

## **Department of History Field Examination Instructions**

### **Introduction**

Comprehensive examinations assess students' knowledge of the field, ability to think historically, and competency to undertake independent research. These examinations measure students' ability to think as historians, to contextualize information, and to demonstrate command of a body of knowledge in a defined field. At the master's level, these examinations serve as a capstone requirement that demonstrates a specific level of training in history. At the doctoral level, successful completion of the field examinations in conjunction with an excellent coursework record indicate that students possess the necessary skills to begin work on the dissertation.

The comprehensive examination will cover a field of study broadly defined. The student should expect that he/she will be asked to demonstrate an acceptable level of understanding of the entire breadth of a historical field in terms of various subject areas as well as the chronological coverage of that field. Core readings for each field will serve as the basis of student reading lists. In general, the comprehensive examination focuses on historiography and historiographical debates. Some faculty, however, may emphasize content and you should discuss the focus of the examination with each individual faculty member on the committee. Students in U.S. history, medieval and renaissance history, and modern European history should consult the suggested reading lists that faculty have compiled for designated chronological and thematic areas. Students should use these suggested reading lists as the basis for putting together their own examination list. These lists are available from the Graduate Programs Assistant. For students in other fields, please consult old examination reading lists (on file with the Graduate Programs Assistant) as guides for creating your own. However, each student is ultimately responsible for developing his/her own bibliography which will serve as the basis for the examination. The members of the student's committee may add or delete works from the list, and all members of the committee **MUST** approve the final reading list no later than one month before the examination.

There is no magic number of books and/or articles for an exam reading list. However, reading lists generally will run in length as follows:

MA major field examinations and Ph.D. minor fields examinations: 50-70 works.

Ph.D. major field examinations: 240-350 works.

### **Major and Minor Field Examinations in U.S. History:**

For the M.A. major field examination or the Ph.D. minor field examination in U.S. history, students should choose two of the three designated chronological areas. They should also choose one thematic area for the examination. For the Ph.D. major field examination in U.S. history, students should choose two of the three designated chronological areas. They should also choose two thematic areas for the examination. The three designated chronological areas are: early America (before 1800); 19<sup>th</sup>-century U.S. history; and 20<sup>th</sup>-century U.S. history. Thematic areas include: urban, women/gender, sexuality, Atlantic world, Indian, cultural, African-American/race, American

west, immigration and ethnicity, labor, environmental, and legal. Other thematic fields are possible with the approval of all committee members.

### **Major and Minor Field Examinations in non-U.S. History Fields:**

For the M.A. major field examination and the Ph.D. major and minor field examinations in areas outside of U.S. history (such as medieval/renaissance, modern/early modern Europe and other thematic fields), students should work closely with their committee members to create reading lists with a broad chronological sweep and a set number of thematic areas.

### **Examination Format:**

Designated take-home examination formats are as follows:

M.A. Major Field: Students must answer two examination questions (out of a possible four questions) by producing two 10-15 page essays. Examination essays should quote from readings and use formal citations. The student has one week to complete the examination.

Ph.D. Minor Field: Students must answer two examination questions (out of a possible four questions) by producing two 10-15 page essays. Examination essays should quote from readings and use formal citations. The student has one week to complete the examination.

Ph.D. Major Field: Students must answer three examination questions (out of a possible six questions) by producing three 10-15 page essays. Examination essays should quote from readings and use formal citations. The student has two weeks to complete the examination.

The take-home examination is followed by a two-hour oral examination. The oral examination is normally scheduled within two weeks of taking and passing the take-home examination.

Public History Oral Examination: The public history oral examination for M.A. students in the public history program and for Ph.D. students in the joint public history and U.S. history program is a two hour examination.

For all written comprehensive examinations (MA major field, Ph.D. minor field, and Ph.D. major field), each professor supplies two questions and the student must answer ONE from each professor. The student will thus answer two questions for the MA major field examination or the Ph.D. minor field examination. The student will thus answer three questions for the Ph.D. major field examination. Sample questions from past examinations are available for your viewing from the graduate programs secretary. For the public history oral examination, please see the director of the public history program for exact procedures. For the oral examination portion of the Ph.D. major field exam, please see the head of your examination committee for exact procedures.

Students have two weeks to complete the examination. Examination essays should quote when necessary from readings and use formal citations of **endnotes or footnotes** in accordance with the University of Chicago Press's *Manual of Style*

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html), Kate Turabian, *Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, or the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

To 'pass with distinction' (the only other option outside of pass and fail), you must receive a 'high pass' from all members of the exam committee on all examination questions. Please make certain you mark which questions you are answering--this will eliminate some initial guessing on the examiner's part when grading.

## **PART I. Setting up the Field Examination Committee / Constructing the Examination Reading List /Meeting with Committee Members**

### Setting Up the Examination Committee

In general, students should obtain a Field Examination Committee Form from the Graduate Programs Assistant one year before they wish to take an examination. Once a student has identified the faculty member he or she wishes to have as committee chair, the student and faculty member should meet to discuss the fields and potential committee members. Students will ask other professors to be members of their committee. In general, students should work with professors with whom they have taken classes with or worked with in a scholarly capacity. The major field examination for the M.A. degree and the minor field examination for the Ph.D. consist of two examiners (one of which is the chair of the exam). The major field examination for the Ph.D. consists of three examiners (one of which is the Chair of the exam). A student's advisor generally serves as the chair of the examination committee. The public history oral examination for the M.A. and for the Ph.D. joint program consists of two examiners.

