

UNB Sociology Graduate Academic Unit: Comprehensive Exam Regulations

Purpose and Content

1. Each PhD student undertaking the program is required to successfully complete two written comprehensive exams (one in social theory, one in an elective area). Usually, the social theory comprehensive exam is written first and followed by a student's elective area.
 - a. Generally, the purpose of the comprehensive exams is to:
 - i. Demonstrate broad knowledge, understanding, and competence in the academic area of Sociology;
 - ii. Demonstrate the ability to analyse, synthesise, and integrate a diverse number of readings from the 'canon' of specific Sociological literatures;
 - iii. Demonstrate a core academic ability to write coherent and informed argument under time-sensitive conditions.
 - b. In addition to the general purposes of the exam, specifically the purpose of the social theory exam is to demonstrate an understanding of the historical and contemporary theoretical perspectives present within the discipline of Sociology.
 - c. In addition to the general purposes of the exam, specifically the purpose of the elective area exam is to demonstrate a broad understanding of the literature and debates within the elective area.
2. After successful completion of the social theory exam the student will, in consultation with their supervisor, choose **one** of the following elective areas in which to complete their comprehensive examinations:
 - a. Communication and Media.
 - b. Family and Domestic Violence.
 - c. Health, Healthcare, and Health Policy.
 - d. Cultural Sociology.
 - e. Population Studies.
3. Each comprehensive exam will consist of two questions with an expected length of 10-15 pages per question (exclusive of references); **examiners will not read past 15 pages of text.**
 - a. See Section 8 for formatting guidance and expectations.
4. Each comprehensive examination takes the form of a **7 day take-home exam**.
 - a. The two comprehensive exams will typically be written separately on set dates: the Mondays nearest to August 30th, December 30th, or April 30th. Any requests for exceptions to this timing must be with due cause, supported by the student's supervisor, and approved by the Graduate Studies Director (GSD).
 - b. Students must notify the GSD of their intent to sit an exam a minimum of one month in advance; i.e.: July for August, November for December, and March for April.
5. Normally, a student will be expected to complete coursework and comprehensives within twenty-four months after entering the PhD programme if they are registered full time, and

within forty-eight months if registered part time. After this period, if the GSD deems it appropriate, the student will be required to begin studying for a comprehensive exam.

6. A student who **twice** fails a comprehensive exam in any given area will be required to withdraw from the program.

Exam Format and Assessment

7. The comprehensive exams are **not** designed to elicit from the student a research paper, a publishable article, or a thesis proposal. Instead, the student's answer should offer both breadth of knowledge and selective depth of knowledge.
8. The formatting regulations for Comprehensive Examinations are as follows:
 - a. Line Spacing – Answers are to be double spaced.
 - b. Margins – Answers must have a 1-inch/2.5cm border on all sides to facilitate duplication.
 - c. Standard Fonts – Answers must be in 12 point font such as Times New Roman/ Arial/ Helvetica/ etc.
 - d. Numbering – Page numbers must be included on all pages.
 - e. Student Name and Number – The student's name and student number must be placed at the top of the first page.
 - f. Question – Clearly state the question that is being answered at the beginning of each answer.
 - g. Length – 10-15 pages per question (exclusive of references); **examiners will not read past 15 pages of text.**
 - h. Referencing – A consistent referencing style (e.g. Chicago, APA, etc.) is expected within each answer. There should be **frequent** referencing that demonstrates both familiarity with texts and accuracy in attribution of concepts, arguments, statements, quotes, etc. Students should include in **every citation “(author date, page)”** (except where referencing a text in general, where it should be “(author date)”).
 - i. Students are encouraged to ask their examining committee members for guidance if they are unsure what this entails.
 - i. Writing style – *Unless specifically directed otherwise by the question*, each answer should be written in an appropriately dispassionate and distanced academic style.
 - i. Students are encouraged to ask their examining committee members for guidance if they are unsure what this entails.
 - j. Printing – A copy dark enough to be copied satisfactorily is required.
 - k. Deadline – Completed examinations must be handed in/e-mailed by 9:00 am on the due date.
9. The following procedures govern the assessment of the Comprehensive Exam by the Examining Committee.
 - a. The Committee reaches decisions by majority, not consensus. If the two Examiners are in agreement, then the written exam passes (or not) based on their assessment. If the two Readers do not agree, then the GSD or designate casts the tie breaking

vote. In the event that the Committee is larger than three, the principal remains the same: the GSD or designate only votes if required to break a tie.

