

The Comprehensive Examination in International Relations (IR)
Instructions to Candidates
August 25, 2014

Format and Evaluation

For students entering the program prior to AY2014: This is a closed book/note examination, taken over a period of six hours. It consists of three sets of questions (international relations theory, international security, and international political economy), with candidates required to answer one question from each set.

For students entering the program in AY2014 and after: This is a closed book/note examination, taken over a period of eight hours. It consists of four sets of questions. The first three sets of questions are: international relations theory, international security, and international political economy. The fourth set of questions is based on the candidate's fourth graduate IR class (e.g. international law, international organizations). Candidates are required to provide the Director of Graduate Studies and Field Chair with the details of their fourth course one month before taking the examination. Candidates are required to answer one question from each set.

For all students: Good answers will answer the question directly, make cogent arguments, use and cite scholars and scholarship appropriately, and use empirical examples as needed. Poor answers fail to address the question, are poorly written, contain little in the way of original argument, miss obvious literatures or authors required to demonstrate mastery of the subject, or are incomplete. Very short parenthetical citations (e.g. Keohane, AH) are sufficient. No answer should exceed 1,000 words in length.

Preparation

Candidates should use the syllabi for their courses as a basis for creating their own examination reading list. They should supplement these readings with readings from graduate level syllabi from other universities, and a wide range of journals in the field, including *International Organization*, *International Security*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, and *World Politics*. Candidates may also find it useful to look at past questions when preparing for the examination. These are available on the department website.

Candidates must do more than simply master the major theories and concepts within each area of inquiry. They should also develop an understanding of the methodological debates in the sub-field and build a substantial base of empirical knowledge—both quantitative and qualitative—regarding major historical events and regions of the world.

Rationale

Preparation for the examination is an opportunity to build a broader and more integrated view of the field. Candidates should try to knit together theories, themes and arguments from their courses and outside readings so that they form a more coherent whole, and should try to integrate international relations with their other field(s). This examination is part of the passage from

being a student consuming IR courses to a professional producing political science knowledge. In other words, the comprehensive examination is an integral part of candidates' intellectual development.

The examination is also the faculty's chance to gauge students' progress in our program. Success means that we certify you as a competent scholar in international relations. If we pass you, it means we believe you could hold your own in general international relations discussions at conferences or at a job interview and that you could teach an introductory international relations class. Our field, our department, our university, and your peers on the job market have a vested interest in maintaining high standards.