DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
PH.D. DOCTORAL EXAMINATIONS
INFORMATION PACKET
Packet Contents

General Information

Doctoral Exams .................................................................3
Exam Schedule .................................................................4
Exam Grading System .......................................................4
Tips from the Faculty ........................................................6

Reading Lists

Family, Health, and Life Course ........................................8
Gender and Sexuality .........................................................15
Race and Urban Studies ....................................................22

Sample Qualifying Examinations
Doctoral Examinations

Required for all Joint M.A./Ph.D. and Ph.D.-Only students, the purpose of the Doctoral Exam is to determine whether a student has a sound understanding of sociology in the concentration area. Successful performance will require students to go beyond their course work; they should expand their knowledge by reviewing books and articles on theories, methods, and research findings from specially prepared reading lists. The exam requires answers to questions designed to test the student's knowledge as well as organizing, synthesizing, and writing abilities.

Students must take the exam at the first opportunity after they successfully complete all doctoral course work. Students in the Joint M.A./Ph.D. Program cannot take the Doctoral Exams until they have successfully defended their M.A. Thesis, completed all requirements for the M.A. degree, and completed all of the coursework for the Ph.D. degree. [Note: The Graduate committee will consider petitions from students who wish to take the exam at an earlier point in their graduate career; for example, if a student is waiting to take just one course, which due to scheduling will not be offered for a semester or more, and the student does not want to delay degree progress any more.]

Students are responsible for informing the Director of Graduate Studies in writing (by email) of their intention to take the examination and the specialty area in which they will take the exam; notification must occur before June 1 for the Fall exam or before Jan 1 for the Spring exam. Failure to take the examination on the agreed date will constitute failure and only one other opportunity will be allowed to take it.

Students are urged to study diligently for these exams. Students are expected to spend a couple of months studying for the exams. These reading lists are available from the departmental Director of Graduate Studies. Students who entered under catalogs earlier than 2013 and who did not change to the latest graduate catalog must register for Soci 9970: Readings for Qualifying Examination (3-9) in the semester(s) during which they prepare for the exam. Those who entered the program after 2012-2013 or who switched to the most recent catalog do not need to register for Soci 9970.

Doctoral Examinations are given in each of the department’s specialty areas: (a) Family, Health, and Life Course, (b) Gender and Sexuality, and (c) Race and Urban Studies. Students take the exam in their declared specialty area.

The Doctoral Examination is composed of three parts – (1) the first part covers the theoretical foundations, debates, and evolution of the student’s specialty area (FHLC, GS, or RUS); (2) the second covers the methodologies typically used and the methodological challenges in the student’s specialty area; and (3) the third asks students to place their intended dissertation topic within the context of the theories and methodologies of the specialty field. **FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2015-2016, PART THREE HAS BEEN DROPPED.** The three parts of the Doctoral Exam use a take-home essay format. The exam is offered twice a year: 1) in mid-August the Monday of the week prior to the beginning of classes and 2) the Monday of the week of Spring break. Students have 72 hours to complete the exam; the exam is distributed on a Monday morning and is due the immediately following Thursday morning. Students answer a
total of two questions (one question per section described above). Each separate answer is limited to 10-12 pages, including footnotes/endnotes, but not including references.

The Chair of the Department will appoint three faculty committees (constructed of three faculty members each) to construct and grade the Doctoral Examination; one committee for each specialty area. Faculty committee assignments begin July 1 and continue through June 30 the following year. The decision to “high pass,” “pass,” or “fail” is governed by a numerical scale (see below). In the event of a failure on the written portion of the exam, the student must wait to retake the Doctoral Exam at the next offering. A student will be dismissed from the program upon a second failure of the Doctoral Examination.

While the exam committee is responsible for the grades, the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) will assess the exams for plagiarism using turnitin.com. This is a tool used to make the assessment easier. The Director will look carefully at each exam regardless of the originality number turnitin.com supplies as that number is meaningless. If the DGS determines that plagiarism has occurred, the director of instruction will be asked to confirm the finding. If it is confirmed, paperwork will be filed with the office of academic dishonesty. This policy allows students to appeal the charge. If the charge is successfully appealed, then the student will receive the grade given by the exam committee. This procedure has been approved by the office of academic dishonesty as the most fair in terms of not biasing the grade with issues of academic dishonesty.

