

## Comprehensive Examination Procedures

### Setting up the Examination Committee

In consultation with your advisor, decide which faculty members in the department you would like to ask to write questions for your exam. Once the two of you have agreed, then you should approach each faculty member individually and ask if s/he is willing to write exam questions for you. As the members agree to serve, then your advisor needs to submit a copy of the exam committee to the Graduate Program Coordinator for confirmation and filing.

As a rule, you should pick faculty members with whom you have had course work. *The exam should serve to demonstrate your mastery of what has been included in your plan of study, both generally and specifically, but it must include both core requirements and elective coursework in the department.*

You should designate time allotments for the members of your exam committee, as you ask them to write questions for you, so they have an idea how much they should cover in their role on your committee. Minimally, you should judge this allotment on the basis of the number of courses to be covered (e.g., 1 course = 1 hour; 2-3 courses = 2 hours). No one should be asked to write questions for less than 1 hour.

### Allocation of Exam Content

The written part of all comprehensive exams should be designed to cover the approved coursework on each candidate's Plan of Study, in this manner:

1 hour = Rhetoric and Political Discourse

1 hour = Organizational and Interpersonal Communication

1 hour = Communication and Culture

1 hour = Research Methods

1 hour = from the major area of electives in the candidate's Plan of Study

#### Suggested Protocol:

- Consult with your advisor about the proposed members for your Committee.
- Ask individual faculty members if they will be willing to write for you.
- Have your advisor approve the proposed committee and submit it to the Graduate Program Coordinator for confirmation and filing.

### Scheduling the Exam

No one will be permitted to schedule an exam until the composition of his/her committee has been approved and filed officially. The Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC), in cooperation with staff, will establish the available dates and time slots for each semester. As soon as you have selected the date you wish to take the exam, you must register that request with the GPC. You should then notify the members of your committee when *exactly* you will be writing for their questions, so that they may plan accordingly. *Except in the case*

*of emergencies (and only with permission of the GPC or the Department Chair), no one will be allowed to change an exam date and time, once it has been scheduled.*

### **The Written Exam**

This part of the comprehensive exam should last no more than 5 hours. Usually, it is taken over the span of two days but otherwise no more than three days. Members of your exam committee must turn in their questions to your advisor at least 24 hours prior to your scheduled exam. Your advisor should submit the exam questions to the office staff for administering. On the day of your exam, you should come to the office to pick up your questions.

**Testing Protocol:** You will be assigned a private area for writing. If you choose to take the exam with a computer, be sure you specify that when you schedule your exam. You will be allowed to take "comfort breaks" -- preferably, between the separate parts of your exam -- but you will not be allowed to take personal items, beyond writing implements, into the exam room with you.

When you have finished writing a set of questions, you should turn in both the questions and your answers to the office staff. At that time, you should request a copy of your answers. The original copy of your answers and the questions will be returned to the faculty member.

When you have finished writing for all your committee members, you should let your advisor know, so that s/he can consult with the committee as a whole. The committee meets to review the written portion of the exam before making a decision about whether or not the student has passed. *If after reviewing all the answers the committee decides to pass the student, the advisor will notify the student accordingly. If you have not heard anything from your advisor, you should ask him/her about the committee's decision making.*

### **The Oral Exam**

After successfully completing the written part of the comprehensive exam, the student is ready to schedule the oral portion of the examination. *This portion may last no more than an hour and is intended to allow committee members to question the student more fully about answers from the written exam.*

Discuss with your advisor when you would like to schedule the oral defense. Your advisor is responsible for actually scheduling the exam with the other members of your committee. Students who do not have to defend a thesis may ask to schedule their oral exam *no earlier than a week after the committee has declared the written exam to be satisfactory.* Once the date has been scheduled and has been cleared through the Graduate Program Coordinator, *you should ask to meet with each member of your committee to see what advice s/he may have for preparing for the oral exam.*

### **Final Procedure**

You or your advisor should bring copies of the Graduate School *Comprehensive Examination Sign-off Form* to the oral examination. Upon successful completion of the examination, all members of the committee must sign the form. The Graduate School will

not confer degrees to students who have not submitted this form by the deadline for commencement. Your advisor should also give a copy of the form to the Graduate Program Coordinator for filing in the department.

**Final Assessment for M.A. Candidates**

Upon completion of the oral exam, the committee chair is responsible for having committee members submit their assessment of the ability demonstrated by the candidate in the examination, using the standard assessment form located at <https://comstudies.ua.edu/files/2013/01/Final-MA-Assessment-Rubric.pdf>.

These assessments are for program assessment purposes only. Either the committee chair or your advisor is responsible for submitting them to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

*Updated April 2016*