

Comprehensive Examinations

Guidelines

Doctoral students are required to complete two comprehensive exams—one in theory and one in a substantive area of socio-legal studies. The purpose of the comprehensives is to prepare the student to do research and to teach in the field at a post-secondary level. Most comprehensives will entail an understanding of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of law and society, how past and current research can be interpreted in the light of different theoretical approaches, and an awareness of gaps in the literature.

Normally, students will complete one exam per term in the second year of their PhD candidacy with the same comprehensive committee.

Theory Requirement

The purpose of the theory exam is to prepare the student to develop the breadth of knowledge necessary to teach an introductory course in Socio-Legal Studies.

Fulfillment of the theory requirement will be met through an oral exam. Students will be responsible for a reading list of twenty books (or equivalent), of which ten to fifteen are to be selected from the Program's common list and the remainder from a list of works in the student's area of interest. The reading list is to be chosen in consultation with, and approved by, the students' comprehensive committee.

With the agreement of their comprehensive committee, students may substitute works by the same author in place of books by that author currently on the list (e.g. substitute a different work by Foucault to the ones now listed). Five journal articles will be considered equivalent to one book.

The student, in consultation with the comprehensive committee, will compose a reading list along with a short (approximately 5 pages) statement explaining the rationale for the reading list and a list of general or thematic questions based on the list. These will be submitted to the SLST Curriculum Committee, which will review the list for consistency with program requirements (set out above) and for comprehensiveness or breadth in keeping with the general purpose of the theory requirement.

Theory reading lists will be kept on file in the SLST office, and used for periodic reviews of the common list.

The student, in consultation with the comprehensive committee, will set a date for the oral exam. One week before the scheduled exam, the student will submit a written statement (approximately 8-10 pages) that will be presented orally at the exam (that is, a 20–25-minute oral presentation). While the written and oral statements may be substantially the same, it is expected that the oral presentation will not consist of a direct reading of the written statement. The statements will offer a reflective review of the approved reading list and issues arising from it. The comprehensive committee will base their first round of questions on the originally submitted rationale and questions, as well as on the written statement. Additional questions and discussion will follow. The oral exam is expected to be 90–120 minutes in length.

Substantive Requirement

Fulfillment of the substantive requirement will be met through written work followed by an oral defense. The written work can take two forms:

- a) A review of research in an area of specialization that is related to the dissertation. The paper (approximately 40 pages) should demonstrate an understanding of the relevant literature, the different theoretical approaches used to interpret empirical research and an awareness of major debates in this site of research as well as major gaps in theory and research. The area of specialization and the readings to be reviewed will be decided by the student in consultation with their committee. The reading list will consist of 20 books or equivalent.

After reading the approved list for the substantive comprehensive, the student, in consultation with the comprehensive committee, will submit 3 to 5 questions based on the readings to her/his comprehensive committee. The comprehensive committee will select 2 of these questions, which may be revised as the committee sees fit. These questions will be given to the student on an agreed-upon date. The essay will be due two weeks later, and will respond to the questions posed

OR

- b) An outline of an advanced undergraduate course in a chosen area to include: an academic rationale for the organization of the course providing broad coverage of the field; a rationale for the particular selection of topics; and a list of twenty-four two-hour lecture sessions, with readings to accompany each session. Also, the students will write the full text of a lecture on one of the topics in the course, to be chosen in consultation with the comprehensive committee. This written lecture should be approximately 25–30 pages.

The substantive comprehensive, whether completed as option (a) or (b), will be subject to an oral defense, to be scheduled within 2 weeks of receiving the essays or course & lecture. The defense is expected to be 90–120 minutes in length.

Evaluation of Comprehensive Exams

At the conclusion of the oral exam or defense, the student will be asked to leave the room, while the committee determines the evaluation. The committee may determine one of the following outcomes:

PASS

The student has demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the field. Grade will be recorded.

INCOMPLETE*

The student has not demonstrated an adequate understanding of the field. The comprehensive committee will provide the student with written comments and directions within one week of the oral exam or defense. The student will then schedule another oral exam, in the case of the theory requirement, or will re-write another essay or lecture, in the case of the substantive requirement. These must be completed not more than two months after receiving the comments. If, after the subsequent oral exam or written submission, the committee is satisfied that the student has demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the field, the grade will be changed to “Pass”. Otherwise, the grade will be changed to “Fail” and the student will be withdrawn from the program.

FAIL

The student has not demonstrated an adequate understanding of the field. The comprehensive committee will provide written comments within one week of the oral exam explaining their finding. The grade will be recorded, and the student will be withdrawn from the program.

***NOTE:** In normal circumstances, it is expected that in cases of unsatisfactory exams, the comprehensive committee will assign a grade of Incomplete and provide a written explanation in order to allow the student to do the exam again.

A comprehensive requirement is considered passed if no more than one member of the committee casts a negative vote. The GPD (or designate) will attend all evaluation meetings as ex-officio, non-voting member.

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