

Comprehensive Examination Policy

October 2017 -- (last revised 2007)

Preamble

Goals and Principles of the Comprehensive examinations:

- 1) a Ph.D. comprehensive is understood to be an examination of broad expertise in an area, not specific background for a research agenda.
- 2) a Ph.D. comprehensive implies to the examining committee a responsibility for exposure to a broad spectrum of materials in an area, to facilitate both the generality of research conducted in that area and preparation for future teaching.
- 3) A Ph.D. comprehensive is one way for students to demonstrate their expertise in a particular subfield or area, as they seek academic and non-academic careers.

General Requirements for Students

Ph.D. students must complete two comprehensive exams in two different areas. The Sociology department's comprehensive exam areas are outlined below. Students are encouraged to complete one exam at the end of their first year of the Ph.D. (August) and one exam by the end of their second year (August). Students may choose to do either a five-day take home exam or a four-hour sit down exam. Students must answer three questions for each examination.

The designated areas are required to offer a core course in their area at least once every two years, as set out by the 2007 policy when the graduate curriculum was updated. This allows Ph.D. students to have regular access to courses that can help them prepare for their comprehensive exams. Students are strongly encouraged to take their exam in the term following completion of a core course and other courses in that area.

Areas of Comprehensive Exams

- Comprehensives will be offered in the following **core areas** of department specialization, Crime & Socio-Legal Studies; Culture; Gender; Health & Mental Health; Immigration & Ethnicity; Networks & Community; Political Sociology; Stratification, Work & Labour Markets; plus Sociological Theory; Qualitative Methods and Quantitative Methods.
- Core courses will be offered at least every other year in all core areas; yearly in theory and methods. It is recommended that students take at least two courses in the area prior to taking the comp exam in that area.
- Students may request to take a comprehensive exam in the following **areas of expertise**: Aging & Life Course; Environmental Sociology; Family; Social Policy; and Urban Sociology. Students may file a request with the Grad Office to take an exam in one of these areas of expertise at least six months ahead of time; if the Associate Grad chair is able to form a faculty comp committee in that area, s/he will approve the request.
- Areas of comprehensive exams may change over time. Requests to supplement or change the currently offered areas must come from a group of at least five faculty in a developing

area. These requests will be considered by the Graduate Program Committee and brought to the Faculty for approval.

- No comprehensives in other areas will be offered by the department.

Appointment of Comprehensive Exam Committees

- Within each comprehensive exam core area, the area faculty members suggest rotations of faculty members to serve as Area head (1 faculty member) and as the other members of the area comp committee (2 faculty members); normally each member serves a two-year term. The Associate Graduate Chair in consultation with the Chair of the Graduate Department appoint the standing committee based on these nominations. It is assumed that there will be rotation of faculty. For areas in which there is a core or required course, the faculty member teaching a core or required course in the area in the past two years will normally be one of the faculty on the committee.
- The Graduate Office will post the names of Comprehensive Exam committee members on the website.
- If a committee member cannot fulfill her/his complete term due to an unplanned research or other leave that comes up during their term, the committee member must notify the Area head and the Associate Graduate Chair as soon as possible. A new committee member will be appointed to complete remaining time of the term. The Associate Graduate Chair will make the appointment in consultation with the faculty in the area and with the approval of the Chair of the Graduate Department.

