UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
DATA-GATHERING FOR PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT

Spring 2010

Were the comprehensive exam questions representative of the content included in the learning experiences undertaken during your master’s program (not necessarily in any specific class)?

Yes = 7

No = 1

I was under the understanding that the questions would be based on our four core classes. I initially felt they were representative of the classes, but did not feel that way after receiving results and going through the defense process. It seems that the panels were looking for specific content that those of us not taking those particular classes would not know information about at extent.

I felt like we had at least touched on most of the concepts that were available to answer. After studying so hard, I don’t necessarily remember what was from class and what was from studying.

Yes, I thought they were fine questions—nothing was a surprise (something I had never heard of) and I felt the questions addressed important aspects of the field.

Very much so. I thought all of the questions were well-written, open-ended, and offered ample opportunity to pull knowledge not only from core courses, but also more specialized ones.

I am a KM student. I loved the questions. They were very current and well-thought out. The courses I’ve taken, however, provided only indirect information that was needed to respond. I believe the courses should be tailored more toward the content represented in the comp questions.

Was the wording of each of the exam questions easy for you to understand?

Yes = 8 (* see below) (** see below)

No = 1

The questions were worded the way I expected they would be. I knew going in that I would need to pick the questions apart and really figure out what was being asked. Does that mean I thought they were worded well? No, not all of them, and again, to piggyback on what I stated above…it seems what was being asked and what was expected in an answer were not parallel to one another.

Yes, no problem understanding the wording.

*I felt that one question was not clear as to what the precise question was. It seemed vaguer than the other questions as to what exactly it wanted. The other questions were clear.

**I thought so, but faculty may have different expectations of the question based on their own understanding of it.
Did you attend a comprehensive orientation session? Yes = 7;  No = 2

If your answer is yes, did the session appropriately represent the faculty expectations of student responses on the comprehensive exam questions?

Yes, I took part in an oral defense (and passed). No, I do not feel like the faculty expectations represented the same expectations for the original written question. In studying for my oral defense, I consulted past class notes, professional journals, and other students. I felt like I adequately addressed every element of the question in my interview, but the questions asked were extremely specific (specific types of digitization for my target library – a school library). This was not a part of the original question, and while I came up with an example, it took some thought and I considered my example to be weak because it was not something I was prepared for. The question in no way addressed specific example of digitization, and after my defense, consulting students who answered the question correctly on the written portion, they did not include specific examples of digitization in libraries. They answered the question as it related to the strategic planning model, which is also how I understood the questions and how I prepared for the oral defense. Is it possible for a student to immediately pass the defense in the first portion, where they reflect on their previous and inform the panel of any strengths, weaknesses and changes they would make? Or is the panel given specific instructions to make the defense last a certain amount of time? That’s what it felt like.

No, I did not. I had schedule conflicts every time one was offered, but many of my classmates went and let me know what it was about. *I didn’t know I should have gone to the session at the beginning of the program.

I attended one session that described the three end options. The session appropriately represented expectations but it would have been nice to have the process explained a little more.

Yes, (at the beginning of the program) and yes it did.

Yes, between the end-of-program assessment orientation and the comps handbook, expectations were clear.

Yes, I felt the session was very useful and prepared me adequately for what to expect as a test-taker, and I had a better understanding of what the faculty would be looking for in a “correct” response.

Yes, I attended. I took a few notes but found that the meeting over-stressed the need for review. My perspective is that the four years of classes and a short review of the general content was all that I needed. I don’t just attend classes and forget the content. I live this content.

Do you have suggestions that could help SLIS improve the comprehensive exam process for students?

I did not appreciate that 2/3 (and I know in some other cases 100%) of my defense panel was in Norman while I was in Tulsa. Video-Teleconferencing is not personal and can leave users on both ends unable to read body language and tone in a person’s voice. This is such a major milestone in the program, and the ultimate requirement for graduation, I would have appreciated the courtesy of having most of my panel in my immediate presence. I have been griping for two years that the degree catalog states that this degree is offered in Tulsa; it’s not. Distance education is offered in Tulsa, and the absence of real people in my oral defense ignited my fury even more and proves that the college needs to change the wording of its catalog to let new students know that Tulsa has very little face-to-face interaction with professors and peers.

There did seem to be a high proportion of questions related to web 2.0 and social networking themes. If you could answer one of them, you could answer them all. Questions could benefit from a broader range of topics.

I headed up a large study group on my own that by word of mouth attracted more people. If there were some way for us to know who else is taking comps, we could help and support each other better. I had a few people tell me they had no idea we had a Google group and a study group meeting regularly to share stuff. Word of mouth can only go so far.
Not really.

Not really. If you go to class, do the homework and read the assigned readings, and study for a month before the exam, the student should do fine.

Spell out in the initial test instructions how to format the title page/page layout and what file naming convention to use. Time was used trying to determine the proper way to format the title page and how/if to do headers/footers/page numbers. Also, after we got our answers printed out, Maggie had to spend additional time renaming our files. Use flash drives rather than floppy disks. Floppies take forever to save, creating anxiety in waiting for them during the test and prolonging the printing/saving process after the test.

I really can’t think of anything I’d change. I think OU SLIS does a great job of preparing its students to do well on the exam, not only via coursework but also with opportunities like the comps orientation and the willingness of professors (particularly Drs. Van Fleet and Martens, in my own experience) to offer advice and the occasional hint. Comps are an inherently stressful event, but in my experience OU SLIS made efforts to minimize that stress in terms of encouraging group study sessions and camaraderie among test takers, and allowing refreshments, etc. in the exam room the day of the test.

Dispel the fear factor – it is anti-productive

Distinguish a curriculum for KM students that recognizes the fundamentally different needs of KM from LIS.