

GUIDELINES ON THE CANDIDACY EXAMINATION FROM THE COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES (COGS)

When Does a Student Take the Candidacy Examination?

To enter into doctoral degree candidacy, a student must have earned a Master of Arts degree or its departmental semester hours equivalent, passed the qualifying examination, completed the Master's Thesis, and successfully completed the candidacy examination (also referred to as the comprehensive exam). All Ph.D. course requirements, including SOC G213 Advanced Research Methods and SOC G701 Teaching Tutorial must be complete (no "I" grades on record). Also, the Ph.D. 21 semester hour requirement beyond the M.A. must be complete. Once students complete this they must register for SOC G890 Dissertation or SOC G899 Dissertation Continuation (depending on time when comprehensive is defended) under their advisor's name. Once the candidacy examination is complete, a student is then free to construct a dissertation proposal. *The candidacy examination requirement must be completed at least nine months before the commencement at which the PhD is to be granted.*

What is the Purpose of the Candidacy Examination?

The purpose of the candidacy examination is to ensure that a student has mastery in two substantive areas of sociology. For instance, a student may wish to specialize in political economy as one area, and crime and violence as another. Our department currently has concentrations in five broad areas: gender studies; urban affairs and public policy; political economy and social movements; social policy and applied sociology; and conflict and violence studies. We suggest that students wanting to specialize in a different substantive area analyze how the American Sociological Association (ASA) defines the subject in terms of sessions at sociological meetings, positions for hire, journals, publications, and sections of ASA.

How Should the Candidacy Exam Committees be Structured?

A student must form of committee of three faculty members to administer the exam in each area of specialization. For instance, for an exam focusing on gender studies, the student may choose three faculty members with expertise in this area. For a second area such as social policy, the student may choose three entirely different faculty members to administer the exam. Or, there may be some overlap of faculty members on each committee. The expectation (but not the rule) is that faculty serving on *both* candidacy examination committees will also serve on the dissertation committee of the candidate.

Since the student-committee relationship is an important one, students are encouraged to establish their candidacy exam committees as early as possible in their residency so that a working relationship can be developed. Students are strongly encouraged to take classes or directed studies from the faculty members they desire to serve on their candidacy committees. *Faculty from outside the department may also be selected by a student to serve on a candidacy*

committee provided that the student submits a written petition to COGS, and which is approved by COGS, prior to the examination. However, the Chair of each exam committee should be a full-time faculty member of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

How Does the Candidacy Examination Process Work?

There is some flexibility as to how the candidacy exam is administered. However, the exam must include the submission of written work prepared exclusively for this examination and an oral defense of the written material. Separate written material and a separate oral defense is required for each area of specialization (i.e., a total of two written documents and two oral defense meetings). However, if the committee for both areas of specialization are made up of exactly the same faculty members, then the student may elect to conduct an oral defense of both areas simultaneously in one meeting. A time frame of one-and-a-half hours is considered sufficient for a single oral exam, and two-and-a-half for a combined oral defense.

The written portion of the examination should be between 30-40 pages (typed, double-spaced, 250 words per page minimum). A bibliography is mandatory, and will result in additional pages (i.e., the bib should not be considered as part of the original 30-40 pages). COGS recommends the following candidacy exam process. In consultation with their faculty committee, a student prepares a reading list and bibliography in their particular area of specialization. It is advised that the reading list contain at least 30 selected books/articles that are central to the field. The student is then presented with a set of written questions by the committee based upon this reading list. The student takes the questions home, and is given a week or more (to be negotiated with the faculty committee) to work up a response.

COGS recommends that two sets of questions be answered. The first category of questions are in the general field of study, and should be designed to test the student for their *breadth* of knowledge. The second category of questions should be more focused on a particular area of study within the larger field, and should test the student for their *depth* of knowledge. So, for instance, the first set of questions may test a student for their general knowledge of the field of environmental sociology, while the second set of questions may be more specifically related to the subfield of environmental justice (which the student will be emphasizing in the dissertation). Regardless of the area of specialization, the comprehensive examination committee should give the student a selection of questions in each category, and have the student *select only one* question to answer *in each category*. A student may be given a week or more to produce 30-40 page answers to the two questions (15-20 pages per answer, minimum of 250 words per page). Thus, the full candidacy exam process consists of two questions in each of the two areas of specialization.

Student responses to the questions should engage the literature of a particular area of study by highlighting different schools of thought, theoretical approaches, methodological issues, and scholarly debates within the field. Obviously, there are a number of ways that the written portion of the exam can be structured. That process is to be negotiated by the student and the faculty

committee. *If the exam process can highlight major theoretical and empirical issues and debates directly related to a dissertation topic, this should prove very beneficial to the student.*

How is the Candidacy Exam Evaluated?

Each portion of the exam is evaluated on a *pass, conditional pass, or no pass* basis. Examinations given on a conditional pass must be rewritten or redone within two months to address the graduate committee's concerns and must be resubmitted for a final evaluation of *pass/no pass*.

Hints for Studying for the Candidacy Exams:

First, find overviews of scholarly research, debates, and perspectives in your areas of concentration in the *Annual Review of Sociology*, *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, or *Sociological Dictionaries*, etc. These are very useful resources for finding the key questions currently being asked in your field and the current "state of the debate," as well as for identifying main contributors or "big names" in your field.

Second, search for abstracts (such as *Sociological Abstracts*) of the main journals, books, and key articles that are most central to your field of study. These abstracts will also help to illuminate the most current debates taking place. Students might also pursue reviews that cover regional interests as well (for instance, *African Studies Review*, *Latin American Perspectives*, etc).