

Option II: The Comprehensive Exam

This manual helps students understand the process involved in taking the comprehensive exam. It outlines the steps involved in this process, from forming the Examination Committee to understanding the format and components of the exam, requesting and preparing for it, and to timely completion of their degree. It also provides valuable information on how the comprehensive exam is evaluated.

A. Creating the Examination Committee

Similar to the thesis option, the student taking the comprehensive exam should have a graduate committee of a minimum of three graduate faculty members; two-thirds of the members, including the Chair will serve as the student's advisor and must be from the English Department. The Examination Committee is the equivalent of the student's graduate committee for Option I students.

B. Exam Content and Format

The exam has three components:

1. A written classroom exam on 4 literary periods, taken over two consecutive days (three hours each)
2. a take-home specialization examination
3. an oral defense of both exams

The content of the examination is not restricted to coursework in the student's Plan of Graduate Study and students may be required to prepare in areas not covered in their courses. The student must initiate negotiation and dialog with his/her committee to determine the focus of the exam in the selected periods (Point D below). Students must initiate these discussions at least one semester before they plan to take the exam in order to prepare reading lists for both exam areas.

C. Preparing to Take the Exam

Prior to taking the comprehensive exam, students must fulfill certain course requirements:

1. Prerequisites:

To request the examination, the student must have **completed** 27 (out of 36) credit hours in the program, including the following courses:

INGL 5015 English and American Literary Criticism and Theory

INGL 6605: Research Methods in Literature

as well as courses in at least four periods

Candidates must be registered in a graduate-level course during the semester in which they plan to take the examination.

2. Registration in INTD 6015:

If students have already completed all course and credit requirements for the degree, students should register for INTD 6015, which is equivalent to zero (0) credits.

3. Exam Dates:

The written exam is given over a period of two consecutive days on dates agreed upon by the student and committee members. Students will answer two exam questions on the first day (three hours) and the second two (three hours) on the second day. The specialization exam will be turned in two weeks after the classroom examinations have been completed. The oral defense of the exams will take place within one week after the specialization exam has been turned in. The last day a student will be permitted to complete the oral defense is **the last day of classes** for the semester in which the student takes the comprehensive exam.

4. Requesting the Exam:

Students must file a formal written *Request to Take the MAEL Comprehensive Exam* by the last day of classes of the semester BEFORE they intend to take the examination.* The Request must be signed by all members of the student's Examination Committee and the MAEL English Graduate Program Coordinator before it is presented to the Department Chair for approval and before registering in INTD 6015. The original request is filed in the English Department by the MAEL Graduate Program Coordinator and the Department Chair will inform OGS about the students who are planning to take comprehensive exams on any given semester. On the request form, candidates indicate the following information:

- Their intention to take the comprehensive examination;
- The dates of the period classroom examination, due date of the specialization take-home examination, and date of the oral defense;
- The study questions for the classroom examinations and specialization examinations (3 per exam);
- A reading list of at least 15 recent academic sources (scholarly journals, book chapters or books, dissertations, etc.) and an appropriate number of primary (literary) sources agreed upon by the committee for each part of the exam (Period exam and specialization). Sources on the list may overlap.
- In the case of a second attempt to pass the exam, the candidate should indicate which parts of the exam will be retaken.

6. Cancellation of Request to Take the MAEL Comprehensive Exam:

Once the *Request* has been received by the Director, students are committed to taking the comprehensive exam. **If a student wishes to reverse this decision, he or she must file a *Cancellation of Request to Take the MAEL Comprehensive Exam* at least ten working days before the date set for the requirement in first component of the exam. In the unlikely event a student does not request the cancellation in a timely manner, the original *Request to Take the MAEL Comprehensive Exam* will be recorded as an official attempt to pass the exam regardless of whether or not the student actually takes it.**

7. **Studying for the MAEL Comprehensive Exam:** In consultation with the committee, the student will prepare a reading list of the appropriate number of primary (literary) sources and at least fifteen recent academic sources (scholarly journals, book chapters or books, dissertations, etc.) to be read in preparation for each of the classroom examinations (A

minimum of five of these sources must be referred to in the answer to each exam question. There may be some overlap between the lists. In preparation for the exam, the student may wish to prepare an annotated bibliography and an outline of his or her answers to each exam question listed on the Request to *Take the MAEL Comprehensive Examination* form. However, no outlines or notes of any kind will be allowed during the written exam. For the oral defense of the exam, students may bring a copy of their answers of each written exam, but they may not use notes or other resources.

D. Taking the Exam

As stated above, the Comprehensive Examination includes a Period written exam on four periods of literature (written over two consecutive days, two questions each day), a specialization takehome exam, and an oral defense. Each component of the examination is further explained below:

1. **Period Written Examination Content:** A written classroom exam on 4 literary periods, taken over two consecutive days (three hours each)
 2. **One take-home specialization examination**
 3. **An Oral defense of both exams**
2. **Written Examination Content and Protocol:** Students will be examined on 4 of the major 6 periods of English Literatures, which have been defined as follows:
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- (a) Old and Middle English
 - (b) Shakespeare and the Renaissance to 1660
 - (c) British Literature from 1660-1900
 - (d) American Literature till 1900
 - (e) The 20th Century through World War II
 - (f) Literature since World War II.

