**Comprehensive Examinations**: Ph.D. and M.A./Ph.D. students should begin to plan for comprehensive examinations the moment they enter the program and make at least an initial decisions of fields by the end of their first semester. Thinking about your comps will help you to plan coursework and will alert you to the need to develop working relationships with potential field examiners.

**Schedule**

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<th>MA/PhD</th>
<th>PhD</th>
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<tr>
<td>Make preliminary choice of fields</td>
<td>By end of 1st semester</td>
<td>By end of 1st semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designate advisory committee</td>
<td>By spring break, 2nd semester</td>
<td>By end of January, 2nd semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advisory committee and student draw up “preliminary comps plan”</td>
<td>By end of 2nd semester</td>
<td>By end of February, 2nd semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advisory committee and student revise “preliminary comps plan”</td>
<td>By end of February, 4th semester</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advisory committee and student draw up “comps contract”</td>
<td>By end of September, 5th semester (end of February, 6th semester for students who qualify for extended eligibility for aid due to language study)</td>
<td>By end of September, 3rd semester (end of February, 4th semester for students who qualify for extended eligibility for aid due to language study)</td>
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<td>Completion of portfolio and oral exam</td>
<td>By end of 6th semester (7th semester for students who qualify for extended eligibility for aid due to language study)</td>
<td>By end of 4th semester (5th semester for students who qualify for extended eligibility for aid due to language study)</td>
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There are three parts to the comprehensive examination. The “portfolio” refers to all written materials submitted for all three fields, including syllabi and bibliographies (as appropriate).

1. A written exam/assignment in the student’s major field. The dissertation advisor will set the reading and writing requirements for this field. Examples of formats include (but aren’t limited to) take-home exams, synthetic essays, annotated bibliographies, and timed exams.
2. The second and third field each consist of two courses designated in advance as fulfilling a field requirement. If the first and second fields are in the same Division, then the third field must be in a different division. If the third field is thematically defined (meaning it appears under “Other” in the outline of Divisions), then over half the material for the field must be outside the student’s primary Division.
   a. The syllabus and all written work for all comps-designated courses become part of the portfolio. In addition, the field director or course instructor may require additional assignments as part of a course to make the course appropriate for a comps requirement; these additional assignments also go into the portfolio.
   b. Courses numbered above 3000 are eligible for consideration. Courses numbered 3000-4999 (upper-level undergraduate courses) must include an additional significant component to make them appropriate for comps credit. Courses numbered 5000 and above may require additional work to qualify for comps credit.
   c. In cases where other coursework obligations make it impossible to register for comps-designated courses for credit, the field director may require the student to audit designated courses and complete all work for the course (including, as appropriate, additional assignments).
   d. The field director may require an additional assignment beyond the coursework to insure appropriate coverage. For example, if a student completing a field in East Asian history has only been able to take courses in Chinese and Korean history, then additional readings in Japanese history might be appropriate. The additional assignment may include reading, writing, or both, and should not exceed the reading/writing requirement for a graduate-level course.
e. In rare cases where coursework is not available or cannot be tailored to constitute a 2nd or 3rd field, field directors may set reading and writing requirements. These should be calibrated to be the rough equivalent of a coursework-defined field (including the possibility of an extra assignment as in 2c), and they may not include timed exams. Student-composed syllabi may be included but cannot constitute the whole of the student’s written work for such a field. Field advisors must approve this non-coursework option (or a field involving only one course) as part of the “preliminary comps plan” (see below). It is not appropriate for students to ask field advisors to approve and develop non-coursework fields (or a field with only one course) after the fact if courses were available. If, after approving this option in the “preliminary comps plan,” courses become available, it is appropriate for field directors to revise the plan to include the coursework (and reduce “additional” work accordingly). Field advisors must notify the student of this expectation in writing or email immediately upon learning of a course’s availability.

f. Field advisors may approve courses in other departments or other universities (including transfer courses from a Ph.D. student’s MA program elsewhere) for the 2nd and/or 3rd field. They are not, however, required to do this. For courses completed elsewhere, students must present all course materials (syllabus and written assignments) to the field advisor for prior approval as part of the “preliminary comps plan.”

g. With the advisor’s approval, the 2nd or 3rd field may be completed in another UI department under the supervision of a faculty member in that department.

h. With the advisor’s approval, a Graduate Certificate may substitute for the third field. Of the coursework fulfilling the requirements for the Certificate, the equivalent of at least 1.5 courses must represent material outside the student’s primary Division.

