

Preliminary Exam Options for Graduate Students in the Social-Personality Area

From the K-State *Graduate Handbook* published by the Graduate School:

“A student must be in good academic standing to take a preliminary examination. The required written preliminary examination may be supplemented by an oral examination as prescribed by the supervisory committee. These are designed to test the student's breadth and depth of knowledge in the proposed field of specialization, as well as the student's ability to explore problems on the boundaries of knowledge. Satisfactory performance in the examination is an indication that the student is prepared to perform independent work toward the doctoral degree and results in the student being classified as a doctoral candidate upon affirmative recommendation by the supervisory committee. The examination may be scheduled after the program of study is filed and at a time deemed appropriate by the supervisory committee. The preliminary examination must be completed at least 7 months before the final oral examination.”

Thus, preliminary examinations have two purposes:

1. They should test a student's knowledge of the field of psychology.
2. They should ascertain if the student has the core competencies necessary to complete a dissertation.

Again, this is taken from the *Graduate Handbook*:

“The format of the examination and the structure of the examining committee may differ among doctoral programs, and in some programs, the examining committee will differ from the supervisory committee.”

To summarize from above, the purpose of the preliminary exam requirement is to promote discipline-relevant knowledge and skills in graduate students, and the form of the preliminary exam may vary.

Graduate students in the Social-Personality Area will have the opportunity to take the traditional preliminary exam or one of the alternative formats described below. Students must consult with their major professor and supervisory committee prior to deciding which preliminary exam format they will complete. The options are designed to generally promote graduate students' acquisition and integration of knowledge within social and/or personality psychology. The different options are provided so that students may focus on further developing different specific career-relevant skills to better prepare them for their post-degree professional careers while achieving the more general common goal of acquiring and integrating knowledge. It is the responsibility of the graduate student, the major professor, and the supervisory or examining committee to make sure the format of the preliminary examination serves the two specific purposes listed above.

The traditional preliminary exam is described in detail elsewhere, and those details will not be repeated here. In summary, this consists of an exam comprised of questions written by members of the graduate student's supervisory committee that the student will take in a three day period (e.g., three four-hour periods over three consecutive days during which a student answers a different set of questions on each day) without the use of resources (e.g., journal articles, internet access) to aid

him or her. This is the preliminary exam option that Social-Personality graduate students have typically completed. This option is designed to reinforce the knowledge that students have learned in their coursework and research, as well as to provide them with the opportunity to learn more about the literature and methods in social/personality psychology. The students choosing this option should do so to increase their breadth of knowledge within the discipline.

Each of the four additional preliminary exam options may take the place of the traditional preliminary exam. These alternative options will share common procedural elements:

- 1) The graduate student must have the permission of his or her major professor and supervisory committee to pursue one of the alternative options.
- 2) The graduate student must propose how he or she will specifically complete the preliminary exam within one of the options in a written proposal. In the proposal, the graduate student must explain how his or her exam will satisfy the two purposes of the preliminary examination. This proposal will be discussed further at a meeting with his or her supervisory committee.
- 3) The graduate student must complete the preliminary exam in the manner in which the supervisory committee decides at the proposal meeting. The timeline for completion of the preliminary exam will also be decided at the proposal meeting. A document summarizing the requirements for completing the preliminary exam will be prepared by the major professor after the proposal meeting and will be provided to the graduate student's supervisory committee.
- 4) The major professor (or the graduate student) will provide copies of the preliminary exam proposal, the document summarizing the requirements for completing the preliminary exam, and/or the final exam materials to other social-personality faculty members who are not members of the graduate student's supervisory committee at the faculty members' request. These materials are informative and will not be evaluated by social-personality faculty members who are not members of the graduate student's supervisory committee.
- 5) Other graduate students may see examples of other students' preliminary exam proposals and summaries of the requirements for completing preliminary exams. Other graduate students may also discuss the experience of preparing and completing preliminary exams with graduate students who are preparing or have completed their preliminary exams. However, graduate students may not have access to other graduate students' final preliminary exam materials because doing so may provide them with an unfair advantage in the completion of their own preliminary exams.

The four additional preliminary exam options are described below.

