

Comprehensive Examination (PhD)

Updated Milestone Document

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT
YORK UNIVERSITY

Objectives

The purposes of the comprehensive examination are twofold:

- › To provide an adequate background and intelligible context for the writing of an interdisciplinary dissertation, where adequacy and intelligibility are determined by the examining committee in relation to the specific texts and areas being examined;
- › To ensure sufficient breadth of scholarly knowledge (again determined by the examining committee in relation to the specific texts and areas being examined) in order to prepare the candidate for a career in university research and teaching.

Timing and Scheduling

Students will complete their comprehensive examination after completing their coursework, and prior to submitting their dissertation proposal. Ideally, this means that the examination will be completed during the Fall semester (or early Winter) of their third year of study.

Arrangements with respect to time, place, date, and composition of the examining committee must be made through the Program office for the Director's approval at least one month prior to the examination. The comprehensive examination committee consists of three members of the Program who are familiar with a student's work and the Director (or representative). The student will consult with their committee members to determine a suitable date and time for the exam, and the supervisory committee will approve the bibliography prior to submitting it to the Program office. The student will then provide to the Director (in writing or by email) the names of the three committee members, the proposed time and date of the exam, and the bibliography. Once the bibliography and committee are approved by the Director and a representative has been selected, the Program Administrator will contact the faculty member nominated as Director's Rep. and arrange the comprehensive exam. Official notification of the exam will be sent (by email) to all participants from the Program Office along with the form to be complete by the faculty members at the exam.

Format and Structure

The doctoral student, in consultation with the examining committee, defines two fields on which the student wishes to be examined. One field will be designated the major field, the other the minor field.

Determination of the fields should be guided by the following considerations:

- Fields must not be excessively narrow
- One field must not subsume another
- Both fields may not be primarily in the same discipline
- At least one field must not be limited primarily to the twentieth or twenty-first century.

Students should demonstrate a broad familiarity with the major texts, issues and critics in any given field. Examples of acceptable fields include but are not limited to:

- Psychoanalysis/ Psychoanalytic Theory
- Structuralist and Poststructuralist Theory
- Postcolonial Theory
- Queer Theory
- Feminist Theory
- Critical Race Theory
- Kant and Enlightenment
- Globalization and the Nation State
- Im/migration, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism
- Social Theories of Religion and Modernity
- 20th Century Historiography
- Theorizing Social Determinants of Health
- Philosophical Anthropology
- Theories of the body
- Aesthetic Theory and Public Spaces
- Hegel and Marx
- Theories of the State
- Themes in Critical Theory
- Theories of Art and Revolution
- Theories of Narratology
- Theories of Nature and Ecology

Prior to the examination, candidates will present a bibliography of the texts relevant to the chosen fields (these must be submitted in proper format, i.e. full references in an approved academic style). The bibliography should include a minimum of (and not much more than) twenty-five (25) significant entries in the major field and a minimum of (and not much more than) fifteen (15) entries for the minor field. The bibliography must be approved by the examining committee and the Director prior to setting the date for the examination.

Candidates must consult with their examining committee when preparing the bibliography. This consultation should, additionally, include discussion of the committee's expectations of the student with respect to the exam's objectives, such that there is consensus as to what will constitute a successful exam. Generally speaking, it is expected that students will:

- Recognize and offer critical assessments of key theoretical and methodological issues and debates
- Critically analyze, compare and present theoretical arguments from the bibliography
- Articulate links within the texts between academic knowledge and political, social, and cultural issues
- Articulate how social and political theory serves to interrogate understandings of social issues, institutions and relations as it pertains to the field(s) of specialization.

The examination itself will begin with a short (i.e. 5-10 minute) presentation prepared in advance by the student that accounts for how they have represented the fields in their bibliography. This will be followed by examiners asking oral questions that focus attention on the material listed in the bibliography. Each examiner will ask one to two rounds of questions, with a "round" typically consisting of one or more lines of inquiry (including follow-up questions and questions seeking context or clarification). This process, including the student presentation, will then be repeated for the other field. In the normal course of events, the entire exam will last between two and three hours.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations are encouraged to contact the appropriate accessibility office at the university well in advance of the examination. The Examination Committee is expected to support students who require accommodation, whilst ensuring the integrity of the examination process.

Assessment Criteria and Feedback

Students are assessed according to their fulfillment of the two-fold purpose of the exam, according to the expectations discussed in advance with their committee. Students must demonstrate competence (as determined by the examination committee) with regards to the following Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs):

- Recognize and offer critical assessments of key theoretical and methodological issues and debates
- Critically analyze, compare and present theoretical arguments from the bibliography
- Articulate links within the texts between academic knowledge and political, social, and cultural issues

- Articulate how social and political theory serves to interrogate understandings of social issues, institutions and relations as it pertains to the field(s) of specialization
- Demonstrate familiarity with a variety of social and political theories and methods, as well as their historical shifts and influences.

Although the Committee is encouraged to provide offer notes on the Examination Report, most of the feedback provided is verbal. The feedback will mainly pertain to the above criteria and will occasionally touch on the student's general preparation for the dissertation proposal stage. Committee members provide primarily verbal feedback in order to extend the dialogic structure of the examination itself.

Outcomes of the Examination(s)

The outcome of the Examination will be described using the following categories:

Pass: The examination committee will use this category if members deem that the student has demonstrated competence with regards to the following PLOs: to recognize and offer critical assessments of key theoretical and methodological issues and debates; to critically analyze, compare and present theoretical arguments from the bibliography; to articulate links within the texts between academic knowledge and political, social, and cultural issues; to articulate how social and political theory serves to interrogate understandings of social issues, institutions and relations as it pertains to the field(s) of specialization; and to demonstrate familiarity with a variety of social and political theories and methods, as well as their historical shifts and influences.

Fail: The examination committee will use this category if members deem that the student has not demonstrated competence with regards to the following PLOs: to recognize and offer critical assessments of key theoretical and methodological issues and debates; to critically analyze, compare and present theoretical arguments from the bibliography; to articulate links within the texts between academic knowledge and political, social, and cultural issues; to articulate how social and political theory serves to interrogate understandings of social issues, institutions and relations as it pertains to the field(s) of specialization; and to demonstrate familiarity with a variety of social and political theories and methods, as well as their historical shifts and influences.

This category may be used if the student has not demonstrated sufficient grasp of the examination materials, but can reasonably be expected to do so upon completion of a set of corrective measures prescribed by the examination committee; such corrective measures will be determined on a case by case basis and may include a written assignment or further oral discussion after re-reading materials. The student's supervisor(s) will ensure the implementation of these corrective measures and will inform the GPD, in writing, of their successful implementation.

A written report is required from the Chair of the examination committee in case of a failure. The examination committee may recommend either that the student retake the examination within six months or that the student withdraw from the PhD program.

The outcome of the second PhD comprehensive examination (i.e. on that has been “retaken”) will be final. That is, no third PhD comprehensive examination will be allowed, and a student who failed both attempts will be withdrawn from the Program.

Procedures for Updating Graduate Milestone Examinations

These procedures will be reviewed as part of the regular CPR process. Any changes will be proposed by a committee formed for this purpose, and will be brought to the SPTH Executive for approval before moving through the expected Faculty-level approval mechanisms.