3. An oral exam on all three fields.

The Department expects that M.A./Ph.D. students take their comprehensive examinations by their sixth semester of study; Ph.D. students should take their exams by their fourth semester of study. Students who qualify for an extra semester of eligibility due to language study also qualify for a one-semester extension on the timing of their exams. If there is a significant reason for delay other than language study, students should discuss this with their advisors, field examiners, and the DGS. Delays can affect the Department’s assessment of a student’s progress when it comes time to decide about major aid for the coming year (see the section on major aid) and should be requested only in cases of unusual personal hardship.

Steps leading to the comprehensive examination: By the end of the first semester of study, MA/PhD students should make a preliminary determination of fields, and PhD students should have a firm sense of their fields.

No later than the second week of the second semester (for PhD students) or spring break (for MA/PhD students), the student, in consultation with her or his advisor (major area), asks two other faculty members to serve as field examiners. The student may not complete more than one field with a single faculty member. The advisor and the two additional field examiners constitute the “advisory committee.” (See also the discussion of the advisory committee elsewhere in this Handbook) MA/PhD students who have not yet finalized their fields may, in their first year, have an advisory committee consisting of their advisor, the likely director of one comps field, and the DGS. Any subsequent changes in the composition of the advisory committee after its initial composition must be registered with the departmental administrator.

No later than the end of the second semester (for MA/PhD students) or the last week in February (for PhD students) in the second semester, the advisory committee and the student meet to draw up the “preliminary comps plan.” This document names the three fields and the anticipated format for each field. As far as possible, it lists the courses to qualify for the 2nd and 3rd fields. (In preparation for the meeting, students should contact faculty members in all three fields – not just the field examiners – to find out as much as possible about their teaching plans are for the next year or two.) The “anticipated format” will include the courses and a reasonable estimation of any additional work that will be expected (e.g. a synthetic essay based on a defined number of books). In preparing the description of additional work (for
fields completed largely via coursework), field directors should keep in mind that additional work should not exceed the typical expectations of one course.

Advisory committees of MA/PhD students will have a second “preliminary” meeting by the last week in February of the 4th semester. This advisory committee will consist of the three field examiners. During this meeting, the advisory committee and student will check on progress towards completing comps requirements and make – in writing – any adjustments necessary, eg to account for a reassessment of course offerings.

Early in the fall of the 3rd semester (for PhD students) or 5th semester (for MA/PhD students) the student and the advisory committee hold a “comps contract meeting.” Students who qualify for a one-semester extension of eligibility for aid due to foreign language study qualify for a one-semester deferral of the comps contract meeting. At the comps contract meeting, those in attendance will draw up the “comps contract,” formally known as the “Comprehensive Examinations: Planning, Terms and Conditions.” The contract will constitute the final agreement on the requirements for the three fields as well as a projected date for the oral exam. The completed “contract” must be submitted to the DGS for review; after review and signature by the DGS, copies are made for the candidate, the candidate’s file, and each of the field examiners.

If a faculty examiner should leave the student’s committee after the “contract” has been completed, the portion of the contract which pertains to the departed examiner is dissolved. The student must then hold a new contract meeting with a committee consisting not only of a new examiner, but also of his or her other examiners. At this meeting the committee draws up a new contract. Making a new contract does not require the student to negotiate new agreements with all of his or her examiners, but only with the new examiner. Unless a student wishes to make changes in his or her agreements with the remaining members of his former committee, the new contract affects only the agreement with the new examiner. Committees may not dispense with contract meetings because a faculty member is on leave; the meeting may be postponed until the absent member returns to campus, or may be conducted by having the absent member participate by telephone or Skype.

