Department of Sociology

PhD Preliminary Examination
Policies and Procedures

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Preliminary Exam Policies and Procedures

Effective Fall 2017, all incoming PhD students must take their preliminary examinations as described below.

Preliminary Examination
The purpose of the preliminary examination is to certify that doctoral students have acquired the necessary expertise in an area of study and can integrate, apply, and discuss what has been learned to contribute to the knowledge in the field. As such, students should begin preparing for the prelims well in advance of the examination.

1. Scheduling the Preliminary Examination
The preliminary examination is offered twice each academic year in May and August. The schedule for the exam is determined by the student and their adviser, in consultation with their prelim committee. Students must submit the preliminary examination application no later than February 1st, if the student takes the prelims in May, and May 1st, if the student takes their exam in August. The final dates for the prelim must be approved by all prelim committee members, and indicated on the application form.

The preliminary examination cannot be undertaken until the Graduate School Plan of Work and Graduate School Transfer of Credits (if applicable) forms have been approved by the Graduate School and any grades of I (i.e., Incomplete), X, or Y in the doctoral coursework removed. Students on probation are not allowed to take the prelims until the probation is removed.

In addition, students take the preliminary examination only after completing all coursework. To be allowed to take prelims, students must have the endorsement of their faculty adviser. Students should work closely with the adviser during this time to ensure that they are adequately prepared for the exam. The Director of Graduate Studies must verify students have completed all required coursework before prelims can be scheduled.

Students are expected to take their preliminary examination in the cycle after they have completed their required PhD coursework, but no later than one year after completion of coursework. Students who do not take the prelims within this time frame are at risk for dismissal from the program. Furthermore, delays in taking the prelim means students cannot enroll in their dissertation credits, extending their time to completion and reducing the amount of time a student would have to work on their dissertation before their seven-year clock expires. To apply to take the prelim students should fill out the Prelim Application Form found on our website at http://clas.wayne.edu/Sociology/FormsDocuments.

Students can also contact the Graduate Director to find out more about prelim policies. As a review, before taking prelims the student must:
1.) File a Plan of Work with the Graduate School;
2.) Successfully complete all the required PhD coursework; and
3.) Complete a Prelim Application Form, approved by the adviser and the Graduate Director.

Please keep in mind that the prelim application must be turned in via email to the Graduate Director no later than February 1st, if taking the exam in May, and May 1st, if taking the exam in August.
2. **Parts of the Preliminary Examination**

The take-home, open-book written examination requires answering three essay-type questions and is conducted over consecutive days that include weekends. Students have up to 72 hours to answer each question. Ordinarily, students receive the first question by 9:00 a.m. on a Monday and submit the responses by 9:00 a.m. 72 hours later (Thursday); the second question is released the day after the student submits their answer to the first question (Friday) at 9:00 a.m. The second question submission is due 72 hours later (Monday); the third and final question is released at 9:00 a.m. on the day after the student submits their answers to the second question (Tuesday). The third question is due 72 hours later at 9:00 a.m. (Friday). The three questions must be completed within 12 consecutive calendar days.

The student's doctoral adviser serves as the chair of the preliminary examination committee for all three questions. The student and adviser determine the start date of the prelim. The adviser is responsible for coordinating with the other two members of the prelim committee to ensure that the days are acceptable. Once dates are determined, the adviser must inform the Director of Graduate Studies and the faculty member who will administer the exam through Canvas. The administrator of the prelims is a faculty member from the Graduate Committee who is not on the student’s prelim committee. If all graduate committee members are on prelim committees in any given year, the Director of Graduate Studies will ask and appoint another faculty member.

The committee must consist of at least three full-time faculty, all from the Department of Sociology. Two of the three, one of which is the adviser, must be from the primary area of the student's focus. If the student has a secondary area, it is encouraged that the third committee member is from that area.

The preliminary examination covers theoretical, methodological, and empirical literature as related to the student research specialization(s), and informed by the student’s doctoral coursework.

