



PhD in Social Welfare

STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURES FOR STUDENTS PREPARING  
FOR THE GENERAL EXAMINATION

(Guidelines for Students entering prior to 2005-06)

[Revised July 2006]

The General Examination consists of written and oral sections. Both are of importance in assessing a student's readiness for advancement to candidacy. Students and faculty should carefully read the Policy and Procedure Manual section on the general examination. The SSW form, **NOTIFICATION OF GENERAL EXAMINATION FORMAT** must be submitted to the Program Director at least one quarter prior to taking the general exams.

1. NOTE: THE ORAL SECTION OF THE GENERAL EXAMINATION MAY NOT TAKE PLACE UNTIL AT LEAST ONE QUARTER AFTER THE SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE IS OFFICIALLY CONVENED (by submission of the form requesting formation of the supervisory committee to the Program Director).
2. Supervisory Committee consultations and distribution of duties.

Meetings prior to the POS presentation should have covered the following areas: a review of the student's program to that point, a discussion of the areas to be covered in the POS (leading to the General Examination), and tentative agreements regarding the timing and format of the General Examination parts as well as how each faculty member will work with the student and provide evaluative feedback along the way. At these meetings, faculty may also discuss division of labor regarding the formulation and evaluation of the Examination. Agreements made at this (these) meeting(s) should be summarized in writing and circulated to all committee members (see Program and Policy Manual.) There should be agreement regarding the content for which student will be held responsible in the General Examination, including the bibliography to be used as source materials.

  - a. The student and chair should arrange regular meetings during the period of studying for the exams.
  - b. The student should arrange extensive consultations with each member of the committee; these may take the form of formal reading courses (i.e., 600 tutorials) or informal ongoing discussion. Student writing of mini-papers and practice exams questions is strongly encouraged. Responding to practice test questions as part of the General Examination preparation provides an important mechanism to both student and faculty regarding mastery of the material. It also provides a foundation for possible publication.
  - c. Students may sign up for tutorial credit with faculty as part of their POS preparation. Generally these range from 1 to 3 credits. A special case needs to be made for tutorials in excess of 3 credits (see PhD Program manual). Contact time with faculty and outside reading/writing time should be proportionate to the number of credits. Written products form an important part of evaluation of tutorials. Registration forms should be specific about objectives, content, format, and expected products of each tutorial. This information is essentially the "course syllabus" for the tutorials and the contract for expectations of the student and faculty member.
3. Checking for completion of all requirements.

The student and Supervisory Committee Chair must verify that the student has completed all necessary requirements for taking the General Examination: these include completion of all required courses and cognates and no incompletes on record (see PhD Program Manual).
4. Setting up and completing the written examination.

As early as possible in the preparation stage, the student, in consultation and with approval of the Supervisory Committee, decides which format will be used for each of the three sections of the written examination: take-home exam, on-site exam, or paper (available only for substantive or interventive sections). All parts of the written examination must be completed, evaluated, and judged as passed before the oral examination can take place. [Note: At least one quarter prior to taking the exam, the student must submit the form indicating the format that will be used for each of the three sections.]

  - a. Whether take-home or on-site, the exam questions directly stem from the learning objectives specified in the POS proposal and the content that the faculty have been covering with the student. The Chair contacts other

Committee members prior to the exam to indicate a deadline by which questions from each member are due to the Chair. Often each member takes responsibility for developing the questions for one section of the Examination. At times, the Chair may need to exercise judgment in wording or format of questions to render them appropriate and manageable within the exam framework. Typically the student has some choice about questions to answer, although certain questions may be made mandatory. The number of questions the student must address should be reasonably manageable within the exam time limit. At least 1 week prior to the written examination, the Chair forwards the questions to Student Services.

- b. On-site (at SSW) written examinations are arranged through and proctored by Student Services (Roberta Aldrich). The dates for the written and oral parts of the Examination need to be planned 4 to 6 weeks in advance in consultation with all members of the supervisory committee. There should be about 10 days to 2 weeks between finishing all written section and the orals.

The time allotment per section is 3.5 hours. If multiple sections are done on-site, they must be taken on separate days, usually with a day intervening. In all cases, the total written examination period (for any combination of formats) should not exceed 10 working days.

The school supplies a computer.

No papers, notes, or books are allowed in the examination room.

The student may proofread the final manuscript of the examination and make minor handwritten corrections in grammar and punctuation prior to the exam being circulated to the Supervisory Committee for review. The proofreading is done under the supervision of Student Services.

- c. Take-home written examinations are also arranged through and proctored by Student Services (Roberta Aldrich). The dates for the written and oral parts of the Examination need to be planned 4 to 6 weeks in advance in consultation with all members of the supervisory committee. There should be 10 days to 2 weeks between finishing all written section and the orals.

Any student may choose the option of a take-home exam for any or all of the three parts of the general examination: substantive, integrative, methods. The format is 24-hour take-home test per part: open book. Questions will be sent by email at a time agreed upon, and the answers must be returned by email within 24 hours.

- d. Paper Option. Students may choose to write a General Examination paper for either the substantive or interventive section of the written examination. The student and Supervisory Committee together make the decision to choose this.

Drafts of the General Examination paper should be submitted to Supervisory Committee members for preliminary review and comment. To ensure independent work, committee feedback will be in the form of manuscript review, involving general suggestions and comments, and the draft review comments will be submitted with the final paper to become part of the official record. The General Examination paper must be submitted by the last day of the written examination for the other two sections.

