

SIUC Department of History Preliminary Exam Procedures – PhD

revised, May, 2010

1. In the first or second semester of your program, in consultation with your advisor, determine in what fields you will take exams. The general exam fields are US History to 1877, US History 1865-present, Medieval Europe, Early Modern Europe, Modern Europe, Modern Britain, Colonial Latin America, Modern Latin America, Modern Middle East and Africa and the African Diaspora. Your fields should consist of two “general” fields, and a thematic or “focus” field, designed by you and your advisor. After you have determined your general fields, be in contact with professors in those fields as soon as possible to inquire whether they are willing to work with you. In consultation with your advisor and other committee members, select a third, thematic field. All fields should contribute to your areas of interest and those in which you will pursue dissertation research. Each examination committee must be made up of at least four members – the two/three professors whose fields you will study, and one/two additional readers affiliated with your field of study – they may be professors in our department (or Edwardsville) or, if appropriate, from another program at SIUC. Collect signatures of all professors on the reverse of this form. When the form is complete, submit it to Ms. Shea for your file. You cannot take exams if this paperwork is not completed. Use the same form (reverse) to establish your dissertation committee (often the same as your exam committee – 5 members required including one outside the history department).
2. At least three months, and preferably a semester or more before you plan to take your exams, you should meet with the professors directing your exams. These professors will discuss with you their expectations for their exams, and assist in designing a reading list. Reading list expectations vary from professor to professor, but you can expect to be responsible for 50 + books and articles per exam. When you meet with the professor, you and he/she should discuss how best to prepare for the exam, and when to meet with him/her during the course of your preparation. Most professors will ask you to write reviews or thought pieces in order to shape your discussion.
3. When you and your committee determine you are prepared to take your exams, schedule three exam periods and an oral period with every member of your committee. Scheduling should happen at least one month before you plan to take the exams in order to accommodate everyone’s schedule. If you plan to take exams in the summer, keep in mind that this is research season for faculty members, so plan in advance! See Ms. Shea to schedule your exams and reserve the examination room.
4. Exams are three hours each. Students generally take their exams in the space of one week. Exams may be handwritten or typed but must be taken in the examination room.
5. Your exams will be assessed according to the following criteria: mastery of historical data, ability to discuss historical relationships, familiarity with monographic literature, familiarity with historiography, and clarity of expression. Your oral exam provides you with the opportunity to enhance your written argument, and expand on questions you chose not to answer.
6. Students who do not pass their exams will, at the discretion of their committee, be given a second opportunity to do so.