The doctoral comprehensive examination in the Sociology of Education program is intended for students to achieve and demonstrate a comprehensive working knowledge of a large subfield of sociology. We trust that the knowledge facilitated by the exams will serve our students well as they write their dissertations and continue into subsequent stages of their careers.

The exam consists of an oral examination in three areas: (1) general sociological theory; (2) sociology of education; and (3) a specialization to be chosen by the student.

Full-time students generally schedule this exam for early in the fall semester of the third year of coursework. Preparation takes several months, and students planning to take the exam in the fall of their third year should begin studying by the late-spring of their second year. It is also important for students to choose coursework that allows them to do some of the core reading on their comps lists and that furthers their understanding and knowledge of sociological theory and the sociology of education.

For the theory and sociology of education portions of the exam, students focus on the material listed in the program’s comps reading lists, which were developed by the program faculty (see below). These serve as the core of students’ reading lists and should be revised and augmented by students in conjunction with the Sociology of Education faculty and in accordance with students’ interests and focus.

The reading list for the specialization area is a third, separate list that will be developed by students, in consultation with their primary academic advisor, eventual dissertation chair, or the program director. This list should be related to the reading that students are beginning to do as they conceptualize and draft their dissertation proposals.

All final reading lists should be distributed to faculty examiners before the exam.

In addition, at least one week prior to the exam, students should prepare and distribute to faculty examiners a very brief (one-page) description of their potential dissertation topic and/or a set of research questions that could serve as the basis of some discussion during the exam. This description can be very preliminary. Its purpose is to prompt a discussion during the exam about next steps with respect to the dissertation.

The exam itself will consist of an approximately two-hour oral exam during which faculty examiners can ask students any questions they wish pertaining to the students’ reading lists and the fields of general sociological theory, sociology of education, the student’s area of specialization, and students’ preliminary dissertation topics.
The exam committee will consist of two faculty members, ideally the program director and the student’s dissertation chair. Faculty examiners can also be other members or the Sociology of Education program faculty or other sociologists in Steinhardt or the broader NYU community. The exam will take the form of a focused conversation during which students will be asked to not simply explicate and summarize what they have read but to put authors in conversation with each other, comment on the key debates in the field, locate debates and lines of research historically, and critically engage with the texts and ideas in the field.

Please note: The comprehensive exam must be passed before students can participate in a dissertation proposal defense, though students may begin working on their dissertation proposals as they study for and complete the comps.
Sociological Theory Reading List

Through this portion of the exam, students will engage with the foundational texts in the field of sociology. They should be able to offer an analysis of the trajectory of the discipline of sociology and the key questions and debates addressed by the discipline. They also should be able to demonstrate understanding of some of the most influential critiques of foundational texts and debates in the field.

The following mandatory reading list represents a core with which all sociologists should be proficient. It should serve as a basis for a more extensive list reflecting each student’s intellectual interests and developed in collaboration with students’ comps examiners. Developing this broader list is a substantive exercise that allows students to conceptualize the discipline and intellectual history of sociology, frame the discipline’s key questions and intellectual traditions, and understand the current role that classic texts play in the discipline.

Overview Texts

R. Collins. *Four Sociological Traditions*.

A. Giddens. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*.


Please note: The Sociology of Education program owns copies of these overview texts. Students should feel free to borrow them.

Classical Social Theory

E. Durkheim. *The Division of Labor in Society*.


E. Durkheim. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*.

S. Freud. *Civilization and its Discontents*.

K. Marx. “Capital Volume One” In *The Marx-Engels Reader*.


T. Parsons. *The Social System*.


**Contemporary Social Theory**


E. Goffman. *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.


P. Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.


Sociology of Education Reading List

The goal of the doctoral exam in the sociology of education is to impart a synthetic understanding of a large sub-field.

Below is a list of overview texts and texts on the history and theory of sociology of education. A long “suggested readings” list for the Sociology of Education comps is also included here.

Students should read selections from the Overview Texts section and should read the entire History and Theory sections or should discuss substitutions and additions with their exam committee. From the Suggested Additional Readings list, each student should choose at least 15 selections and feel free to augment the list with additional texts representing fields of knowledge of particular relevance to their doctoral studies. For examples, students may choose to develop more depth in their coverage of gender and education, tracking, higher education, or specific cross-national comparisons. The suggested reading list below is by no means exhaustive of all the texts of which a student should be aware; the list does, however, provide a sketch of the primary currents in U.S. sociological scholarship on education since the 1950s.

Students should also include in their lists at least one selection from each of the current faculty members in the Sociology of Education program.

Final reading lists should be approved by students’ examiners.

Suggested Overview Texts


Suggested History Texts


Suggested Theory Texts


Suggested Additional Readings (Please Choose Approx. 15)


