Student Guide to the

Comprehensive Examination

for the Master's Degree

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University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma
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Introduction

The School of Library and Information Studies seeks to provide professional education for persons preparing for a career in the information professions, 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.

Importantly, the University of Oklahoma requires an end-of-program assessment (for SLIS students, the three end-of-program assessment options are a thesis, comprehensive examination, or portfolio) for completion of a graduate degree. Therefore, successful completion of one of these three options is required of all persons who graduate with a master’s degree from OU SLIS. This student guide applies specifically to the comprehensive examination.

Purpose and Philosophy of
The Comprehensive Examination

The objectives of the comprehensive examination are 1) to test students’ abilities to extract and synthesize knowledge covered in the core courses, 2) to test the ability to apply knowledge to solve problems, and 3) to test the ability to establish and defend positions on current issues, trends, and problems in information and library studies.

The comprehensive examination requires each student candidate, who chooses this non-thesis end-of-program assessment, to write a research paper as a response to the examination’s single question. 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. Further, students are expected to seek, organize, evaluate, apply information to problem solving, and to communicate a synthesized understanding of a solution that meets professional needs and expectations.

Development of the Examination

SLIS faculty members generate a new question each semester. Topics for the examination are not "course specific" but allow the student an opportunity to integrate content from the core courses and additional appropriate learning experiences. The question focuses on six identified areas that all students are expected to master. These are the:

- Philosophical and theoretical foundations of our field
- Organization and control of information resources
- Provision and analysis of user services
- Management of information agencies
- Acquisition of and access to information
- Application of research or evaluation methods within our field.

The successful student will be able to synthesize knowledge across these areas.
Eligibility for Examination

The single question examination should be taken in the last semester of the student's program unless the student is graduating in the summer. If a student plans to complete coursework for the degree in a summer term, the student may take the exam in the preceding spring semester or wait until the following fall semester. A student must be enrolled in at least two hours of graduate work during the semester that the comprehensive examination is taken and be admitted to candidacy for the master's degree (see "Program of Graduate Work" in next section: Registration for the Comprehensive Examination). A student must have completed 75% of the courses on the submitted program plan, including all of the required courses. Incomplete (I) grades from previous semesters must be removed within two 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 six months of the end of the semester or the comprehensive exam will have to be retaken. The comprehensive exam may be retaken only once. Students who fail to pass the comprehensive examination in two attempts will not receive the degree.

Registration for the Comprehensive Examination

Admission to Candidacy/Program of Graduate Work (required): Students will be notified on the student listserv and through the student digest to access and complete the Program of Graduate Work/Admission to Candidacy form near the beginning of the semester BEFORE they plan to take the comprehensive examination (fall or spring). Students planning to take the exam in a spring semester should complete the Program of Graduate Work/Admission to Candidacy form early in the previous fall semester. Students planning to take the exam in a fall semester should complete the Program of Graduate Work/Admission to Candidacy form early in the previous spring semester. Generally, the form will be due in the SLIS office by the third Friday in September for those taking the exam in the spring semester, and the third Friday of March for those taking the exam in the fall. Students will be informed of specific deadlines. The form is in PDF format and you must complete the form, print it, sign it, and submit it to the SLIS office prior to the stated deadline. The exam is not offered in summer terms. Students planning a summer graduation should take the exam in the spring semester prior to the planned summer graduation.

Application for Graduation (required): Students will be notified on the student listserv and through the student digest to complete and submit an application for graduation in the semester in which they complete all degree requirements. This is usually the semester in which the exam is taken, but it could be a subsequent semester if the student is completing coursework after the exam is completed. Students will be given information on how to obtain the form and how it should be submitted in Norman or Tulsa.

Permanent Alumni Record: Students may submit a permanent alumni record form with the application for graduation (see above).

Cap and Gown Reservation (optional): Norman students can purchase caps and gowns through the University Bookstore on the Norman campus. The phone number is 405-325-3511. Tulsa students will obtain caps and gowns through the OU-Tulsa office of Student Affairs. That phone number is 918-660-3105.
Schedule for the Examination

The comprehensive examination is administered two times each year, once during the fall semester and once during the spring semester. During the fall semester, the administration of the exam will begin at 12:00 noon (CST) on Thursday of the eighth week of classes and end at 9:00 AM (CST) on the following Monday; the spring administration of the exam will begin at 12:00 noon (CST) on Thursday of the week immediately after spring break and end at 9:00 AM (CST) on the following Monday. If any of these dates are on holidays, the exam will begin on Thursday of the next week. The examination will begin with its distribution to students through D2L. Answers to the exam must be submitted through the D2L dropbox by 9:00 AM (CST) the following Monday. The comprehensive examination dates are posted to the student listservs. A paper that is submitted late will be counted as a failed first attempt. An examination that is not submitted at all will be counted as a failed attempt. Students may make two attempts at passing the exam. If the exam is not passed on a 2nd attempt, the student will not receive the degree.

