

Area Exam and Preparation Process: Race and Ethnicity (Spring 2015)

GUIDELINES

We ask all students to do the following:

- *Speak to the committee chair well in advance of exams.*

If a student is interested in taking the race and ethnicity exam, they must speak to the committee chair early in the process to find out if they are available and whether they are teaching a course relevant to your exam. Preparation for exams should consist of a minimum of four months, not including recommended coursework.

- *Take a seminar on the topic of race and ethnicity.*

Students should have completed at least one graduate course related to sociology of race and ethnicity before beginning exam preparation (exceptions may be negotiated with the committee for students with strong prior background).

- *Carefully review and revise the reading list yourself.*

Exam preparation begins with a draft reading list, which the committee provides, including core readings, as well as possible areas of specialization. In developing their reading lists, students must be familiar with the dominant theoretical perspectives and the latest empirical research in the field. However, race is a broad subfield. All students must be familiar with the core topics. Students will also pick two areas of specialization either as suggested by the chair, or of their own design.

While students will receive a guiding list, students are expected to offer revisions, including additions and deletions to the core fields, and two areas of specialization. The student and chair will then work together to revise the list to the student's specific interests, while also addressing the major questions that motivate the subfield. The final reading list should consist of roughly 8-10 pages of readings. Modifying and developing a reading list provides important training and allows students to focus the exam on areas relevant to their own research, as well as learn to identify key readings and debates in the field. Therefore, determining the final reading list should be a student-driven process, but the student must work in close consultation with the committee, especially with the chair.

- *Organize the reading list around debates and/or substantive topics.*

Organize the readings into 10-15 analytical, substantive or chronological categories. We recommend that students do this by creating a "syllabus". While this syllabus will be far too extensive for any real course, it will force students to think about the readings thematically. This helps the committee understand why students want to read a particular item. It is also helpful to think about this process as putting together an extensive class syllabus for a graduate seminar the student might teach. Students need to show breadth ("cover the basics"), but then the student can concentrate in a particular area that is of most interest to them.

- *Write 3 memos during your reading.*

Based on the way you group your readings, and guided questions from the chair, students should write three short memos (3-4 pages, single spaced) that identify the debates in the field, discussing how they fit in the field, and offering some thoughts on where research and thinking must go. This is NOT a literature review, but a synthesis across readings (including 2 or more of your syllabus sections). Memos should not just summarize. Instead they should reflect the student's comprehension of materials (not to be taken for granted!), ability to put scholarship in conversation with one another, and ability to discuss with competence the strengths and shortcomings of different perspectives. After each section memo is completed, the chair will read it, and will discuss with the student during office hours. When memos are poor reflections of the debates, demonstrate poor comprehension of the reading, or fail to synthesize, the chair will ask students to rewrite. Upon the successful completion of all section memos, the chair will sign off on the student's preparedness to sit for the exam.

- *Possible exam questions.*

Based on your memos and our discussions, the chair may signal possible exam questions. The chair will not provide the exact exam questions in advance, but the chair may assist them in their final preparation to sit for the exam.

TIP: We highly recommend that you do your exam preparation with a few colleagues if possible. You can then debate reading lists together, and form a reading group. This helps keep you on track, and lets you bounce ideas off each other.

EXAM FORMAT

The exam will be comprised of two four-hour sessions with two different sets of questions offered in each of the sessions. The first session will focus on core topics in sociology of race, and the second on the student's selected special-interest topics. Each session requires students to answer two or three (2-3) out of two to four (2-4) possible questions. Students may be given some leeway regarding which questions to answer; however, the committee may also require students to answer certain specific questions or may require that students answer all given questions. Students may submit ideas for potential new questions if they wish, but will not be responsible for constructing their own exams.

On the day of the exam, the administrative assistant for graduate studies will communicate the chosen questions to the student at the start of the exam. Students will develop essay answers to the questions, organizing support of a central thesis through discussion and assessment of their readings. At the conclusion of the exam period, the student will communicate their essays to the administrative assistant.

EXAM SCHEDULING

Students will sit the exam at the time scheduled by the department. Typically, the preparation process should involve at least four months and preferably more, not including relevant coursework, so advance planning is required. The committee will write and offer ONLY ONE EXAM per semester. If a student fails the exam, they must wait until the next semester before they may retake this exam.

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING CITATIONS

The committee prefers that students follow ASA guidelines regarding citations: author(s) and year of publication are preferable. Students should be familiar with book names. However, the goal of this examination is not memorization. It is not necessary to provide a full bibliography.

EXAM RESULTS POLICIES REGARDING RE-WRITES

Students will be assigned one of three grades for their exam: pass with distinction, pass, or fail. If students fail the exam, they may retake the area exam (in its entirety) after meetings with committee members to discuss ways to improve, and after devoting significant time to coming to a better understanding of the area with more preparation. Students may also choose to take a different area exam. Students will not be allowed to rewrite parts of their exams in order to change a failing grade to a passing one. They will, however, be encouraged to retake the area exam the next year (or at another appropriate time).

FEEDBACK

Students will be notified of exam results by the committee chair, who will coordinate the reports of committee members. Every attempt will be made to provide results two weeks after the exam; however, this deadline may be extended if the exam date creates deadline conflicts for committee members. The committee chair will keep the student informed of when the report is expected. After the committee renders its decision, the student will be notified of the results by e-mail. The student will then schedule a meeting with the committee chair to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the student's performance. This meeting will be scheduled for all students, regardless of whether they pass or fail the exam. Other committee members may provide written feedback to each student, or they may set up a separate meeting to discuss the students' exam performance. This decision will be left at the discretion of faculty on the committee.