The take-home exam option format will be created by the graduate student in collaboration with his or her major professor and supervisory committee. The take-home exam will be completed within a time frame dictated by the supervisory committee, and may consist of sets of questions, a literature review, and/or another written assignment (e.g., a synthesis of research conducted in the student's content area) that is created by the supervisory committee that may be completed with additional resources (e.g., journal articles). The supervisory committee may include an oral component with this option (e.g., a defense of the graduate student's written work to the supervisory committee). The students choosing this option will experience the same benefits of the traditional preliminary exam as well having the opportunity to complete a writing sample that would improve their skills in

professional writing as well as organizing, summarizing, integrating, and extending the research literature.

The grant proposal option will require the graduate student to prepare a grant proposal for research. In the proposal for the grant option, the student must provide an overview of the research idea, a short description of the research plan, and a justification for why the proposed research would be fundable. The student must also identify a funding mechanism for a predoctoral grant from NIH, NSF, or equivalent agency, and discuss why the proposal would be an appropriate match to the funding mechanism. The granting mechanism targeted must be substantial (e.g., a dissertation fellowship), rather than a small cost mechanism that requires a brief proposal. The final product will include all grant proposal face pages, section requirements, format guidelines, and necessary supplements with the exception of the letters of support and statements from the faculty mentor. The final document will also include a complete IRB protocol for the studies proposed in the grant. With this option, the student will make an oral defense of his or her grant proposal to the supervisory committee. The students choosing this option will gain increased knowledge of the chosen research area and will develop the skills necessary to pursue and obtain extramural funding for research. This is an important skill, especially for those students who plan to pursue research positions in academic or applied domains upon the completion of their degree. To further develop this skill, students pursuing this option will prepare a 10 to 15 page description of the research programs they intend to pursue upon completion of their dissertations. This description will take the form of an extended research statement such as those required by academic search committees. The research programs described will include theoretical foundations and summaries of study methodologies for at least two lines of research, one of which will be the extension of the research line pursued by the dissertation.

The course preparation option will require the graduate student to design a complete course. The course topic will be at the advanced undergraduate level (i.e., not an introductory level survey course), and will be a course not generally taught in the Psychology Department at Kansas State University. In the proposal for the course preparation option, the graduate student must justify why the course is a valuable addition to a psychology curriculum, provide a list of topics that will be covered, and provide a preliminary reference list. The final product produced by the graduate student will include the course syllabus, lectures, assignments, and exams. The students choosing this option will prepare all aspects of a course that they would be able to teach with little additional preparation. With this option, the supervisory committee may require the student to make an oral defense of his or her course and/or to give a sample lecture to the supervisory committee. Their knowledge in the domain of the course will be expanded, and they would develop skills relevant to preparing upper-level undergraduate courses. Students choosing this option should be planning to pursue teaching positions upon the completion of their degree, and will likely be students who have participated in the Teaching Apprenticeship Program.

The literature review/meta-analysis option will require the graduate student to prepare a comprehensive summary of the literature in a research domain in the form of a manuscript that would be submitted to a top psychology review journal (e.g., *Psychological Bulletin*, *Psychological Review*, *Annual Review of Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*). In the proposal for the literature review/meta-analysis option, the graduate student must justify why a summary of the literature in the chosen research domain is interesting, necessary, and expected to be publishable. The student must also provide a detailed plan for how the summary of the literature will be performed and a preliminary reference list. The final product produced by the graduate

student will be a manuscript-style report of the summary of the literature. With this option, the student will make an oral defense of his or her literature review/meta-analysis to the supervisory committee. The students choosing this option will become intimately and expertly familiar with the research domain they pursue. They will also further develop their research skills in literature search and retrieval, summarizing and integrating literature, manuscript preparation, and possibly meta-analytic analyses. It should be noted that students may not use meta-analyses that they began in a graduate seminar as a means of pursuing this option.

Evaluation of Preliminary Exams

Each graduate student's supervisory/examination committee will evaluate his or her preliminary examination and determine if the student has passed or failed. Students who fail their preliminary examination may petition the faculty for permission to take the exam a second time. This opportunity is not automatically conferred, however. The decision rests with the student's supervisory/examination committee, who considers not only the student's performance on the preliminary examination, but also previous course work and other relevant factors.