Structure of the Examination

A single question examination is developed for each spring administration and each fall administration of the comprehensive examination. The examination is a written, take-home endeavor which the student is to access through D2L on a Thursday at 12:00 noon (CST) and return to the D2L dropbox the following Monday by 9 AM (CST). Each student will receive and answer one question, which is based on a broad topic. All students receive the same question. The question may provide an expected framework or allow the framework to flow from the student’s problem solving. Questions are not distributed prior to the time of the examination.

Orientation for Students

Optional live and/or video orientation sessions will be available. FAQs about the examination and this guide are provided on the SLIS Web site.

Preparing for the Examination

If a student is participating in the comprehensive examination process, the Graduate College requires that the student be enrolled in at least two hours of graduate credit.

Although the comprehensive examination question is not based upon subject coverage in any one class, students preparing for the examination are strongly encouraged to review course objectives, course notes, texts, and supplementary readings, particularly those from the required courses within the program. Students should not try to memorize specific facts, titles of materials, or dates; however, they should:

• Consult the School’s published learner outcome educational goals and objectives.
• Review of the current journal literature in library and information studies, scan major LIS journals for the past two or three years, and read selected articles that report trends in the profession, general concepts, and the ideas of leaders in the profession.
• Possess competency in the use of the OU Bizzell Memorial Library information resources (http://libraries.ou.edu) or the OU Tulsa Library information resources (http://library.tulsa.ou.edu).
• Keep schedules open in order to focus on the exam.
• Read the examination question carefully, being certain to respond to all of its aspects.
• Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the literature as well as abilities to synthesize knowledge and to conduct research that solves information problems.
• Provide references, based on the *Chicago Manual of Style* (16th ed.; available as an e-resource through OU Libraries), in support of statements, evidence, and positions taken.
• Review outlining and writing essays.

The comprehensive examination must be a product of individual endeavor. Therefore, upon submission of the completed examination, students will be accepting the following statement:

> This paper represents my own academic work. I have applied my own knowledge, research skills, and endeavors to this new and original work, without discussing or sharing questions or responses. I have not consulted the OU Writing Center during the administration of this examination. I understand that noncompliance with the process may result in failure of the examination. I have utilized the spelling and grammar check functions of my word processing software and *The Chicago Style Manual*, 16th edition.

Students who disregard the University of Oklahoma’s policies on academic integrity risk failure of the examination.

**Writing the Examination**

At noon on Thursday of the week of the exam, each student will receive (through D2L) a broad-based comprehensive examination question. The question will address an aspect of problem solving within the information professions. Students have the opportunity to conduct an information search and literature review. The results of that search, the student’s expertise, and the student’s knowledge of a specific area of interest should inform the answer to the question.

Students, if they have not yet done so, should analyze carefully the School’s stated objectives for the comprehensive examination, which are to:

1. Give students an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organize and synthesize knowledge developed throughout the program
2. Test knowledge in specific subject areas
3. Test ability to solve problems
4. Test the ability to establish and defend positions on current issues, trends, and problems in information and library studies.

A successful student will demonstrate mastery of these objectives.

The question to be answered will focus “upon six identified areas that all students are expected to master”:

• Philosophical and theoretical foundations of our field
• Organization and control of information resources
• Provision and analysis of user services
• Management of information agencies
• Acquisition of and access to information
• Application of research or evaluation methods within our field.
A successful student will be able to demonstrate the synthesis of knowledge in these areas.

Specific instructions are:

1. Students may access the examination question by 12:00 noon (CST) on the Thursday during the week that the exam is offered.
2. Students should regard carefully the University of Oklahoma’s policies on academic integrity or risk failure of the examination.
3. Students will follow instructions regarding identification.
4. The paper will have a minimum number of 2,000 and a maximum of 3,000 words (not including the title page, references, and appendices).
5. The paper will be double-spaced in Times New Roman (12-point font) and word-processed.
6. The paper will be appropriately documented.
7. The required style manual is the Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition; available as an online e-resource through OU Libraries), either the author-date or the notes and bibliography option.
8. The paper should be submitted as a Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf).

The completed paper must be in the D2L dropbox by 9:00 AM (CST) on the Monday following the receipt of the examination question. As previously noted, a paper that is late, or an exam that is not submitted at all, will constitute a failure on this attempt at the exam. Students may make two attempts at passing the exam. If the exam is not passed on a 2nd attempt, the student will not receive the degree.

