

QUALIFYING EXAMINATIONS FOR PH.D. STUDENTS

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Doctoral education in history aims at training scholars who perform at the highest level, historians whose dissertations contribute significantly to our understanding of the past and whose skills as teachers and public historians engage their audiences. To serve that end, qualifying examinations test four kinds of knowledge: historical content, historiography, method, and theory. Their purpose is to assess each student's understanding of three fields, framed in conjunction with faculty.

Qualifying examinations give students the opportunity to demonstrate that they have acquired essential intellectual skills from course work, that they are prepared to begin their dissertations, and that they can meet professional standards. By immersing themselves in exam preparation, students develop expertise and confidence that help them write dissertations and sustain their future careers.

PREPARATION

Preparation for qualifying exams begins when students enter the program; all course work and additional reading provides the groundwork for successful exams. They may supplement regular courses by auditing undergraduate history courses and by taking graduate courses offered in other departments for credit. (Courses from other departments cannot be counted toward the requirement of four reading courses. Students may petition the GSC to make an exception to that rule.) Students should also enhance their knowledge through teaching assistantships at the survey level.

Full-time students admitted to the Ph.D. program must take qualifying exams during the fall of their third year. To be eligible, they must resolve incompletes and complete language exam(s) by **September 1**.

In their second year, students will form their examining committees. It is their responsibility to consult with their advisers during the third semester of coursework and to ask three professors to direct individual fields and serve as an examining committee. At least two committee members will be History Department faculty. A faculty person from History or another department at the University of Delaware may supervise the third field. The student's adviser will normally serve as coordinator of the exam committee. If the adviser is not part of the examining committee, a coordinator will be chosen by their committee members.

Each student will have a Primary field and two Secondary fields. Lists for the Primary field will comprise approximately 60-80 books or their equivalent in articles, from the student's principal area of research. Working in close collaboration with the faculty member, the student will develop a list that prepares him or her to answer broadly historiographical questions about the field *and* to write a prospectus for a dissertation that will, ultimately, contribute to that field. Lists for Secondary fields will comprise approximately 30-40 books or their equivalent in articles. One secondary field will cover a topic, theme, or period of history related to but distinct

from the primary field. The other secondary field will be geographically comparative to the other two fields and/or will be from another discipline (such as Art History or English). These fields provide broad coverage of a topic, may prepare a student to teach courses, and may also contribute to the student's preparation for the dissertation prospectus.

Students will submit their proposed fields, and identify the faculty members who have agreed to supervise each field, to the Graduate Program Academic Support Coordinator no later than **April 15** of their second year (4th semester). The Graduate Studies Committee will meet to review the proposed fields. In particular, the GSC will determine if the fields demonstrate a reasonable breadth of coverage, topically and chronologically. In other words, the GSC will likely not approve three fields that all cover 1918-1939, nor will it approve three fields that are all focused on the American West. Rather, the GSC will encourage breadth whenever possible.

Examples

Primary Field: American Capitalism, 1812-1973
Secondary Field A: American Religion in the 20th Century
Secondary Field B: European Modernisms

Primary Field: American Slavery
Secondary Field A: African American History, 1865-1945
Secondary Field B: Literature of the African Diaspora

Primary Field: 19th Century American Material Culture
Secondary Field A: American Consumer Culture, 1870-1970
Secondary Field B: Art History in the Age of Empire

Primary Field: Comparative Imperialisms
Secondary Field A: Europe, 1919-1939
Secondary Field B: North Africa in the 19th century *or* The United States, 1919-1939

Once students have prepared lists, members of the examination committee will help them prepare in each field. The examining committee as a whole shall ensure that the student's three fields are sufficiently broad, diverse, and distinct. The entire examining committee will also approve all questions for the written exam.

FORMAT, EVALUATION, AND APPEALS

Doctoral qualifying examinations consist of a take-home written examination followed by an oral examination.

Written Examination: Guidelines

The written exam process will begin during the last week of September and consist of two, week-long take-home exams. During Week 1 of the exam process, students will write two essays in response to questions about the Primary field. During Week 2, students will write two essays, one for each of the two Secondary fields. At least one week before the exam process begins, faculty directing a Primary field will submit three to five questions (plus one question that the

Graduate Program Academic Support Coordinator will hold “in reserve” in the event of a retake), and faculty directing a Secondary field will submit two to four questions (plus one question that the Graduate Program Academic Support Coordinator will hold “in reserve” in the event of a retake). The Graduate Program Academic Support Coordinator will send students the relevant set(s) of questions by 9:00 AM on the Monday of the exam week, and students will have until 5:00 PM Friday of that week to submit two essays. Each essay will consist of no more than 3,000 words (excluding citations) and should not be substantially shorter. Students must submit exams electronically to their entire committee, as well as to the Graduate Program Academic Support Coordinator. *Students who need special accommodations may petition the GSC for additional time.*

Examinees may use books, articles, and other resources in writing their essays. Throughout the examination process, they may seek clarification of the questions from the examiners but may not otherwise discuss their essays with anyone. Examinees are responsible for doing their own work in accordance with the code of academic conduct set forth by the University’s Office of Student Conduct.

Written Examination: Evaluation

Individual examiners will determine whether the student has demonstrated proficiency in the field. A passing exam should demonstrate competence in history, historiography, and critical historical thinking. Each essay must include a thesis and a cogent analytical framework.

Members of the exam committee will evaluate the essays in the fields they are directing and assign a grade: high pass, pass, or fail. Each committee member will also read all of the other essays the student has written for his or her other two fields. Committee members will meet to discuss the written exam unless they agree unanimously that no meeting is necessary. Committee members will submit their written reports to the committee chair, the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Graduate Program Academic Support Coordinator within one week of the exam’s conclusion. The Graduate Program Academic Support Coordinator will send copies of all three reports to the student.

Any student who fails two or more essays will not advance in the program. A student who receives a failing grade on one essay will be allowed to retake that portion of the written exam during the following week. He or she will be given an alternate essay question.

Once a student has passed all four essays (but not later than the end of October), he or she will advance to the oral exam.

Oral Examination: Guidelines

The examining committee will administer a two-hour oral examination within two weeks of the written exam (by early November at the latest). The oral exam is both a test of the students’ knowledge and of their ability to think quickly and express ideas coherently. Examinees may be asked to discuss their answers on the written exam, questions posed on the written exam that they did not choose to answer, topics or questions from any of their fields or reading lists, and their dissertation plans.

Oral Examination: Evaluation

Once a student passes the oral examination by unanimous agreement of committee members, the chair of the committee will report on the results of the exam to the Director of Graduate Studies and petition the GSC for advancement to candidacy. After the oral exams are completed, the GSC will hold a “scrutiny meeting” to determine if the student is qualified to advance to candidacy based on his/her overall performance in the program and prospect for future success. The Graduate Program Academic Support Coordinator will submit the appropriate paperwork to the Office of Graduate and Professional Education for advancement to candidacy after the GSC has held its scrutiny meeting. Once their paperwork is approved the student will then be registered in Doctoral Sustaining until graduation.

If a student fails the oral exam, he or she may retake it within two weeks, but not later than **December 15**.

Appeals

If a student wishes to contest the examining committee’s judgment, or if a committee member disagrees with the judgment of the rest of the committee, or if the committee as a whole cannot agree about the outcome of an exam, the student may submit a statement of grounds for an appeal to the Graduate Studies Committee. All GSC members will read the exam, the committee members’ comments, and the appellant’s statement. If a majority of the GSC disagrees with the judgment of the examining committee it will constitute a new examining committee, which may or may not include members of the existing examination committee. The student will retake all disputed portions of the exam.