

# **Student Guide**

to the

## **Comprehensive Examination for the Master's Degree**

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School of Library and Information Studies  
University of Oklahoma  
Norman, Oklahoma

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## **Introduction**

The School of Library and Information Studies seeks to provide professional education for persons wishing to prepare for a career in the information profession, to advance professional knowledge by stimulating research, and to encourage a creative attitude toward effective service in libraries and other information agencies and professional activities. Grades received in course work constitute one measure of a student's performance in professional education. The comprehensive examination constitutes another, as well as meeting the University requirement to successfully complete such an exam for students who enter the non-thesis option program of the School of Library and Information Studies.

### **Purpose and Philosophy of The Comprehensive Examination**

The objectives of the comprehensive examination are 1) to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organize and synthesize knowledge developed throughout the program, 2) to test knowledge in specific subject areas, and 3) to test ability to solve problems, and 4) to test the ability to establish and defend positions on current issues, trends, and problems in information and library studies.

The examination is designed to test mastery of a body of knowledge, not merely recall of specific factual data. Students are expected to use not only the information learned in their course work, but also information from a variety of learning experiences, such as reading the professional literature and other appropriate activities. Responses should demonstrate an ability to organize thoughts into coherent narratives.

### **Development of the Examination**

SLIS faculty generate a new set of questions each semester. Topics for the examination are not "course specific" but allow the student an opportunity to integrate content from several course areas and additional appropriate learning experiences. The questions focus upon six identified areas that all students are expected to master:

- \* the philosophical and theoretical foundations of our field
- \* the organization and control of information resources
- \* the provision and analysis of user services
- \* the management of information agencies
- \* acquiring and accessing information
- \* the application of research methods within our field.

Each individual question will require synthesis of knowledge from at least two of these areas.

## **Eligibility for Examination**

The examination should be taken in the last semester of the student's program. A student must be enrolled in at least 2 hours of graduate work in the semester that the comprehensive exam is taken and be admitted to candidacy for the master's degree (see "Program of Graduate Work" in next section). A student must have completed 75% of the courses on his or her program plan, including all the required courses. Incomplete (I) grades from previous semesters must be removed within 2 weeks in advance of the date of the comprehensive examination. If an incomplete is received in the semester during which the comprehensive is taken, it must be removed within 6 months of the end of the semester or the comprehensive exam will have to be retaken.

## **Registration for the Comprehensive Examination**

No later than the beginning of the academic year in which the student intends to take the comprehensive examination, she/he should request a "Comps Packet" from the School of Library and Information Studies. This packet may be requested in person or via email from the SLIS Admissions Secretary (slisinfo@lists.ou.edu). The packet contains 4 forms for graduation with instructions for completion: the Program of Graduate Work/Admission to Candidacy, Application for Graduation, Permanent Alumni Record, and Cap and Gown Reservation. The semester prior to the comprehensive examination, each student must have completed and turned into the SLIS Office a "Program of Graduate Work." This form is due in the SLIS office by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday in September for those taking the exam in the spring semester, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of February for those taking it in the summer semester, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of March for those taking the exam in the fall. The pre-registration deadline is found in the class schedule booklet. Specific deadlines are posted to the student listservs.

Students will receive notification by the SLIS Office when the "Program of Graduate Work" has been filed in the SLIS Office and has been sent to the Graduate College. Final approval of eligibility to take the exam comes from the Graduate College (Authority Report Form), and students will be notified by the SLIS Office when that form has been received.

## **Schedule for the Examination**

Comprehensive examinations are administered 3 times each year, during the fall semester, the spring semester, and the summer term. The fall semester exam will be on the Friday of the eighth week of classes, the spring exam will be on the Friday of the week following spring break, and the summer exam will be on the fourth Friday of the summer term. If any of these dates are on holidays, the exam will be on the Friday of the next week. During some summer terms, the exam may be given on a day other than a Friday to allow enough time for evaluation of exam results and scheduling of oral exams before the end of the summer term. Examination dates are posted to the student listservs.

## **Structure of the Examination**

The examination is a written, four and one-half-hour exam and consists of five essay questions that are generated by the SLIS faculty each semester. Questions are not distributed prior to the time of the examination. Each student chooses three of the five questions on which to write.

## **Orientation for Students**

An orientation session for students who intend to take the examination is held near the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. The orientation session is scheduled in a no-conflict time, usually after a course delivered via instructional television to both campuses. The dates of the orientation sessions are posted on student listservs.

A [Student Guide to the Comprehensive Examination for the Master's Degree](#) is provided to each student in attendance at an orientation session. The guide contains policies and procedures for the examination and guidelines for preparing for the exam. Additional copies are available at any time to students in the SLIS Office and through the School's website (<http://www.ou.edu/cas/slis>).

