UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
DATA-GATHERING FOR PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT

Spring 2011

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-3

The questions were indicative of what we should have at least heard about in class and what we should have read about in our own research about the field of library science. It would be nice if there were an entire class on DRM and copyright.

I think that the questions did represent content that I learned in many of the classes which I took during my master’s program. I think that my experiences outside of the classroom were helpful in answering the questions as well. But there were several concepts that were first articulated to me in the classroom which were helpful in answering the questions.

While some of the general course concepts were represented in the exam questions, I think the questions asked about far too specific information. The only way one can really answer such specific questions successfully is to stay on top of news and current events in LIS. While this is a good thing to do anyways, it is definitely NOT something that is emphasized in our LIS classes. At all. Course assignments in most LIS classes seem outdated and stale, as if they were developed years ago. Very few assignments are responding to current, real-world trends and phenomenon in the LIS world. This isn’t doing us, future information professionals, any favors.

Yes, all questions applied to the degree program and were answerable based on information covered in course work & assigned readings.

Yes, the questions were representative of the content of the courses I took in the program. I felt that the questions were fair and did a good job of making me pull material from different classes. I believe I could have provided answers for all of the questions.

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

Yes-4

Questions 1, 3, and 5 were easy to understand. Questions 2 and 4 seemed misleading.

I thought the wording of the questions were easy to understand.

Yes. They were clearly written and this is how it should be. The aim shouldn’t be to trick or confuse students taking the exam.
Yes, the wording was clear for all of the questions. I appreciated this a great deal as I was very nervous and would have had trouble focusing on elaborately worded questions.

**Did you attend a comprehensive orientation session?**

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

No-4

Unfortunately, I did not attend a comprehensive orientation session other than the brief session during the original orientation to the program. The online videos about the program options (which were added this year) were a nice refresher.

I did not attend a comprehensive orientation session; the times did not work with my work schedule.

No. I never saw that a formal orientation session was offered for comps, and I looked for one (under advisement from the Dean). I saw comps study session notices sponsored by students that were sent via OU email. Were these considered orientation sessions?

No, I did not attend a comprehensive orientation session. I did not realize the orientation session was part of the general orientation event that was advertised as being of special interest to new students. I was disappointed when I realized I had missed it. I did view the comps video though and felt that it appropriately prepared me for the exam. I was surprised the video was not promoted more heavily within the department.

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

I think it would be helpful for the professors developing the questions to give the students a general idea of what the questions will focus on so they will have a better idea of what portion of their notes and reading from previous classes they should study more intensely. As it was, I felt like 85% of what I studied was not helpful to me based on the questions that were chosen this semester (and I studied a lot, about 20 hrs a week for the four weeks leading up to the test). That being said, I passed comps just fine, and I felt like I had enough knowledge from simply participating in my classes and completing my assignments to answer all the questions fully. I was just a little frustrated that I spent so much time studying on things that really did not aid me on the test. If there was some way to reduce the hype of the difficulty of the test, then I think that would help the students feel less anxious about it, but I realize that is practically beyond your control to do. I will just say that I was fairly anxious about the test, but once I say the questions, I thought “This is it?” Being on this side of the exam, I can say that it was relatively easy. The anticipation of the unknown was the most difficult part. So if there were some way to reassure students that as long as they have understood what they were supposed to take away from their classes they will do fine on the exam, then I think that will improve the process leading up to the exam for students. I do not know if that is helpful at all, but I hope so.

Please let students know more about how the oral exam process works, whether in orientation or in an online video. This will help keep students from feeling so anxious about the oral exam process.

I think that sending out the old exam questions was quite helpful in studying for the exam, one thing that I would have liked to see (and I’m not sure that it’s possible) would be an example of an answer that passed and one that had to be defended, I stressed over how much detail the professors were looking for vs. the time we had to complete the three answers so seeing an example would have helped me to manage that stress.
More current events/trends information should be incorporated into every LIS class, if this is going to remain the focus of the comp exam. It was a nice surprise to find beverages and snacks available in the exam room, keep this up!

The comps process is unnecessarily complicated and produces pointless levels of anxiety in students. Standards to which students are expected to adhere are not revealed – quantity of pages produced, for example. One of my problems with comps is that I am a slow typist. Because I average 30 wpm, it would take me approximately 6.75 hours to produce 9 pages of text (3 pages per 3 responses). Having to think slows my typing even more. If quality answers are desired by the staff comps review committees, then the exam should not be timed. As for oral defenses, students could be immediately notified of the results by the review committee itself. Once a student completes his defense, he can be asked to leave the room while the committee commiserates and makes a decision. The student can then be invited to return to the room for oral results from the review committee. This would also give the student an opportunity to ask the review committee any questions that may have come up after having completed the defense. For example, “Why did you rate this as a failing answer?” I suggest this because email notifications from Maggie seem to come pretty quickly (within 10 minutes) after a student leaves his oral defense.

If OU SLIS continues its current comps process, then timed exams should be incorporated into course work. The current comps process automatically fails good students who cannot “perform” on at least 2 of 3 questions on a timed exam. Also, any student failing written comps should have the chance to orally defend. The school may decide that this opportunity would be based on course work grades. My final suggestion is to drop comps from the end-course evaluation repertoire. It does not reflect how OU SLIS students are currently evaluated in their coursework. If students must have an “exam” option that complements thesis and portfolio options, then it should be a take-home exam that requires research and references.

I suggest being clearer about the nature of the orientation event and specifically stating that it is the only comps orientation. I appreciated the water provided in the computer lab during the exam! I’m not sure if it’s possible, but it would have been helpful when studying to see an example of at least one passing answer along with the previously answered questions. Having the questions is very helpful, but seeing an example of a good answer would be nice too. The exam handbook was very helpful also.

Keep teaching the courses the same way

I think the best thing students can do to prepare is to pay close attention to the Comprehensive Exam Handbook, especially the writing tips. I also found the video posted to the SLIS Vimeo site very helpful (incidentally Dr. Taylor is introduced as “SLIS Associate Producer” in this video, should this say “Professor?”)