The **first and second questions** are a broad evaluation in the student’s declared focus in one of the department’s areas of emphasis. Students who began the program in winter 2018 or later, may elect to focus on one of the following areas: gender/ethnicity/race (REG); sociology of health and illness (SOHI); or global/comparative/transnational sociology (GTC). Students who began prior to winter 2018, may elect: race, gender, health, urban, or labor.

The student’s preliminary exam committee will give the student guidance on the substantive literature, including a general list of key scholars and works in that area.

The **third question** evaluates students on a more narrowly defined topic within their broad area of research. This question should focus on the student’s topic of interest related to their dissertation.

**Procedures:**

a. All committee members must be offered the opportunity to submit questions for the written examination. Normally, each member of the committee writes a full question or substantively contributes to one. The adviser, in consultation with the other two committee members, determines which committee members write which questions. Committee members should consult with the committee chair when preparing their questions. The committee chair should instruct the committee members that the examination questions must not be shared with the student prior to the examination. The committee chair should collect the questions from all the committee members and arrange their distribution to the student.
b. Normally, the answer to each question runs 16-20 pages, excluding references (all double-spaced, 11 or 12 point font size, 1-inch page margins; about 8000-9000 words). Students are expected to provide in-text citations and a complete reference list or bibliography. Students should keep in mind that longer answers may not necessarily reflect higher quality. The document should be in a format approved by the examination committee (e.g., ASA).

c. The administrator of the preliminary examination distributes the questions to the student as timed-release documents through the Department’s Canvas site. The full set of questions, along with the exam schedule must also be emailed to the Director of Graduate Studies and a hard copy should be left with the Graduate Director for placing in the student’s department file, at least 24 hours before the beginning of the exam.

d. The student should pick up each question from the Canvas site at the scheduled time. The submission of answers is to be done in two ways: First, the student should upload the answers to Canvas by the scheduled time. Second, as a backup in case of a Canvas outage, students should email each answer to the administrator of the prelims (if not available, then to the Director of Graduate Studies). The student must ensure that each answer is submitted within the period allowed.

e. Once one question has begun, this is considered the student’s first attempt at the exam. Answers submitted late may be penalized, including, but not limited to, an evaluation of a fail. Late answers are not normally accepted, but may be at the discretion of the prelim committee, if there are documented extenuating circumstances. The administrator of the prelims should acknowledge receipt of each answer to the student by email in a timely manner.

f. Upon completion of the exam, the faculty administrator for the prelims assembles the student’s responses, conducts a plagiarism check using the Safe Assign plagiarism check software available through the Canvas site, and communicates the responses to the student’s prelim committee (adviser and two other sociology faculty members).

g. Students are allowed two attempts at the preliminary examination. The second attempt is final and students who fail this attempt are dismissed from the program. Prelim committees must remain the same for both attempts. Students should consult with their advisers, and the Graduate Director before taking the prelim to ensure that they are ready to retake it.

3. Evaluation of the Written Part

Upon submission of all written answers, the faculty prelim administrator is responsible for distributing an electronic copy of the exam questions and the corresponding responses to each member of the committee, along with a note that states the results of the plagiarism check.

The prelim committee may need up to two weeks to read the answers. Each committee member should evaluate each answer using the following scale:

High Pass - The student demonstrates a command of facts, names, terms, and concepts, as well as the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate in the answer.

Pass - The answer is complete and acceptable.

Low Pass - There is concern about the adequacy of the answer.
Fail - The answer is inadequate either in command of facts, accuracy, and completeness, or in some combination.

Each committee member must provide an evaluation for each answer, along with any comments to the faculty administrator of the preliminary examination via email in a timely manner, but no later than two weeks after the student has submitted the last written answer.

The faculty administrator of the preliminary examination must compile the responses of all members, and convey the evaluation and the comments to the student’s prelim committee members within 48 hours of receiving all evaluations.

