of Arts / MA		
candidacy exam		
prospectus		
field- / archival work		
graduation		

**Comments / Notes**

--