The written examinations will be administered and evaluated by the members of the student's committee. Committee members will jointly select the exam question for each of the four areas from the three questions filed by the student in the *Request to Take the MAEL Comprehensive Exam* (Appendix M). **This information will not be communicated to the student prior to the time of the exam.** The committee will also decide which member will be in charge of administering each of the written examinations and booking a computer-equipped room for this purpose in consultation with the Department Director. Students should be notified about their faculty exam proctors and examination sites at least one week before the scheduled exam date.

On each of the two consecutive exam days, the committee member chosen to administer it will provide the student with an official copy of the exam question. The student will answer the question on a computer provided by the department or committee member (not the student's personal computer). Students will not be allowed to use the Internet or consult any personal files or notes during written examinations. At the end of the examination period, the committee member will keep a digital copy of the student's completed exam and will make the file available to the other committee members by the

next business day. The student will provide hard copies of his/her completed exams to the Department Chair so that they can be placed in the student's departmental file.

3. Specialization exam:

When the student completes the last of the Period written examinations, they will receive the specialization question. As soon as the student receives the questions, they will have two weeks to turn in the written specialization examination. Because it is a take-home exam, students may use their notes, annotated bibliography, and other resources to answer the question. However, it is inappropriate to receive any input or assistance on the answer to the specialization question from faculty members, other students, etc. The exam will be based on their application of literary theory from the core course to an area of literature in which they would like to specialize.

4. Oral defense:

One week after the student turns in the specialization exam, they will sit for the oral defense with all three committee members. The defense is closed to the public. The oral defense is an opportunity for the students to verbalize answers about their written exams. Questions are about the students' written exams and therefore should NOT include new questions about the reading lists. During the defense, committee members may not intervene to aid the student in answering the questions. Each committee member will ask up to two questions about each of the three written parts of the exam. These questions will NOT be shared in advance with the student. After the defense is finished, the student will be asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates. The student will be invited back in and told the results immediately after the deliberation.

E. Passing the Exam

In order to pass the MAEL Comprehensive Exam, the student must obtain passing marks on all components: the written examination, the specialization exam, and the oral defense.

1. Period Written Examination:

To pass the period written examination students must obtain a passing grade on all four periods. The student's Examination Committee members will evaluate the exam. General evaluation criteria for the exams are based on the student's ability to perform the following tasks:

- a. Synthesize the key theoretical and analytical debates defined by the exam questions.
- b. Articulate an independent argument in response to those debates.
- c. Demonstrate knowledge of primary sources in the period.
- d. Integrate information from a variety of sources into an organized, cogent, and scholarly response.
- e. Contextualize the argument appropriately.
- f. Include a minimum of 10 appropriate citations (recent academic journal articles, academic book chapters and/or books) in MLA format.
- g. Compose a scholarly essay of 4-5 pages (double-spaced)

After reading the student's work, Examination Committee members will confer to evaluate the student's written examination (on a pass/fail basis) and complete the corresponding portion of the *Examination Result Form* required by the Registrar's Office and the Office of Graduate Studies (form DAAEG21 Revised October 2008, which is available at <http://admin.uprm.edu/grad/daaeg21.pdf>). Written justification will be submitted to the student and the Department Director (for inclusion in the student's file) in case of failure in any of the exams. Students who fail two or fewer periods of the Period written exam on their first attempt will have one more opportunity to pass the failed parts. (If they fail more than two periods they will be required to retake the entire exam.) They may retake the exam (in full or in part) no sooner than the following semester and no later than one year after their first attempt to pass the exam. (The student may register to take the exam during the summer if all members of the student's committee agree to meet and work during the summer.) Failure in **any** area exam during a second attempt will constitute failure in the MAEL program.

2. Specialization exam:

As stated above, to pass the Comprehensive Exam students must also obtain a passing mark on the specialization exam. General evaluation criteria for the specialization exam are based on the student's ability to perform the following tasks:

- a. Review recent academic literature related to the specialization topic.
- b. Synthesize key theoretical and methodological debates pertinent to the topic.
- c. Articulate an independent argument.
- d. Integrate information from a variety of sources into an organized, cogent, and scholarly response of 12-15 pages.
- e. Contextualize the argument appropriately.
- f. Include a minimum of 15 appropriate citations (recent academic journal articles, academic book chapters and/or books) following MLA format.

3. Oral defense:

The general evaluation criteria for the oral presentation are based on the student's ability to perform the following tasks:

- a. Extemporaneously and formally synthesize the theoretical and conceptual frameworks present in the exam questions.
- b. Knowledgeably respond to questions and comments about the exam responses.

At the end of the oral defense, the Examination Committee will confer, in private, to evaluate (on a pass/fail basis) the oral defense component of the examination. The student will be informed of the committee's decision immediately after the discussion. The committee's evaluation should be reported in the corresponding section of the *Examination Result Form* (Appendix R) required by the

Registrar's Office and the Office of Graduate Studies (form DAAEG21 Revised October 2008), available at <http://grad.uprm.edu/daaeg21.pdf>. Written justification will be submitted to the student and the Department Chair (for inclusion in the student's file) in case of failure in this component of the examination.

F. Reporting the Results of the Exam

The English Department Director is the person in charge of reporting the *Results of the Comprehensive Exam* (form DAAEG21) to the Registrar and the Office of Graduate Studies. For the Director to be able to do so in a timely fashion, the Examination Committee chair must submit form DAAEG21 to the Department Chair within three working days of the completion of the examination process (i.e., Period written examination, the specialization exam, and the oral defense).