Department of Sociology

PhD Preliminary Examination
Policies and Procedures

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Fall 2017
Preliminary Exam Policies and Procedures

Effective Fall 2017, all incoming students will be required to take preliminary examinations under the new structure.

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 Preliminary Examination well in advance of the examination.

1. Scheduling the Preliminary Examination
The Preliminary Examination is offered twice in the academic year. Students who complete coursework in May should take the prelim on or about August 5th; students who complete coursework in December should take the prelim on or about March 22nd.

Ordinarily, students receive the questions by 12:00 pm on Monday and submit the responses by 12:00 pm on the same day of the following week. The two sessions of the examination must be completed within 21 consecutive calendar days.

For students who began the program prior to 2017, they may take the preliminary examination under the previous system up until August 2019 (see "old" format rules on the Department website, under forms and documents). Thereafter, students must take the current format as outlined below. All students who enrolled beginning in August 2017 must take the new format.

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 Preliminary Examination until the probation is removed.

Students take the Preliminary Examination only after completing all coursework. To be allowed to take prelims, PhD students must have the endorsement of their faculty adviser, and the area chairperson who verifies students have completed all required coursework. Students should work closely with the adviser during this time to ensure that they are adequately prepared for the examination.

Students are expected to take their prelim in the cycle after they have completed their required PhD coursework, but no later than one year after completion of the coursework. Students who do not take the prelims within this time frame are at risk for dismissal from the program. 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 area chair and the Graduate Director.
2. Parts of the Preliminary Examination
The written preliminary examination consists of two one-week take home sessions.

The first exam is a broad evaluation in the student’s declared focus in one of the department’s areas of emphasis. The examination covers theory, methods, and substantive research focused on the area of emphasis. The exam consists of two questions. Currently, students may elect to focus on one of the following areas: medical/sociology of health and illness; gender; race/ethnicity; urban; and work/labor.

All students taking exams work from a common reading list developed by the faculty to represent a core corpus of prerequisite understanding for students working in that area. Students will be able to participate in preparing the final reading list, which is subject to change each year as required. The grading committee consists of three faculty members from that area.

The second exam, given one week after completion of the first, evaluates students on a topical area within the broad area specific to each student. The exam consists of two questions. Each student forms a specialty examination committee, works with the committee to develop a more specialized reading list, and is evaluated by that committee. It is anticipated, but not required, that this committee would form the nucleus of the student’s final dissertation committee. The student and their adviser should jointly select the student’s preliminary specialty examination committee. The committee must consist of at least three full-time faculty, all from the Department of Sociology, including the adviser.

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 committee chair, in consultation with the examination committee, 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). 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 chairs of the area exam and specialty exam specify the order in which the written examination questions are administered to the student, communicates the questions to the student, assembles the student’s responses after the due date, submits them through plagiarism-checking software, and communicates the responses to the rest of the preliminary examination committee.

d. The chair of the specialization exam should submit the final version of the exam to the area chair who coordinates the prelim process.
e. The committee chair of the area exam should distribute the questions to the student as timed-release documents through either his or her own faculty Blackboard site or the Department Blackboard site that has been set up for the Preliminary Examination. The full set of questions for both exams, along with the examination schedule must also be emailed by the committee chair to the Director of Graduate Studies and a hard copy should be left with the Graduate Director for placing in the student’s file in the Department, at least 24 hours before the beginning of the examination.

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

g. Answers submitted late may be penalized, including, but not limited to, an evaluation of a fail. Committee chairs do not normally accept late answers, but may do so at their discretion if there are documented extenuating circumstances. The committee chair should acknowledge receipt of each answer to the student by email in a timely manner.

h. 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. Examination committees must remain the same for both attempts. Students should consult their advisers, the chair of the area exam, and the Graduate Director before taking the prelim to ensure that they are ready to take the prelim.

3. Evaluation of the Written Part

Upon submission of all written answers or the manuscript, the chairs should conduct a plagiarism check using the Safe Assign plagiarism check software available through his or her faculty Blackboard site. The committee chair of the area exam is responsible for distributing an electronic copy of the examination questions and the corresponding responses to each member of the committee, along with a note that states the results of the plagiarism check.

The committee chair and committee members may need up to two weeks to read the answers or manuscript. Each committee member should evaluate each answer or the manuscript 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 or manuscript.

Pass - The answer or manuscript is complete and acceptable.

Low Pass - There is concern about the adequacy of the answer or manuscript.

Fail - The answer or manuscript is inadequate either in command of facts, accuracy, and completeness, or in some combination.
Each committee member must provide the evaluation for each answer or manuscript along with any comments to the committee chair (typically via email) in a timely manner, but no later than two weeks after the student has submitted the last written answer or manuscript.

The committee chair must convey the committee evaluation and the comments to the chair of the area exam 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 or manuscript, unless otherwise arranged with the student. The chairs must collate all the evaluations and comments into a single document and send this, rather than the individual committee member evaluation forms, to the student. The chair must leave a hard copy of the summary committee evaluation and comments in the student file.

Documentation of a student’s performance is recorded on an individualized grading sheet prepared by the chair of the area exam. The chair of the area exam serves as the chair and graduate examiner of the preliminary examination for the first exam. The student’s doctoral adviser serves as the chair and graduate examiner of the preliminary examination committee for the second exam. The area chair records the final vote of the student’s performance (passed or failed), once both exams have been evaluated, in writing (via email), with a copy to the Director of Graduate Studies.

In case 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 should consult with the full committee and the Director of Graduate Studies. After discussing the nature and extent of the deficiencies in the answers or manuscript, 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.

(2) Have the student re-write the fail or low pass answer(s) using the original questions or new questions. The re-write must take place within 12 weeks of the date of sending the committee evaluation to the student (typically early August or early December).

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

If the committee evaluates the re-write 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 area exam chair 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 re-take 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. The student can elect to re-take the entire written examination for a re-submission for a second attempt. The re-take of the written examination may not be done until at least three months have passed but must be held by the start of the semester after the first written examination was taken (that is, in either December or August). Normally, the re-take 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 and manuscripts evaluation. *No re-writes of individual answers are allowed for the second attempt.*

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

If the committee evaluates the re-take as a fail, the committee declares the student as having failed the Preliminary Examination at the second attempt. 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 written examination part of 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.

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)