Schedule for the Spring exam:
- Students must submit (via email) their “Notification of Intent” to the Director of Graduate Studies by January 1.
- The exam will be distributed (via email) at 9am on the first Monday in of Spring break.
- Students have 72 hours to complete the exam. Complete exams must be submitted (via email) to the Director of Graduate Studies by 9am on the immediately following Thursday.
- Exam committees will notify the Director of Graduate Studies of the students’ grades on the exam within 5 weeks, who will then immediately notify the students (approx.. 4/20).
- If the student has failed the exam, the student must retake the exam at the next offering in Fall

Schedule for the Fall exam:
- Students must submit (via email) their “Notification of Intent” to the Director of Graduate Studies by June 1
- The exam will be distributed (via email) at 9am on the first Monday of the week prior to the start of Fall semester (August 17th).
- Students have 72 hours to complete the exam. Complete exams must be submitted (via email) to the Director of Graduate Studies by 9am on the immediately following Thursday.
- Exam committees will notify the Director of Graduate Studies of the students’ grades on the exam by October 7, who will then immediately notify the students/
- If the student has failed the exam, the student must retake the exam at the next offering in Spring.
Grading System for the Doctoral Exam

Each faculty committee member grades each individual answer on a ten-point scale, ranging from a low of "1" to a high of "10." The committee members' grades for a particular answer are averaged to produce a summary score for that particular answer. Each student's exam ends up with three summary scores, one for each answer.

- In order to HIGH PASS the exam, a student must obtain a score of 9 or higher on two of the three answers and a score of 8 or higher on the third answer
- In order to PASS the exam, a student must obtain a score of 7 or higher on all three answers or a student must obtain a score of 8 or higher on two answers and a score of 6 or higher on the third answer
- In order to FAIL the exam, a student must not meet the criteria for a PASS or HIGH PASS (described immediately above)

The Director of Graduate Studies is to be responsible for supervising all phases of the Doctoral Examination and informing the Chair of the Department and the Office of Graduate Studies of the College of Arts and Sciences of the results.

Students preparing for the Doctoral Exams should contact the Director of Graduate Studies to receive the department's information and preparation packet.
Exam Tips from the Faculty

Preparing for the exams

- Get the most recent “Exam Packet” from the Graduate Director.
- Form a study group and meet regularly.
- Organize your study materials.
- Don’t limit your exam materials to those used in courses or on the reading lists. Read broadly.

During the exam period

- Clear your schedule as much as possible during the 3-day exam period.
- Before you do anything else, read through the entire exam.
- Do the most work on the first day of the exam period, when you’re freshest.
- Questions/problems during the exam period must be directed only to the Graduate Director.
- Outline your answers to the exam questions. Make sure that your answers have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Make sure that your answer flows and makes sense to the reader.
- Tackle your weakest area/question when you’re fresh and rested.
- Pick questions to answer based on your knowledge. There are no “bonus points” for answering a tougher question.
- Make sure that you answer the question that is being asked, not the question that you wish was being asked.
- Don’t drift or get sidetracked. Answer the questions directly and fully.
- Address all parts of the questions.
Don’t commit errors of inclusion or exclusion

Exam committees are looking for solid and thorough answers. Use your own words. Use direct quotes very sparingly and only when appropriate.

Cite original works when possible. Don’t cite lecture or course materials. Don’t cite undergraduate textbooks. Don’t cite websites like Wikipedia and others.

Don’t gloss over precise terminology. Define and explain terms where appropriate.

Resist the temptation to shoehorn prepared study material into your answer (unless it’s perfectly appropriate, but chances are it won’t be). Don’t submit “cookie-cutter” answers.

Don’t stress too much. If you’re temporarily blocked, go outside, take a walk, etc. Do something to clear your mind.


Epstein, Steven. 2007. *Inclusion: The Politics of Difference in Medical Research*. 
Chicago: University of Chicago Press.


Kessler, Ronald C., Kristin D. Mickelson, and David R. Williams. 1999. "The Prevalence,


Umberson, Debra, Kristi Williams, Daniel A. Powers, Meichu D. Chen, and Anna M. Campbell. 2005. "As Good as it Gets?: A Life Course Perspective on Marital


**In Addition**


In Addition

RACE AND URBAN STUDIES AREA READING LIST


Grant, Gerald. 2009. *Hope and Despair in the American City: Why There are No Bad Schools in Raleigh*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.


