

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Humanities
[For Student Cohort Admitted from 2025/2026 and thereafter]

The PhD degree program in the Division of Humanities is interdisciplinary in nature. Its aim is to provide training for students who intend to pursue professional careers.

I. Admission Requirements

All applicants must meet the general requirements for admission set by the University as outlined in the [Handbook for Research Postgraduate Studies](#) of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology:

Applicants seeking admission to a doctoral program should have obtained a bachelor's degree with a proven record of outstanding performance from a recognized institution or presented evidence of satisfactory work at the postgraduate level on a full-time basis for at least one year, or on a part-time basis for at least two years; and have satisfied the specific requirements prescribed by the School and department concerned as to their chosen subject of research, as well as their fitness to undertake the research.

Applicants whose first language is not English and whose bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification was awarded by institutions where the medium of instruction was not English are expected to have a level of English proficiency adequate for the study of humanities subjects at HKUST. Example of proficiency evidence is an overall score of 6.5 with no sub-score lower than 5.5 for International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or equivalent (score is valid for two years from the test date).

For those specializing in China-related topics, applicants must provide evidence of appropriate degree of proficiency in Chinese language.

Also, a master's degree thesis or a substantial essay in either English or Chinese must be submitted by the applicant.

II. Areas of Concentration

Students enrolled in the program may specialize in Linguistics; Literature, Film, and Media Studies; History and Anthropology; or Philosophy and Religion, but they are expected to go beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries and cultivate knowledge and expertise in interdisciplinary dialogue and interaction.

III. Academic Advising

Upon entering the program, students will receive initial guidance from a temporary advisor assigned by the Division's Postgraduate Committee (PGC).

The PGC, after consulting with the student and the faculty member, will assign a regular academic advisor—who will also serve as the PhD thesis advisor—to each student no later than the end of the second term.

Students will then work under the guidance of their PhD thesis advisors to formulate a study plan, combining coursework in their chosen area of concentration and in other disciplines, and to write a PhD thesis.

At the end of each term, the student's progress will be reported to the PGC by his or her advisor.

IV. Program Requirements

The requirements for the PhD degree are as follows:

1. A minimum of 21 credits of coursework, including HUMA6200 Research Project in Humanities;
2. Professional development courses, i.e. PDEV6770D Professional Development for Research Postgraduate Students, PDEV6800D Introduction to Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (for full-time students only) and HUMA6300 Postgraduate Seminar;
3. LANG5005B Communicating Research in English;
4. Qualifying examination;
5. HUMA7990 Doctoral Thesis Research; and
6. Presentation and oral defense of the MPhil thesis.

1. Credits

Students are required to fulfill a minimum of 21 credits of postgraduate courses offered by the Division of Humanities, including HUMA6200 Research Project in Humanities. In addition, students are required to complete and pass PDEV6770D Professional Development for Research Postgraduate Students, PDEV6800D Introduction to Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (for full-time students only), HUMA6300 Postgraduate Seminar, and LANG5005B Communicating Research in English. The credits earned from PDEV6770D, HUMA6300 and LANG5005B cannot be counted toward the credit requirements.

HUMA6200 Research Project in Humanities

All students enrolled in this program must take this 3-credit course. The student taking this course is required to produce a substantial research paper on a chosen topic in his/her area of concentration under the guidance of his/her advisor, and submit it to a journal in due course.

PDEV6770D Professional Development for Research Postgraduate Students

All students enrolled in this program must take this 1-credit professional development course. Humanities MPhil graduates who have taken and passed this course before may be exempted from this requirement, subject to prior approval of the School.

PDEV6800D Introduction to Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (for full-time students only)

Complete and pass PDEV6800D Introduction to Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

HUMA6300 Postgraduate Seminar

In addition to PDEV6770D, HUMA6300 is another 1-credit required course on professional development. In the second and third terms, full-time students taking this Postgraduate Seminar are required to attend no less than 5 public lectures or seminars of the Division and produce critical comments for each, which are submitted to the advisors. Part-time students are required to do the same from the second to the fifth term. A one-day symposium will be held at the end of the third term (the fifth term for part-time students) where all students enrolled in this course will attend and take turns to present his/her research paper and serve as discussants. The advisors will give students taking the course a Pass or Fail according to the students' performance in the presentation of the research paper, contribution to discussion at the symposium, and critical comments on lectures and seminars. Humanities MPhil graduates who have taken and passed this course before may be exempted from this requirement, subject to prior approval of the School.

LANG5005B Communicating Research in English

This is a 1-credit required course. Students can be exempted from taking LANG5005B with the agreement of the Division Head and PGC or if they have completed this course in the Humanities MPhil program before.

Students are required to focus their research on one of the four concentrations, namely Linguistics; Literature, Film,

and Media Studies; History and Anthropology; and Philosophy and Religion. For all areas of concentration, of the remaining 18 credits of the required coursework, at least 9 must be taken in the student's chosen concentration. Before the commencement of each academic year, the Division will provide students with a list of courses offered in each area of concentration.

For all entering students, they must propose a course-taking plan for the first academic year in consultation with their advisors. The proposal, consisting of a list of courses to be taken in the first year and a study plan specifying the learning objectives and how these objectives can be achieved by the proposed list of courses, should be submitted to the PGC for endorsement with prior approval of the advisor, no later than the end of the add/drop period of the first term.

Students specializing in Linguistics:

Students will focus their research on one of three areas: (1) Chinese linguistics, including syntax and semantics from a synchronic and diachronic perspective; (2) the study of how speech sounds are produced, perceived, and processed by native and non-native speakers (of Chinese languages), using experimental methods; (3) the sociolinguistic study of language and migration.

Students specializing in Literature, Film, and Media Studies:

Students will focus primarily on Chinese literature, Film, or Media Studies from comparative, interdisciplinary, and theoretical perspectives.

Students specializing in History and Anthropology:

Students will have the option of choosing one of the following two areas: Area A - Chinese History and World History; or Area B - Cultural Anthropology and Social History.

Area A - Chinese History and World History

This plan focuses on the history of China with emphasis on the period from early China to the People's Republic, whereas World history focuses on European and/or American history. Approaches to the subject can be economic, social, political, cultural, intellectual, or comparative.

Area B - Cultural Anthropology and Social History

This plan focuses primarily on South China. Research areas include not only Guangdong and Fujian, but also the regions extending from Taiwan through Hong Kong and Macau to Hainan. Other possible subjects of study are overseas Chinese (in Southeast Asia, Japan, North America, and Europe) and the ethnic groups of southern and southwestern China (She, Yao, Dan, etc.).

Students specializing in Philosophy and Religion:

Students will focus their research on at least one of the following areas: Chinese, Asian, Western, and comparative philosophy and/or religion.

2. Language Requirements

The study of a foreign language may be an important part of a student's preparation for research and teaching. A third language (normally Japanese, French or German) requirement, other than English and Chinese, is optional, but according to specific needs of the thesis research, the advisor has the authority to require a student to take one and decide what level of proficiency should be achieved before graduation. The level of competence in a third language can be demonstrated either through satisfactory completion of a second-year language course taken within the last five years or through acceptable performance in a standardized examination. The third language, if required, must be fulfilled no later than the term in which the student completes the qualifying examination.

In the event a standardized language examination to be arranged by the Division is necessary, the student should make this request to the PGC. The PGC will appoint a language examiner who, after consulting with the student's advisor, will determine the date, content, and format of the examination. The PGC will inform the student in writing of the result of the examination no later than seven days after the examination.

3. The Qualifying Examination (Advancement to Candidacy)

To become a doctoral candidate, a student must pass a written qualifying examination in two distinct fields.

No later than the end of the second term (third term for part-time students), the PGC, after consulting with the student and upon the recommendation of the student's thesis advisor, will invite two other faculty members in the Division of Humanities to join the PhD thesis advisor to form a PhD Thesis Committee. Of these two additional members, one will be assigned by the PGC as the chair of the committee, whose responsibilities include chairing both the qualifying examination and the handling of the prospectus. The same committee will administer the qualifying examination in each field of study.

A comprehensive reading list that includes the major works and current scholarship in the field must be submitted to and approved by the PhD Thesis Committee at least one month before the examination is administered.

The qualifying examination should be completed no later than the student's third term of study (fifth term for part-time students). The examination in the two fields must be taken within the same term.

The qualifying examination comprises two parts, each of which is a nine-hour (from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) examination in one field. It is administered normally in the fall and spring terms while school is in session. Students will be provided with a computer, on request.

The committee chair will announce the result of the qualifying examination in writing to the student, with a copy to the PGC, no later than seven days after the examination.

Students who fail the qualifying examination may make a second attempt no later than their fourth term of study (seventh term for part-time students). Students who fail twice will be required to withdraw from the program. ***Students who fail to take or pass the qualifying examination within the stipulated timeframe will be considered as failing the qualifying examination, and are not allowed to continue with their doctoral studies.***

Students specializing in Linguistics may choose any two fields of the following areas:

- (a) Chinese Dialectology
- (b) Cantonese Linguistics
- (c) Chinese Historical Grammar
- (d) Chinese phonetics and phonology
- (e) Sociolinguistics
- (f) Linguistic Ethnography

Students specializing in Literature, Film, and Media Studies will be examined in two of the following fields of study:

Field A: Either (a) A period in Chinese/Japanese/World literature/film/media
(e.g., pre-Qin, Han and the Six Dynasties, Tang and Song, from Yuan to Qing, twentieth century, Republican, Socialist, Postsocialist, Contemporary);
Or (b) A genre in
Chinese/Japanese/World literature/film/media
(e.g., fiction, drama, poetry, prose, animation, documentary).

Field B: Either (a) Traditional Chinese/Japanese/World literary theories;
Or (b) Modern literary/cultural/film/media theories (major theoretical schools since structuralism).

Field C: Film and Media Studies

Students specializing in History and Anthropology will be examined in one of the following two plans of study:

Plan A. Chinese History and World History:

Field A: A period in Chinese history or World history.
Field B: Either (a) A period in Chinese history or World history other than Field A;
Or (b) A specific field (e.g., socioeconomic history, popular religion) or a major sociocultural topic (e.g., ethnicity, kinship).

Plan B. Cultural Anthropology and Social History:

Field A: A specific field (e.g., socioeconomic history, popular religion) or a major sociocultural topic (e.g., ethnicity, kinship).
Field B: Either (a) A specific field (e.g., socioeconomic history, popular religion) or a major sociocultural topic (e.g., ethnicity, kinship) different from Field A;
Or (b) A period in Chinese history.

Students specializing in Philosophy and Religion will be examined in one of the following three plans of study:

Plan A. Chinese Philosophy or Religion:

Field A: Chinese philosophy or religion.
Field B: Either (a) Topics in Chinese philosophy or religion;
Or (b) Topics in Western philosophy or religion;
Or (c) Topics in Asian philosophy or religion (e.g., Indian, Japanese, Korean);
Or (d) Topics in comparative philosophy or religion.

Plan B. Comparative Philosophy or Religion:

Field A: Comparative philosophy or religion.
Field B: Either (a) Topics in Chinese philosophy or religion;
Or (b) Topics in Western philosophy or religion;
Or (c) Topics in Asian philosophy or religion (e.g., Indian, Japanese, Korean);
Or (d) Topics in comparative philosophy or religion.

Plan C. Analytic Philosophy or Religion:

Field A: Analytic philosophy or religion.
Field B: Either (a) Topics in Analytic philosophy or religion;
Or (b) Topics in Chinese philosophy or religion;
Or (c) Topics in Western philosophy or religion
Or (d) Topics in Comparative philosophy or religion.

4. The PhD Thesis

The thesis advisor will advise the student on his or her thesis. Other members of the PhD Thesis Committee will also advise the student upon request.

A PhD thesis prospectus (about 20 pages) should be submitted to the PhD Thesis Committee within three months (six months for part-time students) after successful completion of the qualifying examination. The prospectus must demonstrate a mastery of the literature on the proposed subject, identify an important intellectual question, outline a plan of research for completing the thesis, and include a detailed bibliography. The candidate is required to defend his or her prospectus in front of the committee and the committee chair will announce the committee's decision in writing to the student no later than seven days after the review, with a copy to the PGC.

The thesis is normally written in English. If a student wishes to use Chinese as the thesis language, prior approval must be obtained from the following levels: thesis advisor, Division's PGC, Division Head, and Dean of Humanities and Social Science. Petition to write the thesis in Chinese must be made by the student before the end of his or her third term of study.

A PhD thesis is a scholarly study on a subject based on original research and must demonstrate the level of originality appropriate to the doctoral degree. It must also demonstrate an awareness of the conceptual and methodological problems relating to the chosen topic and a solid command of bibliographical materials in the field of study. The format of the thesis should conform to the general university guidelines outlined in the [Handbook for Research Postgraduate Studies](#) of the University. The usual length of a PhD thesis is about 250 pages.

5. PhD Thesis Examination

When a student is ready to submit his or her PhD thesis, the PGC, after consulting with the student and his or her PhD thesis advisor, will set up a five-member Thesis Examination Committee. This committee will include the PhD thesis advisor, the other two members from the PhD Thesis Committee, one faculty member from outside the Division, and one member external to the University who has expertise in the field being examined.

According to University rules outlined in the [Handbook for Research Postgraduate Studies](#), the constitution of this five-member Thesis Examination Committee requires the formal approval of the Fok Ying Tung Graduate School.

The PhD Thesis Examination Committee is chaired by an individual from outside the Division, who is selected by the school office from a pool of senior faculty nominated by the dean of each school. This person presides over the examination, which is attended by the five members of the Thesis Examination Committee.

Each student who submits a thesis will need to defend it before the Thesis Examination Committee.

A total of seven copies of the thesis and an abstract of not more than 350 words must be submitted to the PGC four weeks prior to the oral examination. One of these copies will be placed in the General Office of the Division of Humanities for perusal by faculty, students, and other members of the University community.

A thesis defense will take place in front of the entire Thesis Examination Committee and a public audience. The student will discuss the issues raised in his or her completed work.

The chair of the Thesis Examination Committee will announce the result of the oral examination in writing to the student, with a copy to the PGC, no later than two days after the examination.

If revisions, either minor or major, are required, they will be relayed to the student by the chair of the committee in writing no later than ten days after the examination. Revisions must be made to the satisfaction of the committee before the degree can be officially recommended by the Head of the Division to the Senate Committee on Postgraduate Studies.

The normative period for completing a PhD degree in Humanities in full-time mode is three years.

V. Reconstitution of the PhD Thesis Committee

When a change in the PhD Thesis Committee is deemed necessary by the student, he or she must submit a written request to the PGC. The PGC will consider the request and make a decision on whether or not the committee should be reconstituted.

VI. Change in Thesis Topic

If, subsequent to having passed the qualifying examination and gained approval for the thesis prospectus, the student wishes to change his or her thesis topic, another prospectus must be prepared and submitted to the PhD Thesis Committee. The new prospectus must be approved by the committee before the student can proceed with the thesis.

VII. Transfer of Postgraduate Credits

Up to 9 postgraduate degree credits from another institution or another program may be applied toward the PhD degree in the Division of Humanities.

Petitions to transfer credits should be accompanied by an official transcript, the course syllabus, and written assignments of the course. Other information may be required if deemed necessary by the PGC. The PGC will determine the appropriateness of course credits petitioned by the student.