The chair and the committee members must sign the student's Field Examination Committee Form. The form then goes to the Graduate Program Director, who will review the form and the student's file. Once everything is in order and the Graduate Program Director has signed the Field Examination Committee Form, the committee is established within the department. The next step is to have the information entered into gsps. The student begins the process. The GPD reviews the request and, if all is in line with what has been approved internally in the program, approves the gsps committee request. The student will receive notification that the Graduate School has approved the establishment of the committee.

### Creating the Examination Reading List

The student will confer with each prospective committee member, discuss the parameters of the fields, and determine the relevant bibliography that he or she will be held responsible for during the examination. Again, students should consult the suggested reading lists (available from the graduate programs secretary) for help in creating their own examination lists. Once a preliminary reading list is assembled, students must distribute this list to all members of the examination committee for their approval. Please remember that committee members might make revisions to the list. A final (revised) examination reading list **MUST** be approved by all members of the committee at least one month before the examination date. All members of the committee must have an electronic or a hardcopy of the final exam reading list. A copy of this final exam list must also be sent to the Graduate Programs Assistant at least one month before the examination date.

### Meeting with Committee Members

Students should meet with **EACH** individual member of their committee at least once during the exam studying process. Students should make sure that the final examination reading list is approved and that each member has a copy of the final reading list. Meetings with each individual faculty member should occur at least one month before the examination date.

Students may wish to meet with committee members more frequently to discuss potential topics for examination questions and/or to ask questions about particular readings. Students are encouraged to consult sample questions from past examinations in preparation for these meetings. The Graduate Programs Assistant has copies of these questions on file. **It is the student's responsibility to keep**

**in touch with the examination committee prior to taking the exam.**

## **PART II. Scheduling the Examination and Taking the Examination**

When the student is ready to schedule the examination, he or she fills out the Examination Request Form. This form goes to the Graduate Program Director who performs a file check to see that the student has fulfilled all the requirements necessary to take the examination.

Students will use the Examination Request Form to establish a date and time to obtain a copy of the examination from the Graduate Programs Assistant (GPA). M.A. major field examinations and Ph.D. minor field examinations are due one week later at the same time that the examination was originally obtained. Ph.D. major field examinations are due two weeks later at the same time that the examination was originally obtained. A hard copy of the examination must be hand delivered or an electronic copy of the examination must be sent to the GPA by the aforementioned time. Students taking the oral examination in public history will use the Examination Request Form to establish a date and time for the oral examination. The GPA will find an appropriate room for the oral examination.

Students should avoid scheduling examinations during the summer and the period between the fall and spring semesters. Faculty members are not expected to be available during these periods, and many will not be physically available to attend examinations.

The Graduate Programs Assistant will administer all aspects of the examination. Two weeks prior to the examination date, the GPA will contact all committee members with a request for examination questions. The GPA will distribute the examination and collect it. The GPA will route the completed examination and the grading ballots to the members of the examination committee. After grading has been completed, the GPA will send copies of the ballots to the committee chairperson who will announce the results to the student. The examinations and original ballots will be kept in the student's file.

The results of the examination should be reported to the student no later than two weeks after completion. If extraordinary circumstances preclude such a report in this time frame, the committee chairman should make every effort to communicate with the student and offer an explanation about the delay. If the results are not forthcoming in a timely manner, the student should seek the assistance of his/her advisor or the Graduate Program Director.

The oral examination portion of the Ph.D. major field examination is set up within two weeks of passing of the written comprehensive exam. The student, working with all members of the examination committee, finds an appropriate date to take the two-hour oral examination. It is permissible and sometimes advisable to establish a date for the oral examination prior to taking the written component of the comprehensive examination. The Chair of the examination committee works with the GPA to schedule a time and place to meet for the oral examination.

## **PART III: Grading the Examination**

Each member of the committee should arrive at an **independent** decision on the merits of the examination answers. Each member of the committee must grade **all** of the questions, not just the one she/he submitted.

The student must receive unanimous approval on all questions to pass the examination (both minor

and major field examinations) without qualification. In cases where some of the examiners shall confer and determine whether or not the student has passed or failed that part of the examination, the student will be required to retake only the failed parts of the examination. For example, if a student taking a major field examination passes two questions but fails the third question, she/he will have to retake the examination in the subject area of the third question. The time allowed for retaking examinations should be proportional to the number of questions originally required. In the example above, the time frame limit would be five days (i.e., one third of the total exam time). The student must retake the examination within two months of the original examination date.

In cases where all or part of an examination must be retaken, the membership of the committee must remain unchanged. Only the Graduate Program Director can grant exceptions under extraordinary circumstances to reconstitute an examination committee for a field examination. If the student fails the examination twice, she/he will be disqualified from continuing in the program and dismissed from the Graduate School. The student will have an opportunity to petition the department and the Graduate School for re-statement through the Departmental and Graduate School grievance procedures.