

Graduate Milestone/ Comprehensive Examinations for SLST (PhD)

Guidelines

Doctoral students are required to complete two comprehensive exams—one in theory and one in a substantive area of socio-legal studies (SLST). The purpose of the comprehensives is to prepare the student to do research and to teach in the field at a post-secondary level. Most comprehensives will entail an understanding of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of socio-legal studies (defined broadly as including critical criminology and law and society research), how past and current research can be interpreted in the light of different theoretical approaches, and an awareness of gaps in the literature. Put another way, the comprehensive exam process is to assess the student's mastery of foundational knowledge for the field of socio-legal studies.

The Theory comprehensive topic can be chosen from previous exams or determined in consultation with the student's supervisory committee. The Substantive comprehensive exam topic is more closely aligned with the student's dissertation topic but still designed to be broad enough to qualify students with expertise to teach in the field (in addition to the expertise developed in their particular dissertation research area).

Timing and Scheduling

Normally, students will complete one exam per term in the second year of their PhD candidacy with the same comprehensive committee, and normally after completing course requirements. The expected schedule for the comprehensive exams is:

- Spring/ Summer Year 1 (Term 3) Comprehensive exam committee established
- Summer Year 1 (Term 3) Theory Comprehensive topic and reading list 1st draft
- Fall Year 2 (Term 4) Theory Comprehensive reading list & Rationale approved
- Fall Year 2 (Term 4) Oral Defense of Theory Comp in **December** (Year 2)
- Winter Year 2 (Term 5) Substantive Comprehensive topic and reading list draft
- Winter Year 2 (Term 5) Substantive Comprehensive approved
- End of Winter (Term 5): Defense of Substantive Comp in **May** (Year 2)

Committee:

The Comprehensive exam committee should normally be made up of a minimum of two faculty members appointed to graduate program in SLST and a third appointed to FGS but not necessarily SLST. The committees need not be the same for both the Theory and Substantive comprehensive exams. Ideally, the supervisor remains the same for consistency and support of the student's progress in the program.

Theory Requirement, Format and Structure

The purpose of the theory exam is to prepare the student to develop the breadth of knowledge necessary to teach an introductory course in Socio-Legal Studies. Fulfillment of the theory requirement will be met through an oral exam. The topic of the Theory exam should be recognizable as a sub-field or cluster within socio-legal studies. Some **examples** from previous exams include:

- Aesthetics and law
- Biopolitics and biopower
- Contemporary approaches to punishment
- Gender, violence and international law
- Globalization and human rights
- Indigeneity and Indigenous legalities
- Law and Disability/ Law and medical power
- Restorative and transitional justice
- Resistance
- Spatial approaches to socio-legal studies
- Surveillance
- Time and temporality
- Violence
- Queerness/ Queering socio-legal studies

1. Reading List: Students will be responsible for a reading list of a minimum of twenty-five (25) books (or equivalent), of which a minimum of half (ten to fifteen) are to be selected from the Program's common list and the remainder from a list of works selected by the student. The final material on the reading list is to be chosen in consultation with, and approved by, the students' comprehensive committee.

With the agreement of their comprehensive committee, students may substitute works by the same author in place of books by that author currently on the list (e.g. substitute a different work by Foucault to the ones now listed). Five journal articles will be considered equivalent to one book. 25 books is considered the minimum not the maximum in order to develop a comprehensive knowledge of the topic in the field.

2. Rationale: The student, in consultation with their comprehensive committee, will compose a short statement (approximately 2500 words, 5 pages single-spaced) explaining the rationale for choosing the books and articles on the reading list and a list of general or thematic questions based on the list. The questions set out by the student will be used as the basis of the written exam questions set by their Committee but will not necessarily be the same.

To ensure that the exam meets breadth requirements, students and committees are strongly encouraged to include at least one of the following questions among their preparatory exam questions:

1. What are the key arguments made by scholars working in the area? How do they relate with one another and what is your critical assessment of them?
2. What is the intellectual context/climate of the area? How has that context/climate changed? What factors have influenced that change and with what impact on the relevant scholarship?
3. How have key debates in the area been shaped by specific theoretical or methodological perspectives?
4. How do you position yourself in the key areas of debate within the area and why?
5. What are the current methodological/theoretical/or substantive research gaps in the area and what are their implications for scholarship in the area?

3. Curricular Review: The Reading List, Rationale and questions will be submitted to the SLST Curriculum Committee that will review the list for consistency with program requirements (set out above) and for comprehensiveness or breadth in keeping with the general purpose of the theory requirement. The Curriculum Committee can ask for revisions to the reading list. Theory reading lists will be kept on file in the SLST office, and used for periodic reviews of the common list and reference for other doctoral students.

4. Oral Exam: The student will normally take two to three months (and a maximum of four months) to closely read the material on their list. The student, in consultation with their comprehensive committee, will then set a date for the oral exam. The comprehensive committee will set the exam questions (normally 3 interrelated questions) and provide them to the student three weeks before the date of the oral exam. The student will have two weeks to write their answers in essay format in what is called the 'written statement'.

