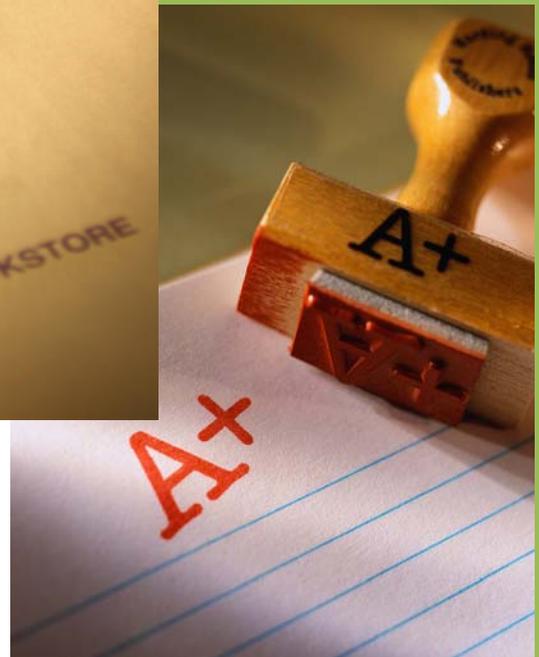
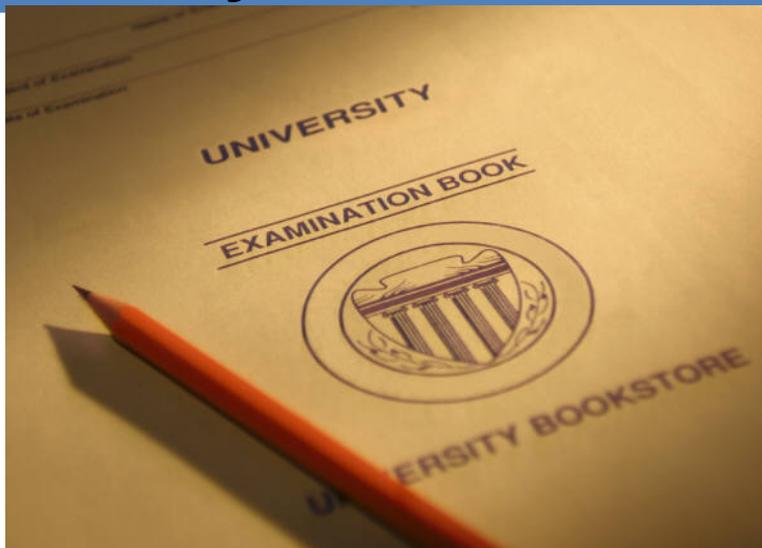


2008

Preliminary Examination Policy



School of Communication Studies

Ohio University

8/1/2008

SECOND YEAR ASSESSMENT OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

As a community of scholar-teachers, we share a commitment to the professional development and success of those individuals who are associated with our program, whether those individuals hold the position of faculty member or have been admitted as students in our graduate or our undergraduate program. Through our courses, our conversations and work together, the opportunities for on- and off-campus engagement, and program requirements, we seek to create an environment that is conducive to intellectual growth and informed decision-making.

The decision to admit an individual to our graduate program is based on multiple sources of information, including the individual's academic record, GRE scores, letters of recommendation, writing sample, and statement of purpose. By the same token, the feedback that we provide to a graduate student as he/she moves through the program is based not only on the grades received in classes but a variety of indicators that we hope will provide us with a sense of the developing "fit" between the student and our program. We recognize that "success" can be defined in many ways. For a majority of our students, short-term success will be defined in the receipt of a doctoral degree, with long-term success defined by the development of a desired career path. For what we hope will be a small number of students, success will come in the realization that our doctoral program is not a good match for/with them or for/with their intellectual ambitions.

As part of the evaluation of graduate student progress and as an aid to conversations concerning graduate student development, all students are required to participate in a two-component second year assessment program. (For part-time students, "second year" is defined as that point in their studies when they have completed both the theory and the research portions of the first year program of studies, three quarters of the Pro-Seminar course, and the introductory course for each of the concentrations.) The assessment program involves the following aspects:

1. During the week prior to the beginning of the Fall quarter of the second year, students sit for a "Preliminary Examination". Two of the questions for this examination will be prepared by the faculty members involved in teaching the first year sequence of courses. One question will concentrate on theory while the other will concentrate on research methods. Both questions will be designed to encourage synthesis on the part of the student and to allow the student to demonstrate extended mastery of the material covered during the first year of coursework. The third question will be designed by the student's POS committee following a meeting with that student in which the student's academic interests are discussed. This third question will be designed in a manner that privileges the theories and perspectives covered in the Spring term introductory courses. As with the other two questions, the third questions will be designed so as to encourage synthesis but also with an eye toward challenging the student to articulate a personal position toward the study of communication.

