POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND THEORIES (PST) FIELD
GUIDELINES FOR PH.D. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS (6-10)

REQUIRED COURSEWORK

The P200 International Relations: Theory and Practice course is required of all doctoral students with International Systems and Theories (PST) as a field. In addition, at least three other courses in this field must be completed before the comprehensive exam can be taken if PST is one of three Ph.D. fields. If PST is taken as one of two fields, P200 is required, together with four other courses from the PST field.

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

PREPARATION FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

Students should prepare a reading list that is organized by topic area (their own choosing). This list is presented to the field coordinator who critiques it and makes recommendations. This process often requires several iterations. The list should include articles, books, reports, and other sources that may or may not have been assigned for specific courses. The study period is not only an opportunity to review material, but also to read additional books and key articles. Relative emphasis of topic areas may vary among reading lists depending upon your areas of interest, but students are expected to cover all important aspects of the field. Students should also consult with other faculty members whose courses they have taken in the PST field. Such faculty members may be asked to submit questions and to grade answers to those questions that they have submitted.

The reading list will be the basis for the written exam questions and will also serve as the basis for preparation for the oral exam. It should contain the following items:

1) a cover sheet that includes the name of the student, date, proposed comprehensive exam date, coursework in the field, semester taken, list of reading topics;
2) a bibliography for each topic which should include the readings listed in the syllabi of Political Systems and Theories courses that have been taken; and
3) additional readings from other literature that you believe would complement the list.

Upon providing this information to the field coordinator, you will either receive approval or be asked to modify the list. Students can expect to have a final list within six weeks of the initial exchange and at least three to four months prior to the comprehensive exam. You should also consult with the PST faculty members whose courses you have taken.

A single exam is given. This is a comprehensive field exam. While you may choose very different specific examples, it is expected that all students understand the fundamental concepts and how to use analytical tools from multiple disciplines in answering the exam questions. The exam may be taken using a computer, but you should not access the internet for information during the exam.
All comprehensive exams are now 7.5 hours long, which includes time for printing at the end. As in the past, students choosing PST as one of three fields will be expected to select two questions from the several questions set forth in the examination. Students opting for two fields including PST will be expected to answer three questions.

The questions address larger conceptual issues, and students are asked to provide specific examples to demonstrate that they understand how general principles apply to specific cases.

Written exams will be graded as “Pass,” “Fail” or “Withhold” by the field director. Students may retake the exam only once should they fail. The exam 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 field;
3) ability to employ appropriate analytical tools in answering exam questions; and
4) your ability to assess strengths and weaknesses of the literature.

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 7.5 hour 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.

Oral Comprehensive Exam

Students may take the oral exam only if they receive a “Pass” on the written exam. The Registrar and/or the field coordinator will notify you of your grade. You should then contact the PST 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 three (two) examiners will pose questions; however, they should expect that each examiner may interject with questions and comments as appropriate throughout the oral exam.

For the PST 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 other questions listed on 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. A student is permitted to retake the exam only once. After a second failure, the Ph.D. candidacy will be terminated.