Public International Law Field
Guidelines for Comprehensive Examinations

Required Coursework:
The International Legal Order (ILO L200) and Public International Law (ILO L201) courses are required of all doctoral students with PIL as a field. In addition, at least three more ILO courses must be completed to satisfy the PIL field requirements if PIL is one of two fields of study (or two additional courses if PIL is one of three fields of study) before the comprehensive examination may be taken.

Reading Lists:
The PIL reading list consists of all materials assigned in L200 and L201. The reading list forms the basis for the written exam questions and serves as preparation for the oral examination. Students in consultation with the field coordinator will identify a comprehensive set of examination topic areas and draft topic-related questions at least three to four months prior to the written comprehensive exam.

Written Comprehensive Exam:
A single PIL exam of 7.5 hours will be administered during each comprehensive exam period (four per year). Students will answer either 2 (if PIL is one of three fields of study) or 3 (if PIL is one of two fields of study) questions out of four contained in the exam, of which one will be mandatory. Exams are closed-book and will be hand-written in bluebooks. Please note that Fletcher honor codes apply.

Each student is responsible for scheduling the date of the exam, reserving a room in which to take the exam and printing the exam prior to the end of the allotted period. All exams are administered through the Registrar’s office. Students may request to see exams from previous years. A file is maintained in the Registrar’s office. Written exams will be graded as “Pass,” “Fail” or “Withhold” by the field director. Students may retake the exam only once should they fail. It will be graded on the following criteria:

1) knowledge of authors and literature on the approved reading list,
2) understanding of fundamental concepts in the PIL field,
3) ability to employ appropriate analytical tools in answering exam questions,
4) the ability to assess strengths and weaknesses in the literature.

Oral Comprehensive Exam:
Students may not advance to the oral exam if they do not receive a “Pass” or “Withhold” on the written portion of the comprehensive exam. The Registrar and/or the field coordinator will notify students of their grade. Students should then contact the PIL field coordinator for any comments before taking the oral comprehensive exam. The oral comprehensive exam is scheduled by the Registrar’s office. It lasts one hour with 20-30 minutes per field. Students may select the order in which the two or three field coordinators will pose questions; however, they should expect that each coordinator may interject with questions and comments as appropriate throughout the oral exam.
For the PIL field, questions for the oral exam stem from one or all of the following categories. Students may be asked to:

1) clarify an answer provided on the written exam;
2) answer any of the questions listed on the written exam;
3) comment on and/or cite any of the literature and/or authors in the approved reading list;
4) and/or apply items in the approved reading list to cases or current events.

Should a student fail the oral, upon conferring with the other examiners, the field coordinator will determine whether a retake of the oral alone or both the written and oral is required. The written exam result will only come into question if the student had originally received a grade of "withhold" on the written exam. A student is permitted to retake the oral exam only once. After a second failure, the Ph.D. candidacy will be terminated.