The preliminary examination committee should discuss the results in a timely manner. Once the preliminary exam committee has finalized the student’s score, the adviser will notify the faculty administrator of the final results, who in turn informs the student in writing (typically via email) in a timely manner but no later than three weeks after the student has submitted the last written answer, unless otherwise arranged with the student. The faculty administrator of the prelim must collate the three evaluations and comments into a single document and send this, rather than the individual committee member evaluation forms, to the student. A copy of the final results must be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will place a hard copy in the student’s file.

**Interpreting results of the preliminary examination:**

In the event that one answer receives a fail from one committee member, or one answer receives a low pass from two or more committee members, or two or more answers receive a low pass from one or more committee members, the committee chair (student’s adviser) should consult with the full committee and the Director of Graduate Studies. After discussing the nature and extent of the deficiencies in the answers, and after asking for a committee vote to determine the majority, the committee chair should take one of the following three actions:

1. Inform the student of the concerns in writing and allow student to submit their candidacy paperwork. This constitutes a passing evaluation.

2. Have the student rewrite the one failed or low pass answer using the original questions or new questions. The rewrite must take place within 6 weeks of the date of sending the committee evaluation to the student. Please note that a partial rewrite can only take place if the committee deems only one answer insufficient. The student will have 72 hours to complete the rewrite. The procedures for using Canvas will be the same.

A student may be passed in the rewrite if there is not more than one negative vote. Abstentions shall be considered negative votes.

If the committee evaluates the rewrite as a fail, the committee can decide to declare the student as having failed the preliminary examination at the first attempt.

If the outcome is a fail, the faculty administrator should prepare written notification to the student, with a copy to the student’s adviser and the Director of Graduate Studies. At this time the student can elect to retake the entire written examination after revision for a second attempt (see next).

3. Declare the student as having failed the preliminary examination in the first attempt. This occurs when the committee has decided that two or more answers are not sufficient. The student can elect to retake the entire written examination for a second attempt. The retake of
the written examination must be done 12 weeks after being notified of their first attempt results. Normally, the retake of the written examination is done with new questions, which may have overlap with the original questions. The same examining committee must preside over both examinations. *No rewrites of individual answers are allowed for the second attempt.* The student will have 72 hours to answer each of the three questions, over a period of 12 consecutive days. All procedures using Canvas are the same.

A student may be passed on the second attempt if there is not more than one negative vote. Abstentions shall be considered negative votes.

If the prelim committee evaluates the second attempt as a fail, the committee declares the student as having failed the preliminary examination. The second attempt at the written examination will be considered final and the student is dismissed from the program at this time.

4. **Registering for Dissertation Credits in the Preliminary Examination Semester**

Students can register for the first dissertation credits (SOC 9991) after passing the Preliminary Examination and achieving Candidacy. However, students who have completed the minimum 60 credits of graduate coursework (transfer credits and doctoral coursework credits combined) required for the doctoral degree may be allowed to register for the first dissertation credits course SOC 9991 during the semester in which they take the Preliminary Examination. To register, the student should request the adviser to send an email endorsing this registration to the Director of Graduate Studies for approval. If approved, the Director will request an override from the Graduate School at phdstudents@wayne.edu for final approval.

Please note that if students are not successful the first time they take the preliminary examinations, depending on timing they may have to register for a semester of pre-dissertation credits (SOC 9990) until they successfully pass the second attempt of the exams. Thus, we strongly encourage students to schedule their exams about five months after completing coursework – if students finish coursework in December, then they should plan to take their exam in May; if students complete coursework in May, then they should plan for August to take their exams.

Once students pass the Preliminary Examination, they must submit the appropriate forms (Recommendation for Candidacy Status) to the Director of Graduate Studies who will submit the form to the Graduate School for approval by the *last day of the examination period* for that semester to proceed with registering for the next set of dissertation credits. **If this is not done, students will not be permitted to register for subsequent dissertation credits in the following semester.** Students will only be allowed to register for SOC 9990 to maintain their full-time status.

[https://gradschool.wayne.edu/phd/candidacy](https://gradschool.wayne.edu/phd/candidacy)