## **Preparing for the Examination**

Topics for the examination will not be "course specific." Students are expected to draw from several course areas, not just the required courses, and to include knowledge gained through reading professional literature and appropriate experiences. The examination is designed to test mastery of a body of knowledge, not recall of specific factual data. Mastery of that body of knowledge should be displayed by organizing thoughts into coherent narratives.

Although items included on comprehensives are not based upon subject coverage in any one class, students preparing for the examination are strongly encouraged to review course notes, texts, and supplementary readings, particularly those from the required courses within the program. Review of the current literature in library and information studies is an important part of preparation for the comprehensive examination.

In evaluating answers, faculty readers expect clarity, specificity, and sufficient information. A passing answer should be clearly organized and should address all parts of the question. Read the questions carefully and be sure to respond to each aspect of the question.

Successful answers should demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the literature as well as the ability to synthesize knowledge. Students are expected to provide support for statements made in their answers. As appropriate for the question, they should cite relevant authorities, theories, important literature, or other supporting evidence. Even though questions may not specifically ask for citations, the evaluators expect that each point in a student's response will be appropriately supported. Any examples and/or citations included in an answer need to be an integral part of that response.

The following study tips are based on the experience of past students. In preparing for the examination, the student should:

1. Study your notes from SLIS courses. Read the notes for general concepts and an

- overview. Do not try to memorize specific facts, titles of materials, or dates. Start well enough in advance of the examination so that you can conduct the review as leisurely as possible. Avoid cramming.
2. Scan the major library and information science journals for the past several years. Read selected articles that report trends in the profession, general concepts, and the ideas of leaders in the profession. It is the student's responsibility to know the latest developments in the field.
  3. If you find discussion with other students helpful, form or join a comps study group. Students may post notices about forming such SLIS student listservs.
  4. Brush up on how to outline, present, and write essays.
  5. Try "test runs" of writing responses to hypothetical questions.
  6. Get a good night's sleep before the examination day.
  7. Try to be as relaxed as possible, under the circumstances.

### **Administration of the Examination**

The Coordinator for Admissions/Academic and Student Support Services oversees the administration of the examination. Monitors are present at each site. On the date of the exam, students report to the designated rooms by 8:15 a.m. to sign in for the exam. Details such as room numbers for the exam will be provided in a letter from the Coordinator one to two weeks before the date of the exam.

Students write their responses on computers (handwritten exams will be allowed only in special accommodation situations). Each student is assigned a number when he/she signs in, which is used as their identification. Each response is a separate document, and will include a cover sheet with your identification number, the number of the question to which you are responding, and the page number (cover page is page one). You will save your responses to a disk or other removable medium, which will be provided to you. You will remain at the exam site until your responses are printed. Blue books will be available to use to write your responses in the event of a technical failure. Books, notes, or other informational sources are not to be used in writing the examination. However, dictionaries may be used for spelling and word usage, and will be provided at each site. Students may take brief breaks (no more than five minutes) from the examination room for refreshments or other reasons during the examination period. No more than one student may be out of the exam room at a time.

### **Writing the Examination**

As you write the exam, keep a few guidelines in mind:

First, read through the selection of questions given you and decide which can best be answered from your experience and knowledge.

Plan your time. Determine how long you should spend on each question.

When you have selected a question, make an outline of the main points you wish to make. Your outline will be written on the pages following your cover sheet. Hint: You may write your outline as a separate document (window). This would enable you to minimize the window containing the document, and allow you to refer to it as needed. After completing your written response, you can cut and paste the outline into the response document (following the cover page).

Start with your most important point. State the point, then explain or elaborate on it in several paragraphs. Go to the other points on your outline and do the same thing.

End with a brief summary or the conclusion you have reached regarding your topic.

Re-read the question. Then re-read your answer for clarity and completeness. Be sure you have answered the questions that was asked and responded to all parts of the question.

### **Evaluation of Examinations**

Grading teams for each question are determined before the exam is administered. The grading teams for each question are comprised of three faculty members who have expertise in the areas addressed by the question and who are available for reading the question. The examinations are sorted by question by the Coordinator of Admissions/Academic and Student Support Services and the grading teams are notified that the exams are available for evaluation. Using the registration sheet and the information on the cover pages of the responses to the questions, the Coordinator devises a master list of the students' identities and keeps this list confidential until after the exams have been evaluated. No faculty member knows the identity of any examinee until after all results are in and posted. Individual results are discussed only with the student involved and with the appropriate authorities who track student academic progress, e.g., the Graduate College. The members of the School's Graduate Studies Committee provide general oversight of the examination and sign each student's comprehensive examination report form (the official notification to the Graduate College).

