

U.S. HISTORY PHD QUALIFYING EXAMINATION GUIDELINES

rev'd May 2013

1. Expectations for students taking the oral examination in the major field

The purpose of the examination is to assess students' scholarly preparation to teach, research, and discuss key issues and problems in U.S. history. While committees are responsible for ensuring that students' preparation includes the entire chronological scope of American history from European contact to the present, they must also help each student to develop his or her own particular questions or themes for framing that breadth. To that end, the student shall establish, in collaboration with his or her committee, three broad thematic questions that will organize and focus the discussion. Additionally, and also under the committee's guidance, s/he should prepare a bibliography of relevant scholarly works pertinent to the key issues and problems to be addressed in the oral examination. The students' bibliographies and thematic questions will be forwarded to the U.S. field chair and will be available by request to all faculty members in the U.S. field.

The student chooses three faculty members from the U.S. field to comprise the major-field portion of his/her examination committee. The student should begin meeting with these committee members several months in advance of the examination to develop a mutual understanding of (1) the key questions on which the student will be examined; and (2) the scope and content of the student's bibliography. During the course of the oral examination the student should (1) persuasively defend the themes and readings s/he has chosen; and (2) demonstrate mastery of the scholarship and relevant historiographical debates informing his/her discussion of the selected discussion questions. We define minimum competence needed for a passing grade as a command of main historical developments, an awareness of key publications, and an understanding of critical scholarly debates sufficient to teach a comprehensive survey course or courses in American history.

2. Expectations for students taking the oral examination in the inside minor field

Students seeking an inside minor in US history shall follow the rules outlined above, with the exception that that they will seek only two members of the U.S. field to be present at the oral examination, and that they will prepare to answer only two broad thematic questions.

3. Guidelines for the prospectus

The dissertation prospectus shall consist of a 4,000-5,000-word historiographical essay that will identify what the student sees as the originality and significance of the proposed dissertation topic, a 1,500-word grant proposal, plus a bibliography. These three elements should be combined in this order into a single document, which will form the basis of the second stage of the qualifying examination: the defense of the dissertation proposal.