



## M.A. Comprehensive Exam Guidelines

Comprehensive Exams ("Comps") are designed to give you the opportunity to read broadly in your specific chosen fields. The most valuable part of the comprehensive exams is not the exam itself, but the process of reading and synthesizing ideas. Comprehensive exams give you the chance to sharpen your sense of the major themes and patterns in your field of study. This awareness of "the big picture" can then help you in your future pursuits as a researcher and/or teacher.

Your professor will guide your compilation of a list of books (no fewer than 25 and no greater than 60) that offers thematic and chronological breadth. If you have taken a Reading Seminar (HIST 551, 521, or 571) with your examiner, then you should consult with him/her and see if the material from that class can make up the core of your comps reading list. Additional books will be added. No textbooks or novels are allowed on your reading list.

Each student will take **TWO** exams. Be advised that it is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** to consult with each examiner on the reading list and to arrange an appropriate date of the exam. You should also have each examiner sign a form indicating that they have agreed to serve in that particular capacity.

### Format of exam

The goal for this exam is for you to retain and synthesize the information you have learned during your comps preparation. How the exam is structured varies with the person administering it. Some students, for example, write a four-hour exam on campus. Others complete the exam over multiple days at home and deliver the exam electronically. In each case, students may typically consult their notes and sources. Often times the test will consist of three questions, of which you will pick two to answer. Your answers should be articulate and contain a clear overall argument.

The exam is measured on a pass/fail basis. Your examiner will notify the graduate adviser upon the successful completion of the test.

### Important Advice on Reading and Preparing for Comprehensive Exams

You should not try to read every sentence of every book. Instead, keep your focus on big themes that will help you synthesize and unify the readings. To help you recognize these larger themes, consult book review essays in such journals as the *American Historical Review*. Be sure to take ample notes on each book, and that your notes connect each book to larger unifying themes. These notes, in addition to your own, will be invaluable in the weeks before the exam, and they can help you later in your historical career.