All responses to each question are read by all three members of the grading team for that question. Each reader assigns a grade of either Pass or Fail to the responses for which she/he has responsibility. At least two members of the grading committee must assess each response as passing in order for the student to pass that question. Responses to individual questions judged as not passing by two of the three members of the grading team are marked as not passing. The faculty readers will submit their results to the Coordinator, who will compile the information and report the result to the Director.

There are three possible outcomes when the student takes the written portion of the comprehensive examination for the first time:

- \* All three written answers are assessed as passing.
- \* Two or more written answers are assessed as not passing
- \* One of the three written answers is assessed as not passing.

Students receiving grades of Pass on all three of their written questions pass the examination.

If two or more written responses are assessed as not passing on the first attempt, the student must re-write the entire exam at a subsequent administration of the Comprehensive Examination within one calendar year.

If only one written response is assessed as not passing on the first attempt, the student will be informed as to which question was not passed and provided with a copy of his or her written answer. The student will be given two options: (1) taking an oral follow-up component on that question during the same semester or (2) rewriting one question during a subsequent administration of the comprehensive examination within one calendar year. Should the student choose option (2), a Report of Failure on the comprehensive examination will be reported to the Graduate College. The oral follow-up component is considered to be part of the first administration of the comprehensive examination. Therefore, if a student selects that option, no remarks regarding the student's response are provided prior to the oral. The oral examination will be conducted by a group of 3 faculty, which may include, but is not limited to, faculty who evaluated the written question (at least two members of the reading team should be present for oral exams, but a different faculty member may participate if the third reader cannot attend). The oral exam will not be restricted to the precise question that was asked in the written portion of the examination, but may be expanded to include the area or concepts represented in that question as well as any other areas covered in the examination, if such expansion is deemed warranted by the examining group of faculty. The date, time, and procedure for the oral examination will be specified in a letter from the SLIS Coordinator for Admissions/Academic and Student Support Services prior to the exam. Generally, the examination will be held within two weeks of notification of results, at the SLIS Office in Norman, and will begin with the student being given the opportunity to summarize and amend his or her written response. The student's performance on the oral portion of the comprehensive examination will result in her or his answer being re-evaluated and assessed as either passing or not passing. Notification of results of the oral examination will be provided by letter within a week from the date of this portion of the exam and the results will be reported to the Graduate College.

A student who does not pass the oral portion of the examination during her or his first comprehensive examination will be required to rewrite one question during a subsequent administration of the comprehensive examination within one calendar year.

## **Repeating the Examination**

A student who does not pass the comprehensive examination on the first attempt may take it again during a subsequent administration within one calendar year. Graduate College regulations require that any student taking all or part of the comprehensive examination for a second time must be enrolled in at least 2 graduate hours at the time of the second examination. This constitutes the second attempt, and the exam may not be taken for a third time.

On the second administration of the comprehensive examination, a student rewriting only one question will be given two questions covering the same general areas covered by the question that was not passed on the first attempt. The student will choose one of these two questions to answer on the second attempt. If the student receives a Pass on this second written attempt, the student has passed the Comprehensive Examination.

If a student rewriting all or part of the comprehensive examination has any written responses that are assessed as not passing on the second attempt, the student will be offered the option of taking an oral follow-up component. This oral component is considered to be part of the second administration of the examination and must be taken during the same semester as the written component. The oral examination will be conducted by a group of 3 faculty, which may include, but is not limited to, faculty who evaluated the written question (at least two members of the grading committee should be present for the oral exam). The oral exam will not be restricted to the precise question that was asked in the written portion of the examination, but may be expanded to include the area or concepts represented in that question as well as any other areas covered in the examination, if such expansion is deemed warranted by the examining group of faculty. The date, time, and procedure for the oral examination will be communicated by the SLIS Coordinator for Admissions/Academic and Student Support Services prior to the exam. Generally, the examination will be held within two weeks of notification of results of the written attempt, at the SLIS Office in Norman (if all participants are in Norman) or via videoconference (if participants are in Norman and Tulsa), and will begin with the student being given the opportunity to summarize and amend his or her written response. The student's performance on the oral portion of the comprehensive examination will result in her or his answer being re-evaluated and assessed as either passing or not passing. Notification of results of the oral examination will be provided by e-mail within a day of this portion of the exam.

If a student does not retake the comprehensive exam within one calendar year or if any portion of the exam is assessed as failing on the second attempt, the exam may not be taken again.

