INTERNATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES FIELD
GUIDELINES FOR PH.D. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

REQUIRED COURSEWORK

The P240 Role of Force course is required of all doctoral students with ISS as a field. In addition, at least three other courses in this field must be completed before the comprehensive exam can be taken.

READING LISTS

The ISS reading list will be the basis for the written exam questions and will serve as 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 ISS, semester taken, list of reading topics;
2) a bibliography for each topic on the cover sheet which should include the all the readings listed in the syllabi of ISS courses taken by the student; and
3) additional readings from other literature that the student feels would complement the list.

Upon providing this information to the field coordinator, the student 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. Students should also consult with the ISS faculty members whose courses they have taken. ISS faculty may be asked to submit questions and to grade answers to those questions that they have submitted.

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.

WRITTEN COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

A single ISS exam will be administered during each comprehensive exam period (four per year). Students will have 7.5 hours in which to take the exam. Students must answer three out of four essay questions. Exams are closed-book and may be taken on computer. 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 7.5 hour exam 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 ISS field;
3) ability to employ appropriate analytical tools in answering exam questions; and
4) the ability to assess strengths and weaknesses of 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 ISS 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 2 – 30 minutes per field. Students may select the order in which the two 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 ISS 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. A student is permitted to retake the exam only once. After a second failure, the Ph.D. candidacy will be terminated.

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