



## **Graduate Student Professional Development Brown Bag “Passing Through Hoops” General Advice from Dissertators on Preliminary and Qualifying Exams”**

Tuesday, February 14, 2006

Prelim preparations getting you down? Looking for an opportunity to discuss the exam process with others and hear advice from dissertators who have already gone through it? Join us for a peer-led discussion for graduate students on taking preliminary or qualifying exams. Professor Aili Tripp will join the panel to offer a faculty perspective.

Co-sponsored by the Women's Studies Research Center, the Graduate Student Collaborative and the OGSPD.

### **General Advice on Taking the Prelim**

- Read the whole exam and figure out an overall strategy for answering the questions. Sometimes questions overlap or could be answered similarly for different parts of the exam. Try to vary your responses so that you show off as much as you can rather than presenting the same material two or three times using different wording. If there is overlap in the questions, focus on different aspects of the phenomenon or answer different questions if you fear there will be too much overlap.
- Figure out exactly what you are being asked to do and underline the verb in the question (e.g., analyze, compare, contrast, criticize, define, describe, discuss, enumerate, evaluate, illustrate, interpret, outline, prove, state, summarize, trace).
- Make an outline of your essay.
- Answer all parts of the question.
- Avoid padding and rambling. Keep the argument tight.
- Use citations as indications that you are familiar with the relevant literature, but don't just offer strings of citations in lieu of an argument. You need to have something substantive to say and be able to flesh out arguments. Cite relevant literature, don't just cite for the sake of citing.
- Define key concepts.
- Develop your own argument, don't just say there is this view and that one; take a position and argue it.
- Provide examples, don't just say, “x happens as in Brazil”. Flesh it out. Be specific.



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- If a question looks unfamiliar to you, recast question in way that you can answer it without changing its meaning. Put it in terms you are more familiar with. Sometimes the question at first glance looks like it is on a topic you know nothing about. Think of an entry point that you can relate to and work with that.
- Pace yourself, don't want to end up with great first question and weak last question.
- Check your work, spellings, etc.

### **Additional Resources**

Preparing for your comprehensive exams - APA article

<http://gradpsych.apags.org/apr04/comps.cfm>

*Study strategically and organize citations, say faculty and students who survived the trial themselves.*

D. Comprehensive Exams Home Page (University of New Mexico)

<http://www.cs.unm.edu/~crowley/phdExams/begin.html>

*Although this is in the Computer Science Department, the information about studying for and taking the exams is relevant to many fields.*

Tips for Taking (and Passing) a Comprehensive Examination (University of Central Florida)

[http://www.uwc.ucf.edu/Grad%20Gateway/grad\\_level\\_writing/tips\\_comps.htm](http://www.uwc.ucf.edu/Grad%20Gateway/grad_level_writing/tips_comps.htm)

*Gives general advice for passing oral or written comprehensive examinations.*

Ph. D. Qualifying Exams: Making it to the Other Side

Melissa Sanchez, Ph.D Student

<http://www.ags.uci.edu/~gvoice/99winter/qualify.html>

*English & Comparative Literature*