

Graduate Program in Humanities: Comprehensive Examinations

Students are normally expected to take their comprehensive examinations by their third year, by their eighth term of registration.

Comprehensive Exams in the Graduate Program in Humanities serve to reflect a student's major interests in the Humanities based on three primary and closely related goals:

- To define the student's scholarly expertise in the Humanities
- To demonstrate a sound knowledge of the major scholarly works, actors, debates, and methodologies that define and illuminate this expertise
- To situate their knowledge within relevant scholarship, with a mind to future research and/or teaching and other relevant employment

There are two examinations, a **General** and a **Specialized**. These examinations equip students with the knowledge they need to conduct research for, or begin writing, their doctoral dissertation, to pursue subsequent research in their future endeavours, and to teach courses in existing or developing programs at universities, colleges, and private institutions.

Comprehensive Exams in the Humanities program follow the principles guiding the tradition of academic exams found in discipline-based departments but are distinct from them in form and method. The Humanities Program tests students on lists the students have created themselves. Thus, a student's lists are unique, reflecting her/his projected work within selected fields of study. By "fields", we mean areas of research that reflect debates, methods, themes, and tropes that exist in scholarship, drawn from traditional and/or contemporary approaches, from one or several fields across schools, and/or methods, and from discipline-based research such as philosophy, history, literature, etc., or multi-disciplinary research areas such as cultural studies, environmental studies, biblical studies, media studies, etc. Working with the Comprehensive Exams committee, students will create unique lists that are situated within scholarly study in the Humanities.

Knowing where and how the student's work fits into existing scholarship is fundamental for creating two coherent lists, one for each exam. When building the lists, the student should consider several factors. The lists should reflect the topic, if not the thesis question of the dissertation, at least in part. The lists should be modelled for future employment, whether that will involve teaching in academia, carrying out academic research, or working in other environments. If teaching is the goal, for example, lists that reflect existing programs in university departments will allow the student to form concrete ideas about where she/he can start applying for work after completing her/his degree. Finally, the lists should consider expertise acquired at the undergraduate and Master levels. Advice on how to incorporate, build on, or otherwise account for this past expertise in the lists, can be sought from members of the Committee, the Program Director, and/or faculty members.

For each exam, the student is expected to supply a list of works along with written material. The list of works for the General exam must aim to describe the larger vista of the field and/or fields of study in which the student will claim expertise. The list for the Specialized exam is more narrowly defined. It provides focus to the student's research, which may involve isolating an aspect or theme of the larger area of research, highlighting a method or school of scholarship, or applying some other formula for circumscribing knowledge. In some cases, the Specialized list contains the material upon which the student's thesis is based.

Examples of past lists and written submissions are available for viewing in the Graduate Program Office. Students must prepare their lists and materials so that individuals unfamiliar with their research areas can readily understand them.

For the General exam, students must provide the following materials:

- Students must provide a list of **approximately seventy-five works**, with a title, student information, and supervisory and comprehensive supervisory committee information. The list of works may include articles, books, films, and other appropriate sources, that are either scholarly or primary sources where appropriate
 - Each work should be a significant contribution to the scholarship for which the student will claim expertise
 - The works should be organized thematically and provided minimally three months prior to the comprehensive examination allowing the student time to finish studying and prepare the written submission
- Students must provide a written submission of approximately 3,500 words, defining the comprehensive field, and discussing the important works, debates, and methodologies informing the field
 - The committee then decides whether the written submission plausibly sets out a field of study and is examinable
 - The written submission must be provided a minimum of three weeks prior to the comprehensive examination.

In the comprehensive examination, students will be examined on both the list and the written submission

For the specialized exam, students must provide the following materials:

- Students must provide a list of **approximately fifty works**, with a title, student information, and supervisory and comprehensive supervisory committee information
 - The list of works may include articles, books, films, and other appropriate sources, that are either scholarly or primary sources where appropriate. Each work should be a significant contribution to the scholarship for which the student will demonstrate expertise
 - The works should be organized thematically and provided minimally three months prior to the comprehensive examination allowing the student time to finish studying and prepare the course syllabus

- Students must provide a twelve-week half-course syllabus at the 4000 level that focuses more directly upon the area of research of their dissertation. This course syllabus will include:
 - A course description that sets out with clarity the focus and methodology of the course
 - A weekly class schedule that specifies the topic and reading assignments for each week, and a paragraph detailing the nature, rationale and overall place within the course of each class
 - The course syllabus must be provided a minimum of three weeks prior to the comprehensive examination

In the comprehensive examination students will be examined on both the list and course syllabus. The first half of the examination will focus on the list and the second half on the syllabus.