- b. Based on its assessment of the entirety of the Comprehensive Examination, the Committee must reach one of the following conclusions:
 - i. Pass with Distinction.
 1. If **both** Examiners of the comprehensive agree that the answers to **both** questions are of exceptional quality, they can recommend to the GSD or designate that the exam be considered a pass with distinction.
 2. If the GSD or designate agrees, then the exam will Pass with Distinction. If the GSD or designate does not agree with the recommendation, then the exam will be considered a Pass, and the designation 'Pass with Distinction' will not be given.
 - ii. Pass.
 - iii. Revise and Resubmit.
 1. The Committee may reach the conclusion that **one** question is satisfactory and the **other** is not. In this situation, the student will be asked to revise and resubmit the unsatisfactory question. In the process of communicating the need to revise and resubmit the question, the Committee should provide the student with feedback aimed at helping the student understand why the original answer was deficient.
 2. Revisions must be completed and resubmitted to the Committee within one week of being informed of the revise and resubmit decision and from receiving the Committee's feedback.
 3. Students will be given only one opportunity to revise substandard work. If the Revised material is not up to the Committee's standards, then the student Fails and is required to retake the entire exam.
 - iv. Fail.
- c. In the event that a student has taken an exam once, failed it, and is due to retake the exam in that area, the following regulations will apply:
 - i. The student must retake the failed exam and successfully complete it before undertaking a comprehensive exam in another area.
 - ii. The reading list will remain the same.
 - iii. The membership of the Examination Committee for the retake may be the same as the membership for the original exam. The Examination Committee will be constituted by the GSD or designate.
 - iv. The questions posed on the retake exam will be different from those posed on the original.
 - v. The Committee decision making process will operate as before, but the possible decisions they can reach will be limited to:
 1. Pass

2. Fail. If the student fails the retake, they will be required to withdraw from the PhD program.
 3. For a second failed examination there is no appeal to required withdrawal, unless under exceptional circumstances.
- d. Normally no more than one month should pass between the time the student submits the written exam and a judgment is rendered and communicated by the Examining Committee.
- i. The Examining Committee should provide in writing either summaries or full copies of their judgements to other members of the Area Committee.
 - ii. A summary or full copy of the Examining Committee's judgement must go to the student and another to the Graduate Secretary for inclusion in the student's file.

Examining Committee Process

10. Each exam will be administered by a Comprehensive Examining Committee which is responsible for setting the questions, evaluating the answers, and communicating the result.
11. Examining Committees must have at least three members.
 - a. Typically this membership will consist of two individuals from the Area Committee (Readers) and the GSD, or their designate, as Chair.
 - i. Supervisors are **not** automatically members of their student's Examining Committees, though they may be asked to serve on them if they are a member of the relevant Area Committee.
 - ii. At a minimum, the Committee must have at least one member from the relevant Area Committee.
 - b. Composition of the Examining Committee will be determined by the GSD, taking into account both the expertise and experience of faculty members, and the needs and interests of the student to be examined.
 - i. Students have the right to appeal the composition of the Committee to the GSD, who has final authority in resolving the composition.
12. Once the Examination Committee has been formed, individual students, in consultation with their Supervisor, can make minor modifications (i.e., no more than **20%**) to the reading list. (For a reading list of 50 texts, this would mean 10 texts.)
 - a. It is permissible for students to contact their examiners to discuss suitable readings. (Although examiners are under no obligation to discuss readings with students.)

Area Committee Process

13. Modification to the list of comprehensive exams requires a quorate, simple majority vote of the Graduate Academic Unit (GAU).
14. A Comprehensive Area Committee, consisting of a minimum of three GAU members (one of whom will act as Chair, as determined by plurality vote), will be created for each of the areas.

- a. Membership in the various Area Committees will be based on self-selection by GAU members and be made public.
 - b. Area Committee members are expected to be available to act as potential examiners for any student taking an examination in their Area. (See Section 11)
 - c. A Comprehensive Area should be struck from the list if the number of GAU members in the Area falls below three for more than three consecutive years.
15. Each Comprehensive Area Committee must prepare a core bibliography that also indicates the approximate date of preparation.
 - a. The core bibliography will consist of approximately 50 book titles (or equivalents).
 - b. Area Committees can, if they wish, construct their lists with a mandatory core and choices from optional lists.
 - i. If a core and sub-lists are created, then the core list will number approximately 35 books (or their equivalent), and each sub-list approximately 15 books (or their equivalent).
 - c. All Area Committees must review and update their lists at least once every three years.
16. Each Comprehensive Area Committee will develop a bank of 10 to 20 questions from which comprehensive questions in that area are normally drawn.
 - a. Each Area Committee will revise these questions on a regular basis.
 - b. The existence of these questions is not meant to prevent committees from devising unique questions for any particular exam, provided that the student is notified in advance of the examination.
17. Current reading lists and example questions for each area will be kept on file with the Graduate Secretary and will be available at all times to any faculty member as well as to graduate students who have passed all their required coursework.