COMPLETING YOUR MINOR/MAJOR COURSEWORK, AND THE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

Prelim Planning Meeting

You determine your minor with the help of your advisor and take all your coursework, including minor coursework, prior to taking your Preliminary Examination. At the time you are preparing for your Preliminary Examination you should have a meeting with your Prelim Committee and review your PhD Checklist making sure you have completed the minor and all coursework.

The Prelim Warrant

The SoHE Graduate Program Coordinator must obtain your Prelim Warrant at least 3 weeks before you defend your prelims. So about the same time you receive your questions, submit to the SoHE Graduate Program Coordinator the signed "Instructions to obtain the PhD Prelim Warrant & Minor" form, and your signed PhD Checklist. The SoHE Graduate Program Coordinator will fill out the paperwork to order your Prelim Warrant, and will contact you (by email) when it arrives. This Warrant is signed by your committee at your prelim defense. When you deliver the signed Warrant to the Graduate School (217 Bascom Hall), you will be granted dissertator status by the Graduate School.

Departmental Policies on the Prelim Examination

Purpose

The doctoral preliminary examination is designed as a summative evaluation and preparatory process. The goals are (1) to assess whether students have the relevant knowledge and scholarly skills necessary for completing a dissertation and (2) to advance understanding and thinking related to their chosen area of scholarship.

Steps and Timeline:

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<th>Step</th>
<th>Deadlines</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Finish PhD coursework in Fall 2017 Semester</td>
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<td>Finish PhD coursework in Spring or Summer 2018 semester</td>
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## 1. PhD Candidacy Meeting

During the last semester of PhD coursework (with the exception of research credits), a PhD Candidacy meeting between the student and prelim committee occurs. It is the student’s responsibility to set up this meeting. Two weeks prior to the meeting the student will give the committee members: 1) a written statement of research interests (up to 1 page, single-spaced); 2) a brief paragraph summarizing career goals; 3) an up-to-date CV; 4) initial reading list of key articles, books, and resources that they will draw on for their written prelim.

During the meeting, the committee will provide feedback to the students related to achieving their career goals, CV, and the focus of their research interests. The committee, with input from the student, will develop the written prelim exam question. The committee will also review the student’s initial reading list and offer additional suggestions.

This meeting should occur toward the beginning (e.g., September or October in the fall semester; February or March in the spring semester) of the last semester of PhD coursework; re-writes of the statement of interest and/or a follow-up committee meeting may be necessary to formulate a focused topic. At the end of this process, the committee will approve the final wording of the prelim question.

In some cases, it may make sense to initiate the Prelim process (i.e. PhD Candidacy meeting) prior to the last semester of PhD coursework. This should only be considered if there is clear

<table>
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<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>PhD Candidacy Meeting</td>
<td>Beginning of last semester of PhD coursework</td>
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<td>September or October 2017</td>
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<td>February or March 2018</td>
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<td>Prelim question finalized</td>
<td>Following PhD Candidacy Meeting</td>
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<td>October 2017</td>
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<td>March 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading List</td>
<td>End of last semester of PhD coursework (last day of classes)</td>
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<td>Early December 2017</td>
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<td>Early May 2018</td>
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<td>Written prelim due</td>
<td>Four weeks prior to end (last day of classes) of following semester</td>
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<td>Mid April 2018</td>
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<td>Mid November 2018</td>
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<td>Oral Defense</td>
<td>Two weeks after written prelim is submitted</td>
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<td>Early May 2018</td>
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<td>Early December 2018</td>
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<td>Re-examination</td>
<td>Four weeks after the original oral defense</td>
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<td>Early June 2018</td>
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<td>Early January 2019</td>
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Footnotes. 1) Last semester of PhD coursework refers to coursework EXCLUDING research credits. 2) In some cases, it may make sense to initiate the Prelim process prior to the last semester of PhD coursework. This should only be considered if there is clear rationale for doing so (from both advisor and student) and the student has limited coursework remaining. 3) The above deadlines are just that – deadlines. Students do NOT need to take the full allotted amount of time to complete prelims. Students who complete PhD course work in a spring semester should consider completing prelims over the summer. Similarly, students who complete PhD course work in a fall semester should consider completing prelims over the winter break. These are often ideal times for writing.
rationale for doing so (from both advisor and student) and the student has limited coursework remaining.

2. **FINALIZED READING LIST**

Following the PhD Candidacy meeting, the student must finalize their reading list of the key articles, books, and resources that they will draw on for their written prelim. This reading list represents the student’s formulation of their chosen area of expertise and is intended to help ensure that the student is ready for the written prelim. The expectation is that students have read and thought about the resources listed (i.e., this is not a to-do list of new material to read). Students must email the updated reading list to the committee members no later than the last day of class of the last semester of PhD course work.

3. **WRITTEN EXAM**

The written prelim exam is due four weeks prior to the end (i.e., last day of classes) of the semester following completion of PhD coursework (with the exception of research credits). If coursework is completed in a fall semester, the completed prelim is due three weeks prior to the last day of the following spring semester. For students who complete their PhD coursework in the spring semester, the prelim must be completed three weeks prior to the end of the fall semester. This will allow time for re-examinations (i.e. re-writes), which is not an uncommon outcome, prior to the beginning of another semester.