One week before the scheduled exam, the student will submit to the committee the written statement/ essay (approximately 5000 words or 10 pages single-spaced) that will be presented orally at the exam (that is, a 20–25-minute oral presentation). While the written and oral statements may be substantially the same, it is expected that the oral presentation will not consist of a direct reading of the written statement. The statement will offer a reflective review of the approved reading list and issues arising from it. The comprehensive committee will base their first round of questions on the originally submitted rationale and questions, as well as on the written statement. The student is responsible for all the material on the reading list and not only those authors referred to and discussed in their statement. Additional questions and discussion will follow.

The oral exam is expected to be 90–120 minutes in length.

Substantive Requirement

Fulfillment of the substantive requirement will be met through written work followed by an oral defense. The written work can take two forms:

- a) A review of research in an area of specialization that is related to the dissertation. The paper (approximately 7500 words or 15 single/ 30 double-spaced pages) should demonstrate an understanding of the relevant literature, the different theoretical approaches used to interpret empirical research and an awareness of major debates in this site of research as well as major gaps in theory and research. The area of specialization and the readings to be reviewed will be decided by the student in consultation with their committee. The reading list will consist of a minimum 25 ~~20~~-books or equivalent.

After reading the approved list for the substantive comprehensive, the student, in consultation with the comprehensive committee, will submit 3 to 5 questions based on the readings to their comprehensive committee. The student should normally take two to three months (and not more than four months) to read the material. The comprehensive committee will select 2 of these questions, which may be revised as the committee sees fit. These questions will be given to the student on an agreed-upon date. The essay will be due two weeks later, and will respond to the questions posed. In other words, this format is similar to the Theory comprehensive process but does not require the written Rationale.

OR

- b) An outline of an advanced undergraduate course (24 weeks) in a chosen area to include: an academic rationale for the organization of the course providing broad coverage of the field; a rationale for the particular selection of topics and modules or sections; and a list of twenty-four two-hour [lecture] sessions, with readings to accompany each session. In addition, the students will write the full text of a lecture on one of the topics in the course, to be chosen in consultation with the comprehensive committee. This written lecture should be approximately 7500 words.

The substantive comprehensive, whether completed as option (a) or (b), will be subject to an oral defense, to be scheduled within 2 weeks of receiving the essays or course & lecture. The defense is expected to be 90–120 minutes in length.

Accessibility and Accommodations: Students requiring accommodations are encouraged to contact the appropriate accessibility office at the university well in advance of the examination(s).

Evaluation of Comprehensive Exams

At the conclusion of the oral exam or defense, the student will be asked to leave the room, while the committee determines the evaluation. The committee may determine one of the following outcomes:

PASS

The student has demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the field. Grade will be recorded. This evaluation is based on the quality of the student's written material and demonstration of knowledge in response to questions.

INCOMPLETE*

The student has not demonstrated an adequate understanding of the field. The comprehensive committee will provide the student with written comments and directions within one week of the oral exam or defense. The student will then schedule another oral exam, in the case of the theory requirement, or will re-write another essay or lecture, in the case of the substantive requirement. These must be completed not more than two months after receiving the comments. If, after the subsequent oral exam or written submission, the committee is satisfied that the student has demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the field, the grade will be changed to "Pass". Otherwise, the grade will be changed to "Fail" and the student will be withdrawn from the program.

FAIL

The student has not demonstrated an adequate understanding of the field. The comprehensive committee will provide written comments within one week of the oral exam explaining their finding. The grade will be recorded, and the student will be withdrawn from the program.

***NOTE:** In normal circumstances, it is expected that in cases of unsatisfactory exams, the comprehensive committee will assign a grade of Incomplete and provide a written explanation in order to allow the student to do the exam again.

A comprehensive requirement is considered passed if no more than one member of the committee casts a negative vote. The GPD (or designate) can attend all evaluation meetings as ex-officio, non-voting member.

Appeals

If a student fails their comprehensive exam on the first attempt, they can appeal the failed exam decision once. They can do so on the basis that, in their view, the written decision by the committee does not justify the exam outcome. To appeal an exam failure, students must submit a Comprehensive Exam Appeal Form to the Program

Office within two weeks of the decision being rendered. They must demonstrate how their responses to the comprehensive exam questions successfully meet the criteria of assessment. The Appeal Form provides the comprehensive examination committee an opportunity to respond in writing to the student's appeal.

The comprehensive exam and the Comprehensive Exam Appeal Form are submitted to the Program's [awards and appeals] committee. The awards and appeals committee can either affirm the decision of the comprehensive examination committee or grant a rewrite (see Appendix 1).

Updates to the Graduate Milestone Examinations:

These examination policies and procedures will be reviewed every 5-years by the Socio-Legal Studies Curriculum Committee and Executive, and if necessary, propose changes.

The Common List of Socio-Legal Studies topics and readings will be updated regularly by the SLST Curriculum and Executive committees and ratified by the SLST program faculty.

Approved by SLST Executive and SLST program Faculty May 2023.