Proposed Changes to the Graduate Catalog Examination Policy

In some graduate programs, there is confusion as to how preliminary exams differ from comprehensive exams and oral preliminary exams, and whether or not comprehensive exams must have both written and oral components. The purpose of this proposed revision is to clear up sources of confusion in the language, by clearly defining three distinct types of examinations:

1. Comprehensives, which focus on the student’s knowledge of the overall field, and which may be written and/or oral;
2. Oral preliminary examination, which focuses on a student’s knowledge of his/her specific area, as well as the dissertation proposal defense;
3. Oral final examination, which is a public dissertation defense.

This is a preliminary draft – I would welcome suggestions to make certain that this is flexible enough to allow for disciplinary differences.

Preliminary Examination

The student working toward a doctoral degree must pass a comprehensive preliminary examination. The purpose of this exam is to determine the student’s understanding of his or her major and minor fields and also to assess the student’s capability for research. Students must enroll for a minimum of 3 credits during terms in which they undertake departmental written or oral preliminary examinations.

Graduate Examination Policies

Students must enroll for a minimum of 3 credits during terms in which they undertake graduate examinations.

Written Comprehensive Examination

The student working toward a doctoral degree must pass a comprehensive preliminary examination (written and/or oral). Most programs require a written comprehensive examination to be taken before the oral preliminary examination. The purpose of this exam is to determine the student’s understanding of his or her major and minor fields and also to assess the student’s capability for research. If a written examination is required, it must be completed prior to the oral preliminary examination. The content, length, timing, passing standard, and repeatability of this examination are at the discretion of the major department. The general rules and structure of this examination, however, must be provided in writing to all candidates for this examination and a current copy of these guidelines must be on file with the Graduate School. Copies of the written examination
(questions and student’s answers) must be available to all members of the student’s doctoral committee at least one week prior to the oral preliminary examination.

**Oral Preliminary Examination**

The oral examination is taken near the completion of the student’s course work. The oral examination is conducted by the student’s doctoral committee, and should cover the student’s knowledge in his or her major and minor subjects, specialty area(s). The exam may cover the student’s proposed research topic, although no more than one-half the time should be devoted to specific aspects of the proposal. The examination should be scheduled for at least two hours, and the exam date must be scheduled in the Graduate School at least one week in advance. If more than one negative vote is recorded by the examining committee, the candidate will have failed the oral examination. No more than two re-examinations are permitted by the Graduate School, although academic units may allow fewer re-examinations.

**Final Oral Examination**

Students will present their dissertations in a public oral examination. Note that the meeting may be closed to the public when the committee questions the student and deliberates on whether s/he has passed the examination. At least one complete academic term must elapse between the time of the preliminary oral examination and the final oral examination. If more than five years elapse between these two examinations, the candidate will be required to take another preliminary oral examination.