

General Guidelines for Comprehensive Exams in Comparative Studies

No later than the last semester of coursework, the student will, in consultation with the Program Director, select an Exam Committee--3 faculty members, one of whom will be appointed chair. Members of the committee must be regular faculty in the College, and the majority, including the chair, must hold tenure. It is anticipated, but not required, that the Exam Committee will constitute the core of the student's dissertation supervisory committee. This committee will construct and oversee the comprehensive exam process, to be administered the following semester.

The timeframe for the appointment of the committee and the administration of the exams should allow for ample study time, usually to be completed within the fifth and/or sixth semesters allotted to the full-time student's time in the program, for the entire exam sequence, both written and oral, to be completed before the conclusion of either a fall or a spring semester. Part-time students' timeframe will vary according to their pace completing coursework, etc.

Written component

In consultation with the student, the Exam Committee will compile a reading list from which the exams will be constructed. This list will not be based solely on the student's coursework, but will include as well readings that the exam committee deems foundational for the student's interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary program of study. (Consult the "Comprehensive Exams and Dissertation Proposal Preparation Strategies" handout for suggestions and tips for the development of the reading lists.)

The committee will devise a series of questions designed to test the student's mastery of these foundational works. Students should be provided with a choice among questions for each exam, (at least two options per exam). A minimum of two questions from the primary field and one question from the secondary field must be answered.

The exam will be administered on campus, during a designated period of time. No resources, electronic or printed, other than the student's approved reading list, will be available to the student during the exam period. The exam will be administered in three, 3 hour periods to cover one question per period; the exams should be scheduled over a 3 day time frame. The PhD administrative office will work with the Exam Committee chairs to coordinate the exam schedule and will administer the exams in a designated testing room.

All members of the Exam Committee will evaluate the written exam, and the chair will report the decision in writing, via email, to the program director. The program director will in turn notify the student, in writing via email, of the result.

If the exam is failed, the student will retake the failed portions within a timeframe by the end of the following semester (excluding summer) to be determined by the committee in consultation with the student. Only one retake will be allowed; if the second is failed,

this is grounds for dismissal from the Program. Retakes will not be administered in the summer.

If the exam is passed, an oral exam will follow. Grading of the written is understood to be on a pass/fail basis. Perceived deficiencies in the passed written exam can be addressed during the oral exam.

Oral component

The oral exam will be administered on-campus approximately 2 weeks following the passed written exam. The student's completed written exams will be made available to the student before the oral exam.

This oral exam is understood to examine, beyond the limits of the written exam, the extent of the student's mastery of the material. After taking the written exam as a starting point and examining further as necessary, examiners and student may choose to discuss specific interests that arose during the course of exam preparation and to begin a preliminary discussion of a dissertation focus. Suggested duration: one-and-a-half to two hours.

The chair of the Exam Committee will report the result of the oral exam in writing, via email, to the program director. The program director will in turn notify the student, in writing via email, of the result.

Upon a failing result, the student will be asked to retake the oral exam within a timeframe selected by the committee in consultation with the student, but no later than the end of the following semester (excluding summer). Only one retake will be allowed; if the second oral exam is failed, this is grounds for dismissal from the Program. Retakes will not be administered during the summer.

If the outcome of the exams is grounds for dismissal, the program director will notify the student and the Graduate College of this recommendation. The student may appeal the process following the procedures set by the Provost (see graduate student dismissal policy on Provost website).

Dissertation Proposal

Once the oral exam is passed, student should begin preparing the dissertation proposal to be defended within a reasonable period of time. (Consult the "Comprehensive Exams and Dissertation Proposal Preparation Strategies" document for tips on developing the proposal.)