**PROCEDURES IN AMERICAN STUDIES COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS**

**Revised 2017, reviewed 2021**

The Department of American Studies depends greatly on the good will and expertise of its cooperating faculty from other departments and programs of the university. Effective training of our doctoral students could not occur without this intellectual generosity from colleagues.

We want to spell out here the Department’s assumptions about and procedures in our exams. If any feature of your role in the exam remains unclear, please feel free to consult the Director of Graduate Studies in American Studies for clarification or amplification.

American Studies written exams consist of three parts, an exam in each of the two interdisciplinary fields a doctoral student develops and an exam on the student’s approach to American studies (methods and models), including the student’s position and critical engagement with models of American Studies scholarship. These written exams are followed by a two-hour oral exam, conducted by all five members of the student’s comps committee. These exams take place when a student has completed ca. 50-55 s.h., during the third or fourth year of full-time residence.

One or both of the interdisciplinary fields may be examined by cooperating faculty from other units. Each field is *sui generis*, constructed by the student to address his or her particular interests and vetted by the core faculty at the time of admission to candidacy, at which time the American Studies faculty may suggest emendation, substitution, or enlargement. Each field requires completion of at least six courses that relate to its general rubric; we also require that each field include course work from more than one department or program. The rubrics for such fields are intentionally broad, to reflect the interdisciplinary and synthesizing impulse of American Studies, e.g., “American cultural history, 1890-1940,” “Music, Culture and Identity in 20th Century America,” “The American Built Environment: Vernacular Architecture, Landscape, and History.”

Because these are interdisciplinary areas, not all examiners will feel comfortable being responsible for the scope of an entire *sui generis* field. Thus, we encourage our students and their examiners to negotiate a reading list for the written examination that centers on a relevant but delimited body of material in the field, one somewhat less extensive than the scope of the field as a whole and which reflects the examiner’s field of expertise. Since fields vary so greatly and incorporate such disparate kinds of materials, it is difficult to be definitive about how great such a delimitation ought to be, or even about how many books and articles ought to constitute a reading list**. The Department of American Studies recommends a bibliography of approximately 30 books.** An examiner, however, ought to expect the same level of effort, in terms of mastery of materials, which the examiner would require of a doctoral student in his or her home department.

Each area examination will be a take-home examination, to be completed in a defined length of time not longer than one week.

The examiner in a field who writes the question(s) for the comps takes the lead in the part of the oral exam given over to the field; about 40 minutes is devoted to each of the three parts of the entire written comprehensive exam. The two members of the exam committee who are not responsible for a discrete section are selected because their expertises abut or overlap the expertise of the other three members of the committee, and we encourage these two examiners to enlarge the discussion in the oral to include the full dimensions of the field.

All of the written parts of the comprehensive exam are copied in the American Studies office and provided to the five examiners at least 10 days in advance of the oral exam. The examining committee makes a judgment about the quality of the entire exam, written and oral, rather than a single part of it.