The successful student will attend to details.

**Evaluation of Examinations**

The members of the School's Graduate Studies Committee provide general oversight of the examination, and three faculty members of the committee sign each student's comprehensive examination report form (the official notification to the Graduate College). Each student is allowed two complete attempts (not in the same semester) to pass the comprehensive exam, and each attempt is read by two faculty members, who individually determine whether the outcome of an exam is assessed as pass or fail. If the two grading faculty members do not agree on an outcome, a third faculty member will be appointed to read and assess the response. Again, each reader individually assigns a grade of either pass or fail to the exam. At least two faculty members must assess an exam as passing in order for the student to complete the exam successfully.

All examination responses will be reviewed by Turnitin (see Appendix 2 of these guidelines for an overview of Turnitin).

In evaluating a written examination, the faculty will take into consideration the quality and application of the evidence offered in support of the paper. The question to be answered will focus “upon six identified areas that all students are expected to master the”:

- Philosophical and theoretical foundations of our field
- Organization and control of information resources
- Provision and analysis of user services
- Management of information agencies
- Acquisition of and access to information
• Application of research or evaluation methods within the LIS field.

The successful student will be able to synthesize knowledge across these areas.

The faculty readers submit their results to the SLIS Coordinator for Admissions/Academic, and Student Support Services who will compile the information and report the results to the Director. 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 (e.g., the Graduate College) who track student academic progress.

Retaking the Comprehensive Examination

If a student’s outcome from the first attempt to complete the comprehensive examination is not successful, the student will have a year to retake the examination. To be successful, the student must pass a retake of the comprehensive examination within one year and during the examination’s administration during a fall or spring semester. Students who successfully complete the comprehensive examination must do so within two attempts. Students may retake the examination only one time. Students who fail to pass the comprehensive examination in two attempts will not receive the degree.

Dissemination of Examination Results

The Coordinator of Admissions/Academic, and Student Support Services compiles the results of the examination and notifies the Director of the School of Library and Information Studies of those results. Students will receive an e-mail from the Coordinator of Admissions/Academic, and Student Support Services informing them of the results of their comprehensive examinations. Letters notifying all students of the final results of the examination are to be mailed before the end of the semester in which the exam is taken.

Examination results are certified by three members of 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 individual results, summary results of the examination will be disseminated to SLIS graduate students.

When all grading is completed for an administration of a comprehensive examination and when a student's response has been judged unacceptable, the faculty readers for the question provide a written statement explaining why the student’s answer was not successful. The faculty readers give the written explanation to the SLIS Coordinator for Admissions/Academic, and Student Support Services. The faculty explanation and an accompanying letter, signed by the SLIS Director, are mailed to the student, and copies are placed in the student's file and sent to the student’s advisor so that the advisor is prepared to respond to questions that may be directed to him or her. When a student's response has been judged not passing, the student will also receive notification from the Graduate College.

Academic Appeals Procedures

According to OU Graduate College Graduate College Bulletin 2011-2012 (pages 49-50), a “Graduate College Academic Appeals Panel 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” [http://gradweb.ou.edu/Current/gcBulletin/GCBulletin.pdf]. The *Graduate College Bulletin 2011-2012* also explains (pages 49-50),

The only issues to be resolved are those of prejudiced or capricious evaluation, or alleged inability to speak the English language to the extent necessary to adequately instruct students.

Complete information about Graduate College academic appeals may be obtained from the Graduate College Academic Appeals Guidelines and the Student Code, Title 14.

**The Academic Appeal Process**

The student is responsible for notifying the instructor of any dispute that meets the above criteria. If the student’s attempts at resolution with the instructor fail, the student should immediately notify the Graduate College of the potential Academic Appeal immediately to make an appointment to discuss the matter.

**Time Limits**

§ In cases of end-of-term evaluations, a student must notify an instructor of a dispute regarding an academic evaluation and must attempt to resolve differences no later than Feb. 15 for the previous fall semester or intercession, and no later than Sept. 15 in cases of end-of-term evaluations for the previous spring semester, spring intersession or summer session.

§ In cases of an evaluation made known to a student during the term, the student must notify an instructor of a dispute regarding an academic evaluation and must attempt to resolve differences no later than 15 calendar days (excluding Saturdays, Sundays and university holidays from classes) after the results of an evaluation are made known to the student.

§ If a student fails to notify an instructor or fails to attempt resolution within the appropriate time limit, the panel shall deny any request for a hearing on the claim unless, in the view of the board, the student has been prevented from complying with the appropriate time limit (for example, a student being called into military service).