The examination will take place in the Lasher computer lab or other, appropriate, designated space. Students will be allowed 4 hours to respond to each question.

Assessment of student responses occurs during the first weeks of Fall quarter and is conducted by student's POS committee. The members of the student's POS will typically have two weeks following the beginning of the Fall quarter to read the student's responses and provide their written assessment to the student's primary advisor. Those written assessments will address, in brief, perceived strengths of the responses and areas meriting additional thought and/or needing clarification.

In general, a "provisionally acceptable" written response is one that (1) clearly addresses the questions posed, (2) provides evidence of a working understanding of the paradigms, theories, and concepts being addressed, and (3) provides evidence of an ability on the part of the student to apply those paradigms, theories, and concepts in addressing and/or framing research questions relevant to the communication discipline. In all cases, detection of plagiarism will result in an assessment that a response is "unacceptable". Possible courses of action in such a situation range from requiring that the student re-sit for the same or a revised examination to dismissal from the graduate program.

2. Three possible outcomes are envisioned at the conclusion of the written examination process: (1) the written examination is determined by the POS committee to be acceptable; (2) the written examination is determined by the POS committee to be provisionally acceptable, with final passage contingent upon what occurs during the oral examination; (3) the written examination, in whole or in part, is determined to not be acceptable in its current form.

If the written Preliminary Examination is determined by the POS committee to be acceptable and/or the POS committee believes that any problems that exist might be best addressed through a meeting with the student (outcomes 1 and 2 above), then the committee will meet with the student at a mutually convenient time to engage in an Oral Examination concerning (1) the student's responses to his/her Preliminary Examination questions and (2) the student's progress in the program.

In general, an "acceptable" oral defense is one in which the student is capable of assuming an active role in a conversation with a community of scholars. In assessing the performance in the oral examination, the POS committee will be concerned with:

- (1) the ability of the student to address questions emerging from his/her written responses to the Preliminary Examination questions;
- (2) the ability of the student to articulate a scholarly persona; and
- (3) the ability of the student, in general, to take part in a scholarly conversation.

An "unacceptable" oral defense is one in which the student displays inadequate understanding of basic concepts and/or foundational perspectives and is unable to

move beyond his/her written responses in a collegial discussion of discipline-relevant issues.

If the written Preliminary Examination is determined by the POS committee to be unacceptable, in whole or in part, then the student will meet with his/her advisor to discuss the revisions that need to be made. At the discretion of the advisor, other members of the student's POS committee will be involved in this conversation. From the point in time of this conversation, the student will be allowed one week per question to be revised in order to complete the revision process. The maximum number of times that any one question may be revised is two.

Based on review of a student's grades, performance on the Preliminary Examination, and performance in the Oral Examination, the student's POS committee will make one of the following decisions:

- (1) The student will have completed the requirements for a master's degree and be approved to continue in the doctoral program.
- (2) The student will be provisionally approved to continue on in the doctoral program with the understanding that he/she will address problems that emerged in the Preliminary Examination and/or the Oral Examination through a series of actions or activities outlined in a "Learning Contract" developed by the student's examining committee. The actions/activities outlined on the Learning Contract are to be completed during the Winter intersession, with the student meeting with his/her POS committee within the first 2 weeks of Winter Quarter to discuss the product of this effort. Successful completion of the Learning Contract means the student will have completed the requirements for a master's degree and be approved to continue in the doctoral program.
- (3) The student will be allowed to pursue a master's degree within the program but will not be continued as a doctoral student. At his/her own discretion or at the discretion of the School, a student may pursue a master's degree as a terminal degree within the program. In order to receive a terminal master's degree, the student will need to (1) successfully complete the courses approved as constituting the student's revised (i.e., Master's) POS, and (2) successfully complete one of the master's projects outlined in the COMS graduate handbook (i.e., a thesis, a research paper, or a professional project).
- (4) The student will not be continued in the program, either as a master's student or as a doctoral student.

This policy was adopted on September 24, 2004; modified October 14, 2005; and is to be re-examined during the Fall term of 2007.