

Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice
Revision of Comprehensive Exams: Side-by-side comparison
October 2013

Current Version

C. Ph.D. Comprehensive Exams

Candidates for the doctoral degree must be certified in two specialized areas. The department currently offers specialization in the following areas: Collective Behavior/Disaster Studies, Criminology, Deviance, Gender, Law and Society, Methodology/Statistics, Race, and Theory. NOTE: Students in Criminology may not select deviance as their second area.

Students are required to take at least one of their certified areas from the standing areas offered by the department. If the candidate wishes to be certified in a specialized area for which there is no standing area committee, she or he may petition to do so after securing the agreement of three (3) faculty members willing to serve as examiners in that area by providing reading lists, constructing and evaluating examinations and other certification requirements. The Graduate Policy Committee must review and approve the petition of the student and inform the Director of Graduate Studies and the Chairperson of the department of its decision.

1. Administration of Comprehensive Exams

Two dates will be established for comprehensive examinations, one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end of the semester. A given area exam, e.g., deviance, will be offered once per semester. The Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the area committee chairs, is in charge of scheduling. Comprehensive examinations will be administered to students in a common room with a maximum 6-hour

Revised Version

C. Ph.D. Comprehensive Exams

Candidates for the doctoral degree must be certified in two specialized areas. The department currently offers specialization in the following areas: **Disasters and the Environment**, Criminology, Deviance, Gender, Law and Society, Methodology/Statistics, Race, and Theory. Students in Criminology may not select deviance as their second area.

Doctoral students in our department must pass a comprehensive examination in one area and write a qualifying paper with a passing grade in the other area. Students are required to take at least one of their certified areas from the standing areas offered by the department. If the candidate wishes to be certified in a specialized area for which there is no standing area committee, she or he may petition to do so after securing the agreement of three (3) faculty members willing to serve as examiners in that area by providing reading lists, constructing and evaluating examinations and other certification requirements. The Graduate Policy Committee must review and approve the petition of the student and inform the Director of Graduate Studies and the Chairperson of the department of its decision.

1. Administration of Comprehensive Exams and Papers

A given area exam, e.g., deviance, will be offered once per semester, on a date to be determined by the Director of Graduate Studies in consultation with the area committee chairs. Comprehensive examinations will be administered to students in a common room with a maximum 6-hour time allotment and

time allotment and proctored by a faculty member.

2. Area Committees

Area committees are responsible for preparing reading lists, overseeing the respective curriculum in this area, and providing students with written guidelines to aid them in the selection of courses and preparation for examinations. Area committees are responsible for designing the specific certification requirements for their particular area, preparing examination questions, and reading and evaluating exams.

Published guidelines and reading lists are reviewed and revised as necessary, usually on a regular cycle of every two (2) years.

Members of area committees and their chairs are appointed by the Chair of the Department. Committees are composed of at least three (3) members of the faculty, but committees may consult other members of the faculty with competence in the area during the preparation of exams and reading lists.

Chairs of the committees are responsible for notifying students of their exam results. Committee Chairs are also required to notify the Director of graduate Studies of the results of examinations within one month of the exam.

3. Scope of the Examinations

Minimal preparation for written examinations includes the review of reading lists provided by area committees. However, reading lists are merely guidelines and should not be considered as the sole basis for examinations. Committees are responsible for clarification of the goals of reading lists, with specific attention to the question of whether

proctored by a faculty member.

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Area committees are responsible for preparing reading lists, overseeing the respective curriculum in this area, and providing students with written guidelines to aid them in the selection of courses and preparation for examinations. Area committees are responsible for designing the specific certification requirements for their particular area, preparing examination questions, and reading and evaluating exams.

Published guidelines and reading lists are reviewed and revised as necessary, usually on a regular cycle of every two (2) years; reading lists are to trend toward equality in length across comprehensive exam areas and committees should make them available on the department website and in the sociology office to students at the beginning of the academic year. The GPC will oversee these requirements.

Members of area committees and their chairs are appointed by the Chair of the Department. Committees are composed of at least three (3) members of the faculty, but committees may consult other members of the faculty with competence in the area during the preparation of exams and reading lists.

Chairs of the committees are responsible for notifying students of their exam results within three (3) weeks (see #6 below for more details). Committee Chairs are also required to notify the Director of Graduate Studies and the GPC of the results of examinations.

3. Scope of the Examinations

Minimal preparation for written examinations includes mastery of material on the reading lists provided by area committees. However,

such lists represent “minimal” or “exhaustive” definitions of the core literature. For each area of certification the candidate is expected to be: up-to-date with the literature in the field at the time of the exam, able to discuss the most important controversies, issues and problems (in both theory and methodology) that exist in the field, and capable of evaluating existing theory and methodology and suggesting new direction of effort.