Responsibilities of Area Comprehensive Exam Committees

- The Area Head is responsible for three key procedures: 1) ensuring the area updates its reading list at least every other year, by February 1 for use in the following academic year. 2) setting the date for the exam committee to meet with all students taking the exam at least once before students take their exam (see below); and 3) ensuring the exam committee marks the exams; discusses the exam, and provides the decision and comments to the Graduate Office in the designated time frame (see below).
- The area committee of three faculty will write the examination questions and submit them to the Graduate Office at least one week prior to the examination date (if there are students taking the exam in their area during that sitting).
- In terms of structure of the examination questions, it is recommended that there be three sections: A, B, C. Each section should have two questions from which the student will choose one to answer.
- Comprehensive exam committee members are responsible for making themselves available to meet with and for maintaining contact with students taking comprehensives for the upcoming sitting. Committees must be available to meet as a whole with students taking the examination at least once prior to the exam (normally a meeting will be set by the Area Head in early May for the August exam and in early November for the February exam).
- Faculty may provide assessments of students' practice exams if they wish, but they are not required to do so. Students who ask faculty to do so should realize that the responses to a practice exam would not necessarily be equivalent to responses received when an entire committee is deliberating.

Reading Lists

- Area reading lists are developed by all faculty in each area, not just by exam committee members. The lists should be updated at least every two years and sent to the Graduate office by the Area Head by February 1 for use the following academic year. Areas may solicit student input for updating the list as well.
- Updated reading lists will be submitted to the Grad Office/Graduate Program committee for approval.
- Reading lists must be organized according to modules for subfield areas with books, chapters or articles related to that topic listed underneath. Reading lists are not to be an alphabetical ordered list of books. There will be core readings for each module; some areas also include supplemental readings (see below). Supplemental reading lists for each module contain 3-4 readings.
- There will be a minimum of 150 and a maximum of 200 readings in each list, in article units. A book will count as five articles if it involves over 200 pages of assigned reading, as three articles if between 100-200 pages of assigned reading, and one article if less than 100 pages of assigned reading. Chapters and articles are considered equal. Any reading list with at least 20 books may have an upper limit of 240 readings.
- Students will read all of the core readings in each module. For those area comps that use supplemental readings, students must choose two modules where they will complete the supplemental readings. The core readings plus two modules of supplemental readings constitute the entire reading the student completes. Students should not expect a question based solely on their supplemental readings. Rather these readings will add to their knowledge of specific subareas.
- Students wishing to take a comprehensive in the following academic year may apply to the standing committee in January, to suggest changes and additions to the current reading list. Any changes incorporated to the list being updated by the area group will apply to all students taking that area comprehensive the following academic year. It is assumed that these suggestions speak to new directions in the area in general, or missing components of the current reading list.
- Reading lists will be posted on the Sociology Departmental Website and students will access the reading lists in this way.

Dates and Procedures for taking Comprehensive Exams

- There will be two dates each year on which comprehensives are held: one date will be set in late August, and one in early February. Committees may not alter the dates of these exams.
- Students must notify the Graduate Office and the Area head by May 1 for the August exam and November 1 for the February exam, that they will be taking the exam and obtain signatures from the committee members. Students must sign that they understand the general instructions provided about the upcoming exam, including being responsible for knowing and understanding academic integrity guidelines.
- Committees should meet as a group of faculty and students in early May for the August exam and in early November for the February exam, to provide instruction and answer questions about the upcoming exam. Faculty should also be available for consultation post meeting.

Marking the Comprehensive Exam

- Exams will be graded according to the current system as either a “pass” or “fail”.
- Comprehensive exam committees must submit their assessment of the exam to the Graduate Office within three weeks of the date of the exam. The Area head/chair of each exam committee is responsible for ensuring this takes place. Students will receive results in approximately four weeks from turning in the exam.
- Before handing in assessments to the Graduate Office, committee members should discuss their individual assessments. The chair of the comprehensive exam committee will compile or write a summary of the comments to be sent to the student through the Graduate Office. These comments should be linked to individual committee members' names, in case students want to follow up and discuss ideas further.
- If a student fails the first take of the exam, the student may take that area exam a second time. The student will take the exam in the same area, normally at the next sitting of the exam. It must be taken within one year of the first attempt.
- If the student fails the exam the second time, current rules and regulations apply, including the student's right to appeal to the Standing Committee overseeing appeals and the department's right to recommend to SGS that the student no longer be eligible to continue in the Ph.D. program.