

## *Preparing for the Ph.D. Comprehensive Examinations*

### **Department of Communication**

#### ***Before the Exam***

Students should begin preparing for their Ph.D. Comprehensive Examinations during their first semester in the graduate program. In preparation for the comprehensive exams, students should take notes of the following: readings from their classes, readings related to their own research program, and discussions that take place in their classes.

The Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam Plan needs to be completed and approved by all members of the examination committee the semester before the exams are completed. Faculty members have different criteria and philosophies about the comprehensive exam process. Such philosophies should be considered when selecting an advisor and committee members. It is the student's responsibility to initiate communication with potential advisors about their philosophy and practices. Certain faculty also have posted their advising philosophies on the departmental website, which may serve as another source of information for the comprehensive examination process.

As the exam period nears, students should talk with their advisor and may also talk to members of their committee at least one semester in advance of the exams in order to gain as much information and advice as possible about how best to study for and complete the exam process.

The Comprehensive Exam process represents an important benchmark in the student's progress toward degree. Those students who are most successful demonstrate a strong command of the literature related to their area of concentration, their methods of analysis, as well as their dissertation literature or second area of study. They should also be prepared to articulate their own views on such literature and the scholarly debates that persist in such relevant scholarship. To adequately prepare for the exams, students should plan to set aside multiple months to re-read and review the exam materials. For those completing the exams in the fall semester, students should plan to devote the summer to preparing for their comprehensive exams. For those completing the exams in the spring semester, they should plan to devote an equivalent amount of time during the fall semester and winter break to preparing for the exams.

Some committees require students to prepare reading lists that need approval by the committee. Other committees do not require such reading lists. The role of the reading list serves different functions for different advisors and committees. Students should consult their advisor for guidance on the reading lists. Moreover, students should talk with their advisor and the committee members about their expectations and criteria for the exams. Questions for the exams may be written by the advisor and/or other committee members. Students should clarify with their advisor who will write questions for each exam and also discuss the potential testing options. For instance, some committees allow students to "take home" exams; others will not. These choices will be specified in the examination plan.

Exams are conducted within the university's principles of academic integrity and under the university's honor code. Students will be asked at the time of the written and oral examination to sign the honor pledge indicating that they have received no unauthorized assistance in preparing for the examination. The graduate faculty intends, however, for students to take full advantage of all the resources available in an academic community during their study for the examination. Within the terms of the honor pledge examinees are authorized to work with faculty and graduate students of the department (or beyond the department) to master material for the exam prior to entering the examination room. Activities that are authorized include: preparation of reading lists in conjunction with others, sharing of exam questions and answers from previous exams, group study with others taking the exam, and mock oral exams. (Also review statements below on unauthorized activities during the written examination and before the oral portion of the exam.)

Students should consult their advisor for guidance on time management during the exam. Asking other graduate students (especially in your area) for tips about time management and preparing for the exam is encouraged.

Questions submitted by the faculty will be turned into the Director of Graduate Studies at least one week before the exam begins. Students can e-mail the Director of Graduate Studies and their advisor to ensure that their respective questions have indeed been submitted.

### ***During the Written Portion of the Exam***

Students are free to bring in food and drinks. They may also leave the room for breaks at their own discretion. Students can use ear plugs and noise canceling headphones but iPods and other electronic devices are prohibited. Seating is on a first-come basis.

Students are expected to use the computers in the computer lab to complete the written portion of the exams. If by chance one or more of the computers is experiencing technical difficulties, students may then be supplied with a departmental laptop. As a last resort, the Director of Graduate Studies may opt to allow a student to complete the exam on a substitute computer in a different room or with their own laptop if no other computers are available.

Once students enter the examination room to begin the writing of the exam no consultation with other students or faculty is authorized and no outside sources are to be accessed electronically or via print. No notes or other material are to be taken into the examination unless specifically authorized by the examiner(s). Students may ask the proctor about the meaning of questions they are given, but the proctor may not be in the position to answer such questions. When the written examination is completed, students will be asked to sign an honors pledge indicating that they have received no unauthorized assistance in preparing for, nor in writing, their examination answers.

If graduate students are completing take home exams, the examination committee should stipulate in the exam plan what type of consultation is authorized by the examination committee once students receive the questions and begin the writing process. It is important for graduate students to know what kinds of sources can be consulted and whether they are allowed to talk with other individuals about the examination questions and answers once they receive a copy of

the examination questions. Inappropriate consultation or collaboration could lead to charges of academic dishonesty.

Students need to be mindful of the time in order to ensure that they allow sufficient time to answer all of the questions. Students will be provided scratch paper during the exam in order to take notes.

### ***After the Written Portion of the Exam***

Students will send electronic copies of the exam to the advisor(s) and the Director of Graduate Studies. Students then have three days to proofread their answers and make corrections to typing and stylistic errors through a track changes program. Students are encouraged to proofread the exam closely. Changes to content should not be made. Students should consult their advisor if uncertain about which content changes are appropriate. All changes should be tracked through the Microsoft Editing function or a similar system.

Students should ask their advisor about consultations between the written and oral exams. Some advisors will plan to meet with students and discuss their responses; other advisors prefer to wait until the oral examinations to identify questions and concerns with the answers. Students should use the period between the written and oral exams as a time for intensive study of their examination materials in preparation for the oral exam. They should also identify areas of weakness in their written exam and be prepared to address those areas in the oral examination. Advisors may or may not choose to identify potential issues with their written examination. It is imperative that students are clear on their advisor's philosophy.

Under the terms of the university's honor code students are authorized to consult with their advisor or members of their examining committee at the discretion of the faculty members; to conduct further reading as they find need from their written answers; to share their answers with other graduate students for their feedback on the exam; and to conduct a mock oral with other graduate students.

### ***Conduct of the Oral Examination***

Students are authorized to, and should, bring into the oral examination room copies of their written examinations. They are also authorized to bring such other material as they believe will assist them in the examination, but students are cautioned that excessive use of notes and other material during the oral portion of the examination may indicate an inadequate oral mastery of material. Unless authorized by the student's examination committee, students are not permitted to consult or connect with electronic sources through an internet connection during the examination. Notes, however, may be kept on a laptop, iPad, or other electronic device if they wish. Upon completion of the Oral Examination, students will be asked to sign an honors pledge indicating that they have not received unauthorized assistance in preparing for and participating in the Oral Examination.

### ***Evaluating the Comprehensive Examination***

The graduate faculty of the Department of Communication has prepared a rubric specifying the criteria by which every student will be evaluated during the comprehensive examination process in helping to determine a student's preparedness to advance to Candidacy for the Doctoral

Degree. Although it is obvious that mastery of the literature of scholarly research is crucial in a successful examination, the rubric indicates that the manner of management of that mastery is multi-dimensional. After completion of the oral, all will leave the room except for the examination committee. They will conduct their deliberations on the result of the examination. Such deliberations may be extensive and cover a wide range of qualities. Immediately following the deliberations, the advisor (and potentially the entire committee) will meet with the student to announce the result of the deliberation.

*After the Comprehensive Examination is Complete*

Students should bring copies of the proper forms to the oral examination to convey the results of the examination to the Director of Graduate Studies, and to apply for Candidacy to the Doctoral Degree.

Once students finish the comprehensive examination process, they should save their notes and study materials. Such notes will help students when writing the dissertation, when preparing for job interviews, and when entering teaching positions upon graduation.