

History of Ideas Field Exam Guide

These guidelines are effective for all History of Ideas Ph.D students who began the program in Fall 2020 or after. Students on earlier catalogs should follow the old guidelines provided on the A&H website, though they can petition their examining committee to use these new guidelines.

The Doctoral Field Examinations in the History of Ideas program consist of three written exam papers and an oral defense.

These examinations test your understanding of both specialized areas of knowledge and the bigger-picture overview of fields of research and teaching. They provide the opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of major research questions, content areas, skills, and methods in the particular areas of inquiry you seek to contribute to. They are an important part of your preparation for the dissertation, and also demonstrate an ability to teach an area at an advanced level.

Exam Fields and Bibliography

You will pick one major and two minor exam fields. The major field and at least one of the minor fields must be supervised by faculty in the History of Ideas. The third exam may optionally be in a cognate field.

Examination fields should balance the breadth necessary to have a broad overview of a whole field with the specificity required to contribute original research in some part of the field (the latter is especially important for one's major field). They should neither be so broad as to be superficial nor so narrow as to be completely idiosyncratic. Each field should be broad enough to prepare you for a major area of instruction.

Your choice of examination fields should be guided by three things: the classes you have taken, the intended topic of your dissertation, and what areas you want to teach or research in the future. It is not recommended that you plan on examination fields totally divorced from your organized coursework; this can delay your progress by one or more semesters. Likewise, your examination fields should support and help you determine your dissertation topic.

Between the three examination fields, the periods covered by the field or the original publication of the primary sources **must span at least 200 years**, though these need not be continuous. One exam might cover 200 years of history, or you might have three separate exams covering shorter periods. In either case, the earliest and latest parts of your three fields must be separated by at least 200 years.

Working with the members of your examining committee, you will prepare a bibliography for each field. The bibliography for the major field will typically have 40-80 sources, though the exact number and the balance of essay-length and monograph-length sources will depend on the discipline and topic of the field, as guided by the supervising professor and other members of the examining committee. Minor fields will typically have fewer sources than major fields.

Each final field bibliography will be prefaced by a brief statement, not exceeding 450 words, explaining the nature of the field and the relevance to your future research and teaching plans.

Written Exams

The written component of the field examination will include a polished paper for each examination field in a format and of a quality that might meet publication requirements in an appropriate professional journal. Papers will typically be between 5000-6000 words (approximately 20-25 pages), with the topic, approach, and methodology of the paper worked out in consultation of the supervisor for each examination field. These papers are written during the examination preparation courses; they might or might not be revised and expanded versions papers submitted for earlier organized coursework. The finished papers need not actually be submitted for publication.

Oral Examination

Once your field bibliographies have been approved and your written examinations are judged ready for examination by your examining committee, they will give you approval to schedule the oral examination. In the oral examination, you will meet with the three members of your examining committee. The oral examination will typically last for about two hours and will cover the following topics:

- The written exam papers,
- The three examination fields as defined by the approved bibliographies, and
- The student's possible dissertation topic(s) and how they can build on their examination fields.

At the conclusion of the oral examination, the candidate will leave the room, and the examination committee will discuss among themselves and determine the evaluation of the examination (for each paper and for the oral exam, the options are High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, or Fail). You must receive a passing grade on all three written exams and the oral exam before you can submit your dissertation proposal. In the case where examiners disagree on the evaluation, you will be considered to pass a written examination if the field supervisor and at least one of the other examiners judges that you pass; you will be considered to pass the oral examination if the examining committee chair and at least one other examiner considers you to have passed.

Students who fail the field examination can petition their examining committee to be allowed to re-take the exam, following the procedure laid out in the Graduate Catalog under "Admission to Doctoral Candidacy". A student failing the second examination will not be allowed to pursue a doctoral degree in that program. Under no circumstances will a third examination be allowed.

Prerequisites

You must complete the following requirements before scheduling your field exams:

- Completed 33 hours of organized coursework including all required courses, breadth requirements, and major electives.
- Enrolled for at least 9 hours of Field Exam preparation courses (6 hours in IDEA 8305). (Oral exam can take place in the semester you are enrolled for these courses.)
- Fulfill the language requirement.

Requirements and Timeline

You must identify your supervising committee and the rough topics for your three fields during your 36th semester credit hour of coursework and submit the “Examining Committee for Doctoral Field Examinations” form. As part of your exam preparation, you must complete 6 SCH of IDEA 8305 and 3 SCH of IDEA 8305, LIT 8305, VPAS 8305, or equivalent exam-preparation-focused independent studies.

Once your examining committee has given the go-ahead for you to schedule your oral examination, you must submit your “Request to Schedule H.I. Doctoral Field Examinations” form, with all three field bibliographies and written examinations attached, with signatures from each committee member. This form should be submitted at least two weeks before scheduling the exam.

Exams should be completed before the completion of 60 semester credit hours, though the recommendation for timely progress is to complete them during the semester that you complete your 54th SCH.

For students taking classes full-time, the timeline should look something like this:

1st-3rd Semesters Organized coursework

4th Semester Complete organized coursework, sign up for IDEA 8305 on major field

3rd Year Complete 6 additional hours of field exam prep, schedule field exam, complete and submit dissertation proposal

4th-5th Year Dissertation