Students will normally be expected to take both examinations by the second term in the third year of their program of study or the eighth term of study.

Setting up the Examinations

The lists of works for each comprehensive field are to be submitted and approved by the supervisor and the comprehensive supervisory committee, and by the Graduate Program Director, minimally three months before the comprehensive examination. Students must meet with their comprehensive supervisory committee prior to approving the final version of the list. Once the list is approved by the committee, students are to submit the list together with approval confirmations to the Graduate Program Office. Only once the written material has been submitted will the proposed comprehensive examination date be finalized.

Students should discuss with their supervisor and the GPD any accommodations that are required or any accessibility issues.

The written submission for the general comprehensive examination or the course syllabus for the specialized comprehensive examination are to be approved by the supervisor and the comprehensive supervisory committee, and submitted to the Graduate Program Office, minimally three weeks before the comprehensive examination. Once the written material is approved by the committee, students are to submit the material together with approval. Only once the written material has been submitted will a comprehensive examination be scheduled.

Once the written material for the comprehensive examination has been submitted, the Graduate Program Assistant will schedule the examination. Each examination committee will be comprised of four faculty: the Program Director or his/her representative; the student's supervisor; and the two further members of the comprehensive supervisory committee. Students or supervisors should never attempt to schedule comprehensive examinations; these must always be scheduled by the Graduate Program Assistant. Students are normally provided at least 20 business days' notice of the examination date.

Each examination takes two hours. Candidates may choose to take both examinations in one day or to take them on separate dates, as agreed with the members of the examination committee..

The Examination

Candidates will be required to demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the designated fields in the examination. Evidence of such comprehensive knowledge will be assessed on the basis of the candidate's competence in providing answers to questions during the examination that address the material in relation to significant critical, theoretical and methodological issues. Examiners will want to know that candidates have a firm idea of each of their fields: what are the key questions raised in these fields; what methods of investigation are appropriate in each field; how is this field connected to related fields; and who are the influential scholars, both past and present, who helped define the fields? Candidates will also be examined on the construction and understanding of their fields of research and the relationship between their fields of research, existing academic fields or disciplines and the study of the humanities. In general, the examination will focus on the critical interpretation of texts and methods of inquiry.

Each examination will last two hours. Before the examination begins the chair will send the candidate out of the room. The committee will agree on the length and order of the questioning. (Usually the supervisor goes last). It is the chair's task to ensure that members of the committee stay within the time allotted. Once the committee is ready to proceed with the examination, the candidate will then be invited back into the room.

General comprehensive examination: The candidate will be asked to give a five minute presentation addressing the main issues and problems within the field. The examination will then proceed through two cycles of questioning, in which the examining committee will ask questions regarding the comprehensive list and the submitted written work

Specialized comprehensive examination: The examination will be broken into two parts. The candidate will be asked to give a presentation situating the specialized comprehensive field within the general comprehensive field, as well on the rationale of the course syllabus. In other words, what is the logic of the coherence and sequencing of the course. The examining committee will then proceed through a cycle of questioning.

Each exam will be assessed separately.

In each examination, once the questioning has come to an end, the student will be asked to leave the room so that the committee can make their decision. The committee can choose to pass or to fail the candidate, or to pass the candidate subject to revisions to the written materials. Such revisions can take the form of an essay on a neglected topic or an annotated bibliography. The members of the committee must sign the standard comprehensive examination form that records their decision and allows them to make comments. The candidate is then invited back into the room and the committee's decision is announced.

A student will have been assessed to have passed their comprehensive exam if they are able to demonstrate:

- i. a critical interpretation of the texts and the related methods of inquiry associated with their given fields; and
- ii. a keen understanding and explanation of
 - a. the key questions raised in the fields.
 - b. who the influential scholars are and how.
 - c. the relationship between their fields of research, existing academic fields/disciplines and the study of the humanities more broadly.

Students who fail a comprehensive examination will be permitted to re-sit the examination only once, and the re-examination is to take place within three months of the date of the first examination. A second failure on a re-sat examination will require withdrawal from the Program.

Successful candidates will have their results submitted to FGS in order to update their degree milestones. Following this step, the next milestone is the thesis proposal.

The executive committee of the program will undertake a review and assessment of the format for the exams every five years and make adjustments when it is deemed necessary.