The student may rescind the commitment to write a General Examination paper by obtaining signatures from all Supervisory Committee members, excepting the GSR (although the GSR must be informed at the time), on a memo stating the student's decision to use either the on-site or take-home General Examination format for the particular section. The signed memo is submitted to the Director of the Doctoral Program no later than one month before the scheduled written examination.

5. Supervisory Committee evaluation of the written examination.

The committee members will have at least one week to read and comment on the examination.

- a. All members read and evaluate all sections of the written examination. Each section is judged and graded separately as (1) pass with distinction, (2) pass, (3) marginal pass, or (4) fail. Each member should contact the chair as soon as possible with his/her judgment. If there are any major or specific requirements members have of the student for the oral examination, these should be conveyed to the chair. Minor differences in judgment

may exist, but major differences regarding the written exams (e.g., whether one or more sections has been failed) should be resolved before proceeding to the oral exam.

- b. The chairperson conveys these results to the student along with any evaluative comments that may help the student prepare for the oral examination.
  - c. In the event that a student fails one or more sections of the written examination, the committee schedules a re-examination of such sections.
6. Setting the date for the oral examination.
- a. To set the date of the oral examination, the student must consult all members of the committee (including the GSR) to arrange a date and time. At least 4 members of the Supervisory Committee, including the CHAIR and GSR must be present at the oral examination (normally scheduled for 2 hours). This typically means the entire committee must be present (most committees have only 4 members). An oral examination can be scheduled between quarters; however, if this is done, the student will not be advanced to candidacy until the end of the next quarter.
  - b. The student then schedules a room for the Oral examination, usually the Dean's large conference room, and notifies the PhD Program Coordinator of the date, time, and room.
7. Completing the "APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION TO GENERAL EXAMINATION FOR THE DOCTOR'S DEGREE."
- a. This form is available online at the Graduate School web site. It is best to download it directly from there since it can change annually: <http://www.grad.washington.edu/forms/forms.htm>.
  - b. The application form must be received in **BY THE GRADUATE SCHOOL AT LEAST THREE WEEKS** prior to the oral examination. This time period is necessary for the Graduate School to clear the student's transcripts, to ascertain that all minimum Graduate School requirements have been met, and to announce the examination in the University Week. After all signatures are obtained, the student either takes the form directly to the Graduate School and gives a copy to the PhD Coordinator, or gives the signed form directly to the PhD Coordinator, who then forwards it on to the Graduate School.
  - c. The Graduate School approves the oral examination date and sends the General Examination Warrant (Examinations Report) to PhD Program Office about 1 week before the scheduled oral; the Office forwards it to the Supervisory Committee Chair. The committee completes EXAMINATIONS REPORT and School of Social Work Evaluation form after the oral examination and returns both the to PhD Program Office. If the student chooses to take the completed REPORT form directly to the Graduate School, a copy must be submitted to the Program Office.
8. The Oral Examination format.
- a. The oral exams have no specific format. A 2-hour timeframe is customary. The Chair serves as the timekeeper.
  - b. The GSR will have an form to use in monitoring the exam and must ensure that all required persons are present and that the Warrant for General Examination for the Doctor's Degree is approved by the Graduate School and is present at the oral.
  - c. After opening the session, the Chair typically excuses the student so that the committee can reaffirm, in the presence of the GSR, their evaluation of the written examination and their expectations for the oral examination.
  - d. When the student rejoins the committee, she/he may wish to offer brief preliminary comments (e.g., providing a self-assessment, outlining any points that she/he would like to elaborate upon from his/her written responses, as time permits). Some students may prefer simply to begin with questions from the committee.
  - d. Committee members may ask the student to respond to any of the questions formulated for the examinations and not addressed in the written exams, to elaborate on any answer and/or provide clarification, to respond to other questions directly relevant to the POS content, and/or to think ahead to the implications for future research and career activities. The committee needs time within a 2-hour period to cover such questions and to again excuse the student to discuss judgments of the student's performance (see step 9).

- e. If the committee feels that more time is essential to render an evaluation, this time should be scheduled as soon as possible after the first session, and any second session requires the same attendance rules as the first.
  - f. After the Committee discussion, the student rejoins the committee and the Chair shares the committee's evaluation with the student.
9. Evaluation of the Oral Examination.
- a. The committee rates the student's overall performance as (1) exceptional pass, (2) pass, (3) marginal pass, or (4) fail. In the event a student fails the oral exam, or any part thereof, the committee will reschedule another oral exam at a time it considers appropriate. (A pass with distinction can only be given after the first taking of examinations. If there are repeat sections, the performance can be rated no higher than pass.)
  - b. Ratings of the student's performance on both written and oral examinations shall be recorded by the chairperson on the School of Social Work's evaluation form provided for this purpose (the "Social Welfare Doctoral Program Evaluation of General Examinations"). The Warrant from the Graduate School is also completed and signed by all members of the committee.
  - c. The completed Warrant and the Social Welfare Doctoral Program Evaluation of General Examinations are returned to the Program Office by the Supervisory Committee Chair. The Office submits the signed Warrant to the Graduate School for approval. The Social Work evaluation form is retained in the student's School of Social Work file.
  - d. Upon Graduate School approval, the student is advanced to candidacy. Students who have passed the General Examination and who have completed all requirements for the degree except the dissertation and the Final Examination are awarded the appropriate Candidate's certificate from the Graduate School. For further information, see The Graduate School: Graduate Study and Research section of the General Catalog entitled "Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degree."

FOR EXAMPLE GENERAL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS:  
See Binder in PhD Program Office.