

## Comprehensive Exams

### GOALS

The comprehensive exam aims to help students synthesize, integrate, and critically assess the ideas in courses related to their social work concentration, social science, and substantive area of interest. Students should demonstrate knowledge of the primary theories, empirical findings, and methodologies that apply to their chosen areas of focus.

### EXPECTATIONS

Students taking the comprehensive exams are expected to demonstrate the following:

1. Ability to demonstrate a thorough understanding of relevant social and behavioral science theories, including:
  - ability to explain why this/these are the most appropriate theory(ies) for the particular area/question -- demonstrating that they have considered a range of potential theoretical approaches and have a credible rationale for their choice
  - ability to describe the development of selected theoretical approach(es) with an emphasis on current thinking and use
  - ability to manipulate and apply key concepts- an example might be: to link theory(ies) with social work and research methodologies
2. Ability to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the social work method, including:
  - ability to critique key historical arguments in the method area and how these have led to present-day models
  - ability to effectively apply this knowledge of theories and practice models to a specific illustrative population or practice problem
3. Ability to demonstrate a thorough working knowledge of a selected **substantive area**
  - ability to critique the development and current status of interdisciplinary scholarship in the substantive area
  - ability to demonstrate the main contextual factors that influence the topic, including domestic and global contexts
  - ability to identify 'significant' knowledge gaps in the substantive area

and to formulate 'significant' researchable questions and appropriate analytic strategies to address these gaps.

## STRUCTURE

### Social/Behavioral Science

- Students must declare their choice of social/behavioral science by the end of the first year/beginning of the second year. Social/behavioral science declarations must be approved by their advisor, with the doctoral program chair providing ultimate oversight.

### The Reading List

- Students will propose a reading list of at least 30 seminal articles or books relevant to their field of practice, from the perspective of their social science theory and their method, for review and approval by their Comprehensive Exam (CE) committee. Though there is no set number of required readings that must be included on the list, a guideline is 30 to 50 publications. The committee may add to the list readings it deems important or suggest removal of certain readings that may not be considered seminal, prior to approval. Students will be expected to become very knowledgeable about the designated readings, from which questions will be drawn. Students should have their individual lists approved by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year (4<sup>th</sup> semester). The student and CE committee members will schedule the exam. Students should be advised that while they will be asked to draw heavily on their reading list for the examination, they are also expected to utilize their accumulated knowledge from their required coursework.

### The Exam

- Drawing mostly (but not necessarily exclusively) from the approved list, faculty on the student's CE committee will draft a total of 6-8 questions incorporating the student's social science perspective, social work method, and area(s) of substantive interest. Questions may be specific to a particular article or book, or may focus on the integration of the student's various areas of knowledge.
- Additionally, students may be asked to draft and submit their own exam question(s). It is up to the discretion of the committee to decide 1) to solicit student-generated questions; and 2) to incorporate any of the student's questions into the exam.
- Students will be asked to answer a total of 4 questions.
- Students will choose to take the exam either as a 7-hour in-school closed-book exam or as a 3-day 30 page (double-spaced) maximum take home exam. All students will also take an oral exam after the CE committee has reviewed the written component. Exams are to be completed only by the student, without substantive or editorial assistance from others.
- Students electing the closed-book in-school exam are not allowed to take the exam on personal computers with internet access, nor are they allowed to bring flash drives into the exam.
- Students are required to sign a pledge of academic honesty, to be submitted with the completed exam.

- Comments to the students need not be provided in the case of satisfactory answers to all questions. In the case of unsatisfactory answers, faculty will indicate areas of deficiency prior to the oral portion of the exam. Feedback should be given to students as quickly as possible after the written exam.
- The oral exams should be scheduled as soon as possible after the written portion, ideally within a couple of weeks. However, if the student and committee are in agreement, a later date may be set.
- The CE committee will designate two of its members to administer the oral exam. During the oral portion of the exam, students will be given the chance to elaborate on answers from the written portion of their exam.
- A unanimous committee vote is required to pass the exam.
- In the event of a failed exam, the student will be given the opportunity to retake the comprehensive exam once. While students are encouraged to retake the exam as soon as is feasible, they are allowed up to 12 months maximum to retake. The committee may remain the same or be reconstituted, the reading list will have to be reapproved, and new questions will be asked.
- Students who have not successfully defended the dissertation 5 years from the date of their comprehensive exams will be required to retake the exams if they wish to be considered for continued program enrollment.

#### The CE committee

- Students will be responsible for assembling a 3-person examination committee from the CUSSW faculty. The committee should contain at least 1 faculty member from the student's social work method concentration (practice, policy or admin). The committee will approve the student's reading list, draft questions, meet as a group to determine whether the student performed satisfactorily on the written portion of the exam, and (a subset of the committee) administer and evaluate the oral portion of the exam. The committee can enlist assistance from outside faculty with specific expertise for any or all stages of the examination process, as deemed necessary. The committee will determine with the student the schedule for the written and oral portions of the exam.
- The CE committee will designate one member to act as the committee chair, and inform the doctoral office of its selection. The CE chair will take the lead in finalizing questions for the CE exam, coordinating the delivery of the exam with the doctoral office, and formalizing the logistics of the oral exam.

#### INTEGRATION WITH FIELD OF PRACTICE (FOP)

- The structure of the FOP will not change but the CE will now integrate knowledge from the field of practice.
- The student will declare a social science expertise by the end of the first year/beginning of the second year, subject to the approval of their advisor. The social science should be relevant to the field of practice and to the social work method
- The doctoral handbook will list possible fields of practice that cut across the different social work methods and social/behavioral sciences.

- Students should be allowed some flexibility to specialize in more than one social science (e.g. organizational theory). A list of approved social science areas will be listed within the program resource guide.