When a potential Academic Appeal is brought to the attention of the Graduate College, the following steps will be taken:

- **An attempt will be made to resolve the problem with the department.**

- If the matter is not resolved in conference, the student will be briefed on the procedures for filing an Academic Appeal.
Appeals must be filed in writing in the Graduate College office. The written appeal should state:

- the action being appealed
- the individual(s) responsible for the action under appeal
- the basis for the appeal
- the relief sought by the student

**Time Limits**

- A written appeal must be filed as soon as possible, but in no event later than 10 calendar days (excluding Saturdays, Sundays and university holidays from classes) following the day when attempts at resolution are completed.

- The board shall deny any request for hearing on a claim that does not meet this deadline unless, in the view of the board, exceptional circumstances exist whereby the student is prevented from filing a claim.

**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 at 405-325-4173. On the OU-Tulsa campus, students should contact the OU-Tulsa Student Affairs office located in Room 1C53 (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, and by February 1 for the spring semester.

3. Students who plan to take the examination should:
   a. Check their program plans and with their advisers make certain they are eligible to take the exam.
   b. Watch for information posted to the SLIS Student Digest on the SLIS website and to the SLIS student listserv on deadlines for completing the Admission to Candidacy/Program of Graduate Work in the semester prior to taking the comprehensive examination. (Please see the Registration for the Comprehensive Examination section, beginning of page 4 of this handbook.) The Admission to Candidacy/Program of Graduate Work form will be due in the SLIS Office by the third Friday of September for those planning to take the exam during the spring semester, and by the third Friday of March for those planning to take the exam during the fall semester. Specific dates will be posted to the student listserv and the student digest. Students filing forms after published deadlines will be required to provide additional information, including an explanation why the forms are being submitted after the deadline.
   c. File the "Application for Graduation" with the Office of Academic Records in Norman and the Graduate College office in Tulsa before October 1st for students planning to graduate in the fall semester and before March 1st for students planning to graduate in the spring semester.
   d. Receive a copy of the comprehensive examination from D2L at 12:00 noon on Thursday of the week of the examination.
   e. Complete the examination and return it in the assigned D2L dropbox by 9:00 AM on the following Monday.

5. Before the end of the semester in which students take the exam, they will be notified of the results by letter from the Director of the School of Library and Information Studies.
APPENDIX 1: RESOURCES ABOUT PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

This Web page on "Student Academic Integrity" provides OU's expectations of academic honesty, defines misconduct, provides examples of prohibited conduct (including plagiarism, improper collaboration, and Internet cheating), and explains sanctions for misconduct: [http://integrity.ou.edu/students_guide.html](http://integrity.ou.edu/students_guide.html)

Available on that Web site is a list of "Nine Things You Should Already Know About Plagiarism", including “Six Excuses That Don’t Work”, and “Three Things You Don’t Need to Worry About”: [http://integrity.ou.edu/files/nine_things_you_should_know.pdf](http://integrity.ou.edu/files/nine_things_you_should_know.pdf)

Also provided is an “Interactive Tutorial: Avoiding Plagiarism”: [http://libraries.ou.edu/help/tutorials/academicintegrity/player.html](http://libraries.ou.edu/help/tutorials/academicintegrity/player.html)

SOME RELEVANT SECTIONS OF CHICAGO STYLE MANUAL, 16TH EDITION:

4.77 OVERVIEW OF THE LEGAL DOCTRINE

4.79 A FEW GENERAL RULES

4.85 IMPORTANCE OF ATTRIBUTION
APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF TURNITIN

All examination responses will be reviewed by Turnitin.

Use of Turnitin allows faculty to identify plagiarism in students’ work.

The Turnitin databases contain 14 billion current and archived Web pages, 150 million student papers and millions of articles from libraries and publications.

Turnitin shows how much of the student's paper matches content from the Turnitin databases so instructors can quickly understand how much of the paper is unoriginal. While Turnitin highlights quotes as being unoriginal, its purpose is to recognize unsourced/improperly cited material (correctly referenced quotes will be highlighted as "unoriginal"). The intent is to find non-cited and poorly cited material.

Turnitin preserves the original format of the paper allowing instructors to view the student's original text, formatting, imagery and layout.

Faculty can view students’ sources. Matched sources from the paper appear in an easy-to-understand format revealing color-coded sources corresponding to non-original work.

Faculty can control what information appears in the originality report by filtering out bibliographic, quoted or small match sizes.

Information for students and instructors, including videos, is available at https://turnitin.com/static/index.php