## **Dissemination of Examination Results**

The Coordinator of Admissions/Academic and Student Support Services compiles the results of the written portion of the examination and notifies the Director of the School of Library and Information Studies of those results. All students will receive an e-mail from the Coordinator informing them of the results of their exams by 5:00 p.m. on the second Friday after the exam (this may vary during summer semesters). Students who receive the option of taking an oral exam (failure on one question) will also be contacted by phone. Because the oral is considered to be part of the same examination as the written component, no commentary on the written answer is provided to the student until after the oral component has been taken or waived. Every attempt will be made to complete all oral exams no later

than Wednesday or Thursday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> week following the comprehensive examination. An e-mail announcing the results of the oral exams will be sent to the students taking oral exams as soon as those results are known. Letters notifying all students of the final results of the exam should be mailed before the end of the semester in which the exam is taken.

Examination results are certified by the School's Graduate Studies Committee. The Director notifies the Graduate College of the results of the examination. After the students who have taken the exam have been notified of their results, a summary of the results of the examination will be posted to the student listservs.

When all components of the comprehensive exam have been completed and a student's response has been judged unacceptable, the readers for the question, will provide a written explanation of why the student's answer was deemed unacceptable. That written explanation is given to the SLIS Coordinator for Admissions/Academic and Student Support Services, and these remarks are mailed to the student. If more than one of the student's responses are considered unacceptable, the letter will include comments on all unacceptable answers. The letter is signed by the SLIS Director, and copies are placed in the student's file and sent to his/her advisor so that the advisor will be prepared to respond to questions that may be directed to him or her. When a student's response has been judged unacceptable, the student will also receive notification from the Graduate College.

### **Academic Appeals Procedures**

"A Graduate College Academic Appeals Board will be appointed and given authority to hear all appeals involving qualifying examinations, comprehensive examinations, general examinations, theses and dissertations, and other appropriate matters as determined by the Graduate Dean. Such an appeal must be filed in writing and given to the Graduate Dean as soon as possible" (<http://gradweb.ou.edu/docs/information/gcbulletin/StandardsAppeals.htm>). Complete information about Graduate College academic appeals, including time limits, may be obtained from the [Graduate College Academic Appeals Guidelines](http://catalog.ou.edu/current/Graduate_College_Standards.htm) ([http://catalog.ou.edu/current/Graduate\\_College\\_Standards.htm](http://catalog.ou.edu/current/Graduate_College_Standards.htm)) and the Student Code (Academic Appeals Policy).

### **Reasonable Accommodations**

The University of Oklahoma is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all students with disabilities. Any student who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities on the comprehensive examination should contact the OU Disability Resource Center to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate educational opportunities. The OU Disability Resource Center accepts requests from students for reasonable accommodation after the student has self-identified as an individual with a disability and has provided the appropriate documentation that substantiates both the disability and the request for accommodation. Accommodations are not retroactive and begin only after documentation is received and a reasonable time for accommodation development has been allowed. The OU Disability Resource Center on the Norman campus is located in Goddard Health Center, Suite 166, phone (405)325-3852 or TDD only (405)325-4173. On the OU-Tulsa campus, students should contact the OU-Tulsa Student Affairs located in Room 1C 53 (phone 918 660-3107).

### **Checklist of Activities for**

## The SLIS Comprehensive Examination

1. A calendar of all comprehensive examination dates and related deadlines for an academic year is posted and otherwise publicized before September 15th of each year.
2. An official notice of the examination is posted on the student listservs by September 15 for the fall Semester, by February 1 for the spring Semester, and by June 15 for the summer session (if the exam is administered during the summer term).
3. If you plan to take the examination:
  - a. Check your program plan and with your adviser to make certain you are eligible to take the exam.
  - b. Request a Comps Packet from the SLIS Office. Read the directions for completing the forms in the packet, noting appropriate fees and due dates. Packets should be requested at the beginning of the spring semester if you plan to take the exam during the summer or fall semesters and at the beginning of the fall semester if you plan to take the exam during the spring semester. **The Program of Graduate Work will be due in the SLIS Office by the third Friday of September if you plan to take the exam during the spring semester, by the third Friday of February if you plan to take the exam during the summer semester, and by the third Friday of March if you plan to take the exam during the fall semester.** Specific dates will be posted. Students applying to take the exam in the spring semester will need to request the packet no later than the beginning of that semester.
  - c. File the "Application for Graduation" with the Office of Academic Records and the "Program of Graduate Work/Admission to Candidacy" with the SLIS Office. Note dates on the forms.
  - d. Report to the designated place by 8:15 a.m. on the date of the exam. The exam will be from 8:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.
  - e. Take the examination.
4. Before the end of the semester in which you take the exam, you will be notified of the results by letter from the Director of the School of Library and Information Studies.