The “contract” specifies:

1. the seven 6000-7999 level seminar and readings courses to be used to satisfy the requirement that the candidate will have completed a total of ten graduate-level courses including HIST:6001 (016:201), HIST:6002 (016:200), and HIST:6003 (016:203). The student only needs to complete HIST:6001 (016:201), HIST:6002 (016:200), HIST:6003 (016:203), and four additional 6000-7999 level classes before actually taking the comprehensive exams. However, we strongly discourage students from taking additional readings courses post-comps. Subsequent courses should be in the form of research seminars that will focus on the production of chapters for the dissertation.
2. the supplementary skills and studies in which the candidate will be required to demonstrate proficiency (such as language skills).
3. the three fields which will comprise the comprehensive examinations
4. the format of the examination in the primary field for which the student will be responsible
5. the coursework and any additional requirements to be completed for the second and third fields
6. the contents of the portfolios for all fields
7. the approximate date of the oral exam
8. the approximate date on which the student will complete all requirements for the written examinations (two weeks before the oral exam)
9. the names of all five committee members

The oral exam must be completed by the end of the 4th semester (PhD students) or 6th semester (MA/PhD students). Students who qualify for a one-semester extension of eligibility for aid due to foreign language study qualify for a one-semester deferral of the oral exam. The deadline for submitting all written materials is two weeks before the oral exam. Be aware that schedules in the last few weeks of
classes can get very busy. You will find it easier to convene your committee for the oral exam if you do not leave it until the last two weeks of the semester.

The oral examination: The oral examination committee includes the three field examiners as well as two additional committee members. The student should consult with the advisor about which faculty members to ask to serve in this role. During the semester preceding the oral exam, the student should confirm all committee members’ availability.

When the five faculty members have been contacted and have agreed to serve on the oral examination, and at least two weeks before the student expects to turn in the portfolio, three forms must be filled out. Students should work with the Departmental Administrator to insure that these forms are filled out correctly. The first form is “Completion of Portfolio.” This form must be signed by the student and by the three field examiners; by signing it, examiners confirm that the portfolio has been completed and delivered according to the terms set in the “Comps Contract.” This form also confirms that student and field examiners have agreed on the date of the oral exam. Two other forms must be completed and submitted to the Graduate College. One is the “Doctoral Plan of Study Summary Sheet.” This form summarizes the number of graduate credit hours the student already has, the number on the current registration, and the title of courses that the student plans to take to complete the graduate credit requirements (72 hours) if he or she has not already done so. This form needs to be signed by the student’s advisor and the DGS and given to the Departmental Administrator, who will complete the other form, “Request for Doctoral Comprehensive Examination,” and submit both to the Graduate College. It is the student’s responsibility to see that the forms get filled out at an appropriate time before the comps begin.

Each of these forms must be completed and submitted to the departmental administrator before the oral portion of the exams can be scheduled. Because it is often difficult to get five faculty members and a student to agree on a meeting time, students must consult the Departmental Administrator about scheduling the oral exam at least six weeks before it is to take place. Once faculty responses are received, she sets a time and books a room for the exam; she then sends out a memo informing the entire committee when the exam will take place.

Once the portfolio has been submitted, the departmental administrator sees to it that copies are made for each member of the examination committee and distributed to them promptly. All members of the committee read the portfolio, and at the oral exam faculty regularly ask questions about exams not in their particular area, field or even division.

Substitutions for examiners: Because History faculty regularly get research grants, as well as invitations to join other institutions and research centers for a semester or a year, it may be impossible for a field examiner to be present for the written and oral comps when it is time for a student to take her or his examinations. Faculty regularly prepare comprehensive examination questions while away from the University and read the student’s written answers, sent by FAX or email. The faculty member may participate in the exam by phone or Skype, or another professor may be chosen (in consultation with the student) to stand in for the absent professor during the oral part of the examination.

What happens at the oral examination: The oral exam is scheduled for two hours. The oral starts with the faculty asking the student to step out of the room for a few minutes. During that time, the advisor – who serves as the chair of the committee – asks for general feedback about the overall quality of the portfolio. The committee then decides how it wants to organize the question period before inviting the student back into the room. Sometimes the student is asked to start with any comments he or she has about the portfolio. Faculty might then take turns asking questions about all three fields, or a field examiner might start with questions on his or her field with the other faculty joining in with questions that they have. Most faculty ask questions that are designed to let the student expand upon questions raised by the materials in the portfolio, to help the student explore the implications of ideas beyond the specific literature, and to encourage the student to respond freely about the complexities of understanding historical events and processes. Towards the end of the session, the student is again asked to leave the room while the
committee consults. After the consultation, the student is invited back into the room to learn the results of the exam.