

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

Objective

The objective of the comprehensive general examination is to ensure that students have acquired the specialized knowledge they will need to undertake research on their doctoral dissertation. Accordingly, students in the program will be expected to develop both general knowledge and capacities in the required domain of scholarship (interdisciplinarity), the domain of his/her thesis, as well as specialized knowledge and capacities in other domains as may be necessary to successfully undertake the dissertation. The comprehensive is also a way of assessing the student in his/her understanding of critical and theoretical issues introduced and discussed in the list of assigned readings.

Content

The comprehensive general examination will have two parts: a major part, concerned with specialized knowledge directly and essentially related to the domain of the dissertation, and a minor part, concerned with knowledge in interdisciplinarity.

Since the dissertation will be interdisciplinary, the major part of the examination, which is essentially a written presentation and an oral defense of the dissertation proposal, shall identify an issue or a problem and the ways in which the student proposes to bring the meeting of disciplines, theories and methods to bear in very particular and specialized ways in the dissertation. One of the key criteria for assessing the student with respect to the major part is whether the student would be able to teach a graduate level course or research seminar in the domain of his/her dissertation.

The minor part of the examination is of a more general nature.

It will cover interdisciplinarity as an approach to knowledge and a way of developing new knowledge. It raises important theoretical and methodological questions and issues examined by the student in the course of his/her program. In his/her written document and in answering orally the questions that will be asked by the committee members, the student will address the relationship between various disciplines to his/her dissertation project. One of the key criteria for assessing the student with respect to the minor part is whether the student would be able to teach an undergraduate level course or research seminar in interdisciplinarity.

In contrast with discipline-based graduate programs, with domains fields or areas thought to be essential to the discipline, interdisciplinary programs are inherently broad, and the domains fields or areas must necessarily depend on the dissertation topic and approach. The object of the comprehensive examination is not to ensure breadth but rather depth and focus on the domains of study.

Process

The full-time student will normally be expected to take the comprehensive general examination at the end of their second or at the beginning of their third year of registration. The student will normally have selected a dissertation supervisor at least six months after first registering in the program and submitted a dissertation subject to his/her supervisory committee at least eight months after his/her first registration, a subject previously agreed upon with his/her supervisor.

The domains, the questions and the related bibliographies around which the examination will be set, both in the major and minor parts, will be determined by the student, the thesis supervisor, and the supervisory committee, and will be approved by the Program Director at least six months before the comprehensive general examination. The student and his/her committee members must sign an agreement where the questions and the bibliographies are clearly identified and which the student will rely upon to answer those questions (*Agreement on Comprehensive Examination*). The agreement must then be forwarded to the Program Director for signature.

The examination will have two main elements, one oral and one written. The written component will consist of approximately one hundred pages of analysis. When all the members of the supervision committee consider the student ready for the oral part of the Examination, each member must complete the Authorization Form . Once signed, this form must be submitted to the Program Director with one copy of the written part of the Comprehensive Examination at least four weeks prior to the oral session. The Program Director will inform the committee members whether or not the oral part can go ahead at least one week prior to the set date, and if so, such will be organized by the program administration.

The oral element will not last more than 2.5 hours during which the student will first present his/her dissertation proposal (30 to 40 minutes) and then respond to questions posed.

The examination committee will be composed of a minimum of four faculty: the Program Director or his/her representative, the thesis supervisor, and two members of the thesis committee, all of whom are members of the program. Their assessment of the examination will be expressed in terms of one of the three options below:

- i. PASS: the candidate has met the required standards and may proceed to Candidacy.
- ii. INCOMPLETE: the candidate has passed the examination except for identified weakness(es) that can be corrected by appropriate, and specifically identified remedial measures. A PASS shall be awarded upon successful completion of those measures.
- iii. FAIL: the candidate will be given permission to repeat the Comprehensive Examination within no more than 6 months. Failure to pass a second examination will require the candidate to withdraw from the program.

The Chair of the Comprehensive Examination Committee will give a preliminary indication of the result to the candidate immediately following the examination. The Chair will then inform the Dean of Graduate Studies in writing as to the outcome of the examination. In the case of an INCOMPLETE decision, the weaknesses and necessary remedial actions, and the required timeline, will be specified by the program director in a letter to the student.

IMPORTANT: Please read the following documents

Comprehensive Examination Process

Bibliography - Minor component