4. Pre-requisites and Schedule of Examinations

Students are required to declare their intent to take a comprehensive examination, in writing, within the first two weeks of the previous semester to the Director of Graduate Studies who will notify the relevant Area Committee. The Committee will schedule an interview with the student to explore his or her level of preparedness. Students are expected to provide Committee members with written documentation of their preparedness in that area prior to the interview (e.g. courses taken, etc.) **IMPORTANT:** All Ph.D. course requirements, including any outstanding incomplete grades, must be completed before students are eligible to take Ph.D. examinations.

Students are required to take both comprehensive exams (and repeats thereof) in the same semester, or in consecutive semesters.

5. Grading

The outcome of examinations is determined by majority vote. There are four possible outcomes: Pass with distinction, Pass, Conditional outcome, Fail.

Conditional Outcomes: Students receiving this grade are required to complete additional work within two months of formal notification of the committee’s decision. If the committee is

reading lists are merely guidelines and should not be considered as the sole basis for examinations. Committees are responsible for clarification of the goals of reading lists, with specific attention to the question of whether such lists represent “minimal” or “exhaustive” definitions of the core literature. For each area of certification the candidate is expected to be: up-to-date with the literature in the field at the time of the exam, able to discuss the most important controversies, issues and problems (in both theory and methodology) that exist in the field, and capable of evaluating existing theory and methodology and suggesting new direction of effort.

Course Requirements. No area comprehensive exam shall require more than one course beyond the requirements of the PhD degree. The area committee can, however, recommend additional courses. Recommended courses are those the committee advises, but does not require, students to take.

4. Qualifying Paper

In addition to the written comprehensive exam in one area, students must write a qualifying paper in the other area. The same stipulations for course requirements as the area exam are required.

This paper should be of "publishable quality" (though it need not be submitted for publication) and should focus on specific areas in the literature, foundational pieces on the topic, and conclude with more specificity and application of the material relevant to the student’s interests within the broad area of study. It should not be a dissertation proposal; rather, its intention is to evaluate students’ critical thinking/analytic skills. A good model is found in the articles published in the journal *Annual Review of Sociology*. The paper must reflect the student's own work and not work done in collaboration with co-authors or faculty mentors. After the student turns in the qualifying paper, the area committee will meet with the student to conduct an oral defense.

satisfied with the quality of the work, the student will receive a grade of Pass. If the committee is not satisfied with the quality of the work, the student will receive a grade of Fail.

Within one week of formal notification of the grade, students will receive a detailed evaluation in writing from the chair of the area committee.

Students who fail a written exam, or any part thereof, may request a re-reading from the original area examination committee. This request is to be submitted within 20 days of the student receiving the detailed written evaluation.

6. Repeats of Examinations

- Only one repeat for each area is permitted. Failure on a repeat examination is a permanent failure for that area.
- Three failures of Ph.D. comprehensive examinations in any combination shall result in dismissal from the program.

Grading for the qualifying paper and dissemination of results will be the same as those stated for the comprehensive exam.

Papers will be due during the final week of classes of the semester, unless the student and exam committee agree on an extension (in which case a new due date will be set by the committee). Exam committees will provide guidance and feedback to students as they work on the paper; students must request feedback from the committee chair, who will in turn seek input from other faculty members.

5. Pre-requisites and Schedule of Examinations

Students are required to declare their intent to take a comprehensive examination or write the qualifying paper, in writing, within the first two weeks of the previous semester to the Director of Graduate Studies who will notify the relevant Area Committee. The Committee will schedule an interview with the student to explore his or her level of preparedness. Students are expected to provide Committee members with written documentation of their preparedness in that area prior to the interview (e.g. courses taken, etc.). **IMPORTANT:** All Ph.D. course requirements, including any outstanding incomplete grades, must be completed before students are eligible to take Ph.D. examinations.

Students are encouraged to complete both the exam and qualifying paper during the two semesters immediately after they complete course requirements.

In the case of a failing grade, the student must retake the exam or rewrite the paper in the following semester.

6. Grading

The outcome of examinations and qualifying

papers is determined by majority vote. There are four possible outcomes: Pass with distinction, Pass, Conditional outcome, Fail.

Conditional Outcomes: Students receiving this grade are required to complete additional work within two months of formal notification of the committee's decision. If the committee is satisfied with the quality of the work, the student will receive a grade of Pass. If the committee is not satisfied with the quality of the work, the student will receive a grade of Fail.

Students earning "conditional" outcomes have the option, at the committee's approval, to respond 1) orally or 2) by the traditional written form as indicated in the current policy. The student, in consultation with the area comprehensive exam chair and his/her mentor(s) will have two weeks to make the decision and notify the area chair and the Director of Graduate Studies.

Within one week of formal notification of the grade, students will receive a detailed evaluation in writing from the chair of the area committee.

Students who fail a written exam **or qualifying paper**, or any part thereof, may request a re-reading from the original area examination committee. This request is to be submitted within 20 days of the student receiving the detailed written evaluation.

7. Repeats of Examinations

Only one repeat for each area is permitted. Failure on a repeat examination **or paper** is a permanent failure for that area. Three failures of Ph.D. comprehensive examinations **or qualifying papers** in any combination shall result in dismissal from the program.

