PH.D. COMPREHENSIVE EXAM


OVERVIEW AND SCOPE

The aim of the comprehensive exam is to give students an opportunity to demonstrate mastery over relevant theory, methods, and empirical material in a subfield or set of related subfields, with an eye toward conducting related research. Exams can be taken in traditional or 'synthetic areas;' exams that bridge areas may be particularly useful for students whose emerging research agenda draws on multiple lines of scholarship. The topic and coverage of the exam should be substantially broader than a dissertation, and should cover foundational readings and current scholarship in one or more subfields. Specific exam areas will be developed by the student in conjunction with an examining committee of their choosing.

COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEE

The exam committee shall consist of at least three faculty members selected by the student; once the exam is approved, one additional Sociology faculty will be assigned by lottery to the committee. At least two of the faculty members selected by the student must have at least 25% appointments in the Sociology department, and the third should have, at a minimum, adjunct status in the department. Additional members of the graduate faculty at UW may be added to the committee above the minimum of three.

FORMAT OF EXAMS

Exams will typically consist of written responses to at least three and not more than six questions posed by an examining committee. Responses should not exceed 30 pages of double-spaced type. Students will have no more than 48 hours to write their responses, though committees may choose to offer a shorter, closed book exam.

The closed-book examination shall be conducted over two days. Students shall have a maximum of 8 hours each day to complete the exam, depending on the number of questions agreed upon by the examining committee. The examining committee shall set the final structure of the exam in terms of number of hours, and total number of questions.

CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MAY ALLOW FOR EXTRA TIME:

With the following types of situations, a student can ask their committee for an additional 24 hours for the Comprehensive Examination. The exam committee must approve this request (emails work fine). The student is under no obligation to use this extra time. These are the types of circumstances where this is the case:

- Non-native English speaking students.
- Pregnancy.
- Documented learning disability needs.
- Other life or medical situations where the request is deemed by the committee to be appropriate.

If you wish to request extra time:

- Make arrangements for this when scheduling your exam by asking permission of your Exam Committee,
- And inform the Graduate Program Advisor.

REQUESTING AN EXAM
When a student is ready to request an exam, s/he should complete the Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam Request form, and submit it, along with a narrative rationale for the exam, a reading list, and the signatures of faculty members who agree to serve on the examining committee, to the Graduate Program Advisor. After review by the Graduate Program Coordinator, a Departmental Representative will be assigned to the committee, and the exam can be scheduled.

NARRATIVE RATIONALE FOR EXAM

Each student should prepare a short narrative rationale for the proposed exam (one page or less). This document should describe why the student is proposing this particular exam, and outline the broad contours of the exam's domain. If the exam covers more than one field or subfield in the discipline, the narrative should briefly discuss how this particular combination of fields will prepare the student for future research and teaching.

DEPARTMENTAL REPRESENTATIVE

Once a proposed exam has been approved by the GPC, a Departmental Representative (DR) will be assigned by lottery. The pool of faculty eligible to serve as DR contains all those faculty with 50% or more appointments in Sociology. The manifest function of the DR is to assure that exams do not become too closely aligned to a student's (or faculty member's) idiosyncratic interests; the latent function is to provide all faculty with an opportunity to see what type of work is being done in other wings of the department. Practically, the Departmental Representative's role is one of coordination and oversight rather than as a substantive contributor to the exam. At a minimum, the Departmental Reader should review the exam questions before the student takes the exam to ensure that they are neither too broad nor too narrow, and should have an opportunity to read the completed exam.

TIMING OF EXAMS

Students should take their exams within one year of completing their MA degree, and no later than the spring of their fourth year. Once an exam topic and committee is approved, the student may schedule the exam at any time that is mutually convenient for the student and the committee within the following guidelines:

- Exams cannot be scheduled during breaks in between quarters.
- Exams should also typically be taken before the last week of classes in any given quarter so the exam can be graded during the quarter in which it is taken.
- The student must be registered in the quarter in which they take the exam.

OUTCOME OF EXAMS

After the student has written his or her exam, the examining committee will read and evaluate it. Exams can receive one of the following grades:

- Pass with Distinction (in exceptional cases)
- Pass
- Conditional Pass
- Fail

Students should be notified of the outcome of their exam within two weeks of completing the exam. Results of a comprehensive exam must also be communicated to the Graduate Program Advisor.

Details about exams receiving a Conditional Pass

- Exam committee chair communicates to student in writing within two weeks of completion of exam the conditions required for passing exam (copy placed in student's file)
- Student must meet these conditions 60 days after receiving the exam committee chair's communication.
- Students who do not convert a Conditional Pass to at least a Pass by the time specified will, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, be put on warning status in the Graduate School. Students placed on warning status must re-take the comprehensive exam within one quarter after the original exam date.

Details about exams receiving a Fail:
- Student will be put on warning status
- Re-examination will be scheduled no later than one quarter following original examination quarter
- If performance is not satisfactory on second try, student ordinarily terminated from program.
- Student failing two opportunities on the comprehensive exam can receive third opportunity only if two-thirds of department faculty approves.