*There is not an expectation that students must or should take the entire time period possible for completing the prelim. That is, finishing early is not a problem! If coursework is completed in a spring semester, summer is often the ideal time to complete the prelim and students are encouraged to do so. Similarly, if coursework is completed in a fall semester, winter break may also be an appropriate time to complete the prelim.*

In planning PhD course work and scheduling the prelim, students should remember that they need to be enrolled in a minimum of eight credits per semester prior to successfully passing the prelim examination.

4. **ORAL DEFENSE**

The oral defense of the prelim, which is a meeting between the students and their committee, should occur about two weeks after the written exam has been turned in. This will serve as an oral exam and feedback session. It is the responsibility of the students to schedule this meeting in advance and turn in the exam accordingly (i.e., give the committee about two weeks to read the written exam prior to the oral defense). The purposes of the oral defense are (a) to clarify possible shortcomings in the written exam, and (b) to initiate in-depth discussions to move forward the student’s thinking.

The following decisions can be made following the oral defense: **Pass, Pass with minor re-**
writes, Re-examination (i.e., major re-writes), or Fail.

If the decision is Fail, the student is terminated from the program.

5. RE-EXAMINATIONS

Re-writes are not uncommon. If the decision is a Pass with minor re-writes, then the student has two weeks to turn in a revised written prelim to all committee members with a cover letter outlining changes in response to issues raised by committee members.

If the decision is Re-examination, then the student has four weeks to turn in a revised written prelim to the committee members with a cover letter outlining changes to the prelim in response to issues raised by committee members. A second oral defense will be scheduled. A decision of Pass or Fail will be made following the second oral Defense. Under exceptional circumstances, the prelim committee may allow a longer timeline for completing the re-examination.

Format and Length:

The written exam must be 25-30 pages double-spaced, Times New Roman Font 12, and 1 inch margins (not including references, tables, figures, or appendices). The exam consists of one question, which has been designed to integrate components of theory, content, and research methods. In the exam students will be required to demonstrate proficiency in the scholarly skills and knowledge listed below.

- An in-depth understanding of the content of their chosen area of expertise
- Ability to use theory to understand a topic, conceptualize a research question, and/or design outreach/intervention programs
- Understanding of contextual factors (e.g., ecological factors)
- Synthesis of research findings across studies, including an understanding that some studies should be emphasized and relied on more than others
- Ability to use studies to tell a coherent story (rather than reviewing studies without a narrative to link them together)
- Critical evaluation of the quality and meaning of methods used in the research studies
- Scholarly writing (e.g., clear writing, appropriate tone)
- Demonstration of appropriate breadth and depth of coverage of selected studies
- Ability to identify gaps in knowledge and propose future directions through identifying key research questions, establishing program goals, or developing evaluation plans.

QUESTION:
The prelim question will take the following format. The committee may make modifications to
the question if needed to fit a student’s focus. The question will be finalized through the
Candidacy meeting(s) and given to the student prior to the end of the last semester of PhD
coursework (i.e., the question is not meant to be a surprise).

**Review and critique the literature on ____________________________.** In the process of this
critique, synthesize what is known and convey how well it is known theoretically and
empirically, identify gaps in knowledge, evaluate the methods used, and provide conclusions
regarding next steps for research or to advance the field.

Footnote. If using a specific theory, this can be incorporated into the blank space. Example:
“Review and critique the literature on the impact of poverty on toddler language development
using Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory. In the process of this critique……”

**Exam preparation:**

1. Check the Graduate Student Handbook for information on when students can take the
prelim exam, how to form the prelim committee, how and when to obtain the warrant, etc. The
committee must include three members, at least two of whom must be HDFS faculty. A third
member may come from outside the department but must be a part of the UW-Madison
graduate faculty.

2. The entire three-person prelim committee will develop and must approve the final
question.

3. The prelim committee chair will coordinate the prelim process and be responsible for
ensuring that the exam question has adequate balance, breadth, and depth.

4. Students may use any references or handbooks, published articles, or drafts to answer
prelim questions, but are not permitted to receive direct assistance from other individuals in
the completion of this examination. However, to clarify prelim questions, a student is
encouraged to contact the prelim committee chair, who will then get feedback from other
committee members.

5. Committee members will evaluate the prelim exam (including in the oral defense) using the
“HDFS Preliminary Examination Assessment Form.” The student should give these forms to
each prelim committee member. Students will not receive completed copies of these
assessment forms, but will get feedback about their performance during the defense and from
their advisor.

6. A doctoral candidate may use a copy editor only under special circumstances (e.g., if
English is a second language) and with the approval of the committee. The copy editor must be
from outside the field. If copy editing is approved, the doctoral candidate must turn in the
written prelim on time and then be granted additional time for copy editing before the committee reads the prelim.

7. The decision to Pass, Pass with minor re-writes, Re-examination, or Fail will be made at the end of the oral defense, after the student has had the opportunity to respond to questioning, and following committee discussion. The decision is not based solely on the written exam, but on the written and oral exam together. In consultation with the committee, the student’s advisor will complete the “Preliminary Examination Outcome Summary Sheet” at the end of the preliminary exam oral defense. The student’s advisor will discuss the outcome and feedback with the student. A copy of the form will be kept in the student’s departmental file.

8. Students who do not complete the prelim exam steps within the specified deadlines, will not be eligible for department funding. If there are exceptional circumstances contributing to the delay, the student’s advisor may submit a written request for an extension to the GPC Chair.

9. Most faculty are on 9-month appointments and they are not required to read/write prelims during the summer months, so be sure to check with your committee about the timing of meetings to be sure it fits with their schedules as well as yours.