Lee, Jennifer and Frank D. Bean. 2010. The Diversity Paradox: Immigration and the


Richardson, Chad. 1999. *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture on the South Texas Border*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press.


Ross, Catherine E. and John Mirowsky. 2001. “Neighborhood Disadvantage, Disorder,


Behavior 41: 314-332.


INSTRUCTIONS: Each section should be independent, in other words, material used in one section should not be used in another. While there is room for overlap, each answer must cover new ground.

Part 1 (choose one)
1. What are the three most important new theoretical developments or new perspectives that have emerged in the sociology of the family in the last twenty years? Defend and explain how they were different from earlier theories or perspectives and why they are important. Be sure to be specific and identify authors/contributors/scholars and their works that are associated with each new development or perspective.

2. How has a life course perspective changed the way that sociologists understand underlying issues and social processes in the study of the family, health, youth/adolescence, young adulthood, mid-life, or aging and the elderly? (pick one) What have been new research findings and study results that support the use of a life course perspective in the area that you choose? What else can be done?

3. How can macro-level and micro-level sociological perspectives and processes be integrated in the study of family, health, or life stages? What studies have successfully combined both macro- and micro-level processes in their investigations? What macro-level studies can be extended and benefit by micro-level processes or what micro-level studies can be extended and benefit by macro-level processes?

Part 2 (choose one)
1. Cumulative advantage/disadvantage theory has been a driving force in aging inequality and health disparities research. This theory focuses on how differences in opportunities, inequalities or disparities cumulative at various earlier stages of the life course lead to greater inequality in a variety of social and health outcomes at later stages of the life course. How have the methodological issues of causation been handled in this literature? First, summarize the empirical evidence about cumulative advantage/disadvantage theory as it relates to either aging inequality or health disparities including the extent to which cumulative advantage/disadvantage appears to have causal effects. In your response, be sure to discuss how the literature addresses methodological issues in drawing causal inferences from observational and non-observational studies of
aging and health, and what types of studies are best-suited for inferring causal effects. Second, summarize the ways in which cumulative advantage/disadvantage have been measured in the body of literature chosen. What are the common measurement challenges the literature discusses for this abstract concept and how has it been resolved by the field?

2. It is widely recognized that there is much to be gained by studying sociological research questions using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. Unfortunately, this seldom happens in practice. First, select a research topic in family sociology or in the sociology of health and illness that has been studied primarily (or exclusively) using either quantitative or qualitative methods. Second, describe the research question and summarize major findings to date and the methods upon which those findings are based. Third, describe what research in the other methodological tradition would add to our knowledge of this issue. For example, if research to date has been based primarily on quantitative methods, describe what would be gained by using qualitative methods to address the same issue. Fourth -- and this should be the most detailed part of your answer -- design a study to investigate this research question using the other methodological approach. Thus, if most research has been based on quantitative methods, design a study that would address the research question using qualitative methods. We recognize that the study design cannot be detailed, but provide basic information on sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation.

Part 3
Discuss three alternative theoretical approaches and three alternative methodological approaches you could apply to your intended dissertation topic. Discuss the rationale for each approach and the implications of using it. It should go without saying, but be sure to clearly explain your dissertation topic.
INSTRUCTIONS: Each section should be independent, in other words, material used in one section should not be used in another. While there is room for overlap, each answer must cover new ground.

Part 1 (select one)

1. You have three variables, health, self or well-being, and social structure. Draw a heuristic model that indicates the causal relationships between the three variables. Citing current theoretical understandings and empirical findings, what are the social processes underlying or “causing” each of the relationships? Develop hypotheses that summarize each of your testable relationships.

2. What are the three most interesting and important studies so far in the 21st century that have applied a life course perspective? Citing current theoretical and empirical work, defend your selections. Are there common themes that connect your selections? What are the next steps in continuing or advancing the research agendas of each of the selected studies?

3. Using current empirical studies and theoretical approaches, demonstrate that families are an interesting focus or social context to study either issues related to children and/or adolescents, or alternatively, issues related to middle age and older adults. Make sure that your essay integrates your ideas with references to current sociological theory and research.

Part 2

Longitudinal methods form a substantial portion of the family, health, and life course research toolkit. What do we mean by longitudinal methods, especially as they refer to sampling of subjects, measurement of variables, and the analysis of relationships among variables? Select and summarize in detail the longitudinal methods employed by two studies published within the last 5 years, which you consider to be exemