

CREES MA PORTFOLIO EXAM

The primary mission of the Master of Arts Degree Program in Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies is to provide a comprehensive interdisciplinary introduction to Russia, East Europe, and Eurasia with language competency appropriate for a wide range of professional careers in the government, private-sector, NGOs, business, international law, or media. It is also designed to meet the need of those students preparing for advanced graduate study in a particular discipline.

Upon completion of their 2-year MA degree program at CREES, students are expected to:

- demonstrate broad knowledge of the history, cultures, societies, and politics of the region;
- acquire language proficiency at the appropriate level of professional competence and use it in research activities;
- apply the variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the region;
- attain an on-site experience and analytical skill appropriate for an area expert

The traditional written MA exam has now been replaced with a portfolio, which consists of the parts listed below. The portfolio is read by a committee of three graduate faculty (from the student's three main areas of expertise) and tested through a 90-minute oral examination at the end of the student's final semester.

Committee:

The student creates the MA committee no later than the 7th week of the penultimate semester of study.

MA Reading List:

At that point the student together with the committee creates an MA reading list of no less than 15-20 readings that are crucial to understanding contemporary area studies, the student's three main disciplines, and the student's main region of focus.

The Electronic Portfolio:

The student places in the electronic portfolio proof that all requirements for the REES MA degree have been met. The student demonstrates in written scholarly work:

- Proficiency in the student's chosen foreign language (FL) with the result of an oral and a reading exam, signed by the student's 3rd-4th year FL instructor showing at least intermediate in oral proficiency and research-level proficiency in reading comprehension
- Ability to read, understand, and synthesize in written scholarly work a substantial number of sources in a target foreign language
- Knowledge of the student's special region from at least three disciplinary perspectives
- Use of a variety of methodologies
- Ability to synthesize theoretical and practical knowledge of regional affairs
- Cultural knowledge and awareness of the operation of diverse cultural patterns

- Effective oral presentation of scholarly findings
- Effective critical writing skills

The portfolio includes 6 items written by the student and is presented by the student in an oral exam format to an MA committee including 3 graduate faculty from 3 major area disciplines. The portfolio may be in hard-copy or in digital format (for example, on Blackboard) and must be accessible to the student, the student's MA committee, the CREES Director, and the CREES Associate Director. The MA student's portfolio is composed as follows:

1) 3 samples of major scholarly writing (each at least 3000 words plus bibliography with both English and target language sources, 10-12 pp.). These samples must include at least **one** original research paper and may include **two** of the following: a series of 3 policy briefs; a historiography paper or other synthetic essay with a critical literature review; an annotated literary translation; a lengthy essay exam; or other lengthy, critical work approved by the student's committee. All must have been completed in courses taken in 3 of the 5 required REES disciplines. Each piece of work should demonstrate appropriate knowledge of the given discipline and the ability to understand and use its methodologies and current research areas. At least one of these writing samples must include at least 25% target language sources.

These papers or equivalent assignments will already have been graded. The portfolio provides the opportunity to edit and adapt them, as needed. These papers/projects are the source of questions or discussion during the oral examination. Taken together, this work must demonstrate clear use of and intellectual engagement with sources in the student's target language.

The 3 papers/projects are due in the portfolio by the end of the 8th week of the student's final semester.

2) The Synthetic Essay (approximately 3500-word text plus bibliography, 13-15 pp.):

The synthetic essay should be an intellectual response to the student's work through the penultimate semester of area studies coursework, as well incorporating outside reading from the MA Reading List in the chosen region of specialization. It is the student's opportunity to reflect upon what he or she has learned, while drawing conclusions about the ways that various disciplinary ways of thinking intersect and inform each other.

The synthetic essay addresses the following themes or questions:

- Based on coursework at KU (including language courses) and the MA reading list for the student's chosen region of specialization, what are the major regional themes or problems?*** An answer to this question need not give equal emphasis to each of the five major disciplinary perspectives, but it should not be limited to, say, the student's major subject discipline. The student seeks to define topics common to several disciplinary approaches or overlapping themes. To illustrate major points, the student uses specific examples from primary sources, whether from coursework or the MA reading list.
- How has the study of various disciplinary approaches affected the way the student views this special area?*** How, for example, does normative or statistical analysis inform humanistic study,

and vice versa? The student uses specific examples, both from coursework and the MA reading list.

- c) ***Finally, what are the student's conclusions concerning the area studies degree?*** What are the two or three main concepts or ways of thinking that the student has absorbed? How does the student make sense of the REES interdisciplinary experience?

3) The Professional Essay (approximately 750-word text plus bibliography, about 3 pp.):

This essay should be viewed as an extended first draft of a future job application letter in the student's field. If the synthetic essay looks back, the professional essay should look forward, picking up where the synthetic essay left off and should address the following questions:

- a) What is the student's career objective?
- b) How has the KU REES MA prepared the student to move into a related career (please address, among other things, the REES curriculum, faculty, programming, resources)? If the plans include continuation of graduate study, the student will want to discuss how the area studies degree has offered good preparation and helped to shape the student's interests for further study at the PhD level.
- c) How will the area studies approach impact the student's future life and work?

4) MA Capstone Seminar Paper (approximately 7500-word text plus bibliography (at least 25% works in the student's target language). The student deposits a full (if still rough) draft of the MA capstone seminar paper by the end of the 8th week of the student's final semester.

One week before the oral examination (or by the end of the 12th week of the semester) the student provides the MA committee with a more finished draft of the capstone paper.

By the end of the penultimate semester the REES student forms a committee of 3 graduate faculty, representing the three disciplinary emphases of the student's portfolio papers (please see #1 above).

5) In the final exam of record the student conducts a 90-minute presentation of the portfolio to the MA committee. Approximately 30% of questions will address the 3 research papers (or equivalent projects); 40% will deal with the MA capstone seminar paper; 30% will engage with the student's synthetic and professional essays. Following an unsuccessful performance, the student may retake the oral examination once.

6) Assessment in research skills, responsible scholarship, and cultural competency is conducted in the first semester and final semester of the student's MA career. In the first semester the instructor of REES 898, the introduction to REE area studies, completes the initial assessment. Using the same rubric, the student's committee chair fills out the final assessment following the oral presentation and discussion of the student's portfolio. Both results are placed in the student's permanent file.

Timeline of Deadlines for the MA Portfolio

Penultimate Semester:

7th week: student forms committee and secures the committee chair

12th week: student and committee file the student's 20-item reading list with the CREES Associate Director

Final Semester:

1st week: CREES Associate Director reserves 318 Bailey for 90-minute oral portfolio presentations.

2nd week: CREES Associate Director establishes a Blackboard site for each examinee; adds the student, the MA committee members, and the CREES Director, as users.

7th week: The student deposits all 3 seminar papers/projects.

8th week: The student deposits a rough draft of the MA Capstone paper.

11th week: The student deposits the synthetic essay and the professional essay.

12th week: The student deposits a near-final draft of the MA Capstone paper.

12th-13th week: 90-minute oral portfolio presentations