

## V. GENERAL EXAMINATIONS

Students are required to take a general exam consisting of a written and an oral examination in their first and second major fields at the beginning of their third year (fifth semester). All **outstanding** pre-dissertation requirements should be completed no later than the end of the fifth semester in residence.

**General exams are offered once a year in early September.\* Separate day-long written exams are followed the next week by one oral exam of approximately two hours given by two faculty members from the student's first major field and one faculty member from the student's second major field. Both fields are covered in the oral exam.**

Students must inform the Graduate Administrator of the fields in which they will examine no later than May 1st of the *prior* spring semester.

**\*Students who fail a September exam may re-take it in February if recommended by the exam committee.**

### *Purpose of General Exams*

The general examinations seek to discover a student's "command" of the field. Command is achieved through a mixture of subjects, reading, research, and seminar attendance during the entirety of a student's graduate experience, as well as more focused attention during the weeks or months allocated to generals preparation.

Command has two aspects. First, the student should have a reasonably complete map of the basic arguments in the field and how they have developed. This naturally implies familiarity with the empirical base relevant to the field. Thus, the student should have read the most widely cited literature in the field. The faculty in some fields prepare suggested lists of such classics. If not, individual students or groups are urged to prepare their own lists and discuss them with faculty in the field. Students should also be broadly familiar with the most recent debates in the field, which can be achieved through some combination of subjects, lectures, seminar attendance, direct reading of the relevant articles and books, exchange of outlines with colleagues, etc.

The second aspect of command is somewhat more problematic, but nevertheless, it is central to the Department's purposes. Students are expected to adopt a critical perspective on the field and be able to articulate it. A critical perspective has two components, both important. First, students should be able to critique the literature and the debates of the field. But more importantly, they should be able to demonstrate some creative engagement with the field. This might include an ability to sketch out how the student thinks the frontiers of the field might be extended. What paths appear most promising, and which ones the least? What new ideas has the student generated as to what the next steps should be? How would the student go about pursuing them? Has the student encountered literature and concepts from other fields of political science that might be useful to this exercise? Such examples suggest the creative aspect of command.

We recognize that this is a major undertaking and that it is difficult to test or demonstrate this

ideal description of command in the course of fairly brief written and oral general examinations. But students spend many hours studying for generals, and much can be achieved if those hours are directed at these objectives. The level of command sought is very useful in three ways. First, it gives students a tremendous foundation for the development of a thesis proposal and provides intellectual capital for subsequent academic work. Second, it provides the foundation for initial teaching responsibilities at the outset of an academic career. Finally, it provides the essential basis for the maintenance of a community of professional political scientists capable of easy communication regardless of whether or not they have ever met, which eases the way for cumulative scientific progress.

### *Procedures for General Exams*

The written examination is normally scheduled to begin at 9:00 am and end at 5:00 pm. Students are permitted to go wherever they like, and consult whatever materials they wish. Students are required to write notes or outlines in preparation for answering each question. These notes must be typed or handwritten that day and submitted with the completed exam. Students may not incorporate previously written blocks of text (including equations and the like) into their examination answers in any manner. With the exception of the Models and Methods exam, the completed exam should not exceed twenty-one double spaced pages, with one-inch margins, and 12-point type. Students who exceed this limit should expect the readers to deal arbitrarily with the additional pages. Exam answers and notes must be paginated.

Confusion over proper conduct has occasionally emerged in past examinations, and makes the following statements necessary. On written examination days from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, examinees are not allowed to discuss the exam questions or possible answers with anyone. They are not allowed to ask anyone to provide any service to them, except to deliver lunch. Others may not provide research assistance, print articles, search the Web, check out library books, etc.

During the period between written exams and oral exams, students are not to discuss exam questions or answers with anyone else, including their cohort.

The only reference that a student may consult during the oral exam are copies of the student's written examinations.

If a violation of the rules is observed by a faculty member or the staff member in charge, the exam may be suspended. The incident will be investigated. If a violation is reported after the day of the exam, the report will be investigated. Investigations may result in disciplinary action.

### *Examiners*

The selection of readers and oral examiners is made by the Department Graduate Administrator and the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee. The faculty chairs in the fields to be examined normally compose questions in consultation with other faculty. Before and between the written examinations, a student is not informed of the names of the examiners. After the written exams are completed, a student is told the members of their oral exam committee, which is subject to change. Each of the two written exams is graded by two faculty members.

### *Policy on Failing Grades*

Students who are given a failing grade by both examiners on a written exam are not permitted to take the oral exam in that field during that same exam period. The failed written exam must be retaken and passed at the subsequent exam period before orals can proceed.

If **one** of the two readers gives a failing grade on a written exam, the oral exam is held as scheduled.

Students who receive a failing grade following an oral examination, including the written part, are normally permitted to repeat the entire examination on a subsequent occasion. A second failure is likely to result in a decision by the examiners not to permit re-examination.

### *Feedback*

After the oral exams, a discussion is held with students concerning their level of performance. In addition, at the student's request, the Department's Graduate Administrator will give them written comments faculty members have made for both the oral and written portions of the exam.