Department of Applied Statistics, Social Science, and Humanities
Program in Sociology of Education
Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Policy and Reading List
REVISED: December 2018

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 exam 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 two areas: (1) a list of 18 books and articles that our program considers to be foundational to the field of Sociology of Education and (2) approximately 32 additional readings (for a total of approximately 50 readings on the comps list), both theoretical and empirical, in an area of the student’s specialization.

Full-time students generally schedule this exam for the fall semester of the third year in the program, once most coursework has been completed. 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 our field. We also strongly recommend studying in pairs or groups, whenever possible.

The core reading list (see below) is required for all students. The reading list for the specialization area 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 at least one month prior to the exam. In addition, there are two brief written documents that students should prepare and submit at this time. First, students should prepare a one-page written justification for their choices of readings in their specialization list. Second, students should prepare a 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 1.5-hour oral exam during which faculty examiners can ask students any questions they wish pertaining to the students’ reading lists and the fields of sociology of education, the student’s area of specialization, and students’ preliminary dissertation topics. 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, critically engage with the texts and ideas in the field, and begin to articulate how their own work relates to what has been done in the field to date.

The exam committee will consist of two faculty members, ideally the program director and the student’s future 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 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.
Core (Required) Reading List


