Students should contact the field coordinator sometime during their last semester of course work (typically 4-6 months prior to taking the comprehensive exam).

There exists a reading list, bringing together scholarly literature dealing with the various elements of human security—peace and conflict; development and socio-economic change; human rights, governance and democratization. This reading list is strongly inspired by the courses in the Human Security field and certificate, but it goes beyond that.

The Human Security field at the MALD level is a professional field. It prepares students to be cutting-edge, thoughtful, relevant practitioners in complicated situations. A PhD is a research degree, however, and thus by necessity must draw more on theory and scholarship. Hence, each section in the reading list for the field exam starts with some of the key policy writings in the field, as well as some of the lessons learned, the insights gained, from practice so far. Much of this is the same as what was in the MALD courses listed in this field. But each section then goes beyond those courses and looks at the scholarly literature (frequently entirely unrelated to operational concerns) about those very same dynamics. Mostly, that literature comes from the field of comparative politics (which is why the course by that name is the required one for the field for PhD students), but I also draw from anthropology, economics, and sociology.

The reading list is updated every year. Students wishing to take the field are invited to make propositions to make the reading list shorter as well as more relevant in function of their specific research interests (although most of the core must remain, for a field reading list cannot be only about the specific PhD topic of a student). After a few weeks of back and forth, then, a definitive reading list is established, which constitutes the basis for the exam.

The exam consists of three questions. Most of the time (but not always), students can chose between two questions for one topic. I care foremost about students' capacity to demonstrate their understanding of the intellectual landscape, the way different schools of thought and intellectual traditions conceive of particular problems, and the way they conceive of the type of social change under study.

The oral exam primarily covers questions that were on the exam, and is normally used for clarification of and elaboration on answers on the written exam. However, additional questions may be asked, and the student may be asked to make connections with other fields.