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Interim Comprehensive Exam Procedure
Established by the Graduate Faculty at Mini-Retreat December 17, 2021

Four main factors motivated a reform of our Pitt Sociology comprehensive exam (comps) requirement. First, it remains important for students to learn how to conduct broad literature reviews and assess the topography of important debates in a field. Scholars will have many opportunities to do this over the course of their career, including in the dissertation. Preserving the comps requirement in a streamlined form ensures that students will learn how to review a field without unduly obstructing progress to degree. Second, and the main impetus for reform, students are facing time to degree pressures. The University limits internal funding to five years. The previous comps process was taking a year or more that students could not afford, while producing little of recognized value on the job market. Third, while the comps requirement is becoming less important nationally and at Pitt, it is still seen as an important milestone both here and on the job market. Preserving the comps signals that our students have obtained this training. Fourth, making the comps due at the same time as the overview facilitates students using the comps to develop their dissertation project. The timing makes it possible for some students to decide on the scope of their dissertation before finishing the lit review. And this process also leaves flexibility for students interested in exploring other fields.

To address these issues, the Graduate Faculty established the following interim comprehensive exam procedure effective immediately:

- Reduce the comprehensive exam to 1 review style essay.
- The body of the essay should be between 5000 and 6250 words (approximately 20-30 pages, double-spaced, plus references).
- Require two graduate faculty signatures.
- The essay is due at the end of year 3 along with the dissertation overview.

Faculty raised a variety of considerations that are not fully addressed by this proposal. We passed this interim proposal to remove the immediate obstruction to dissertation work and program completion for our current students. The intention is to revisit these issues as we engage in wide-ranging re-envisioning of the graduate program to better serve our students, faculty commitments, and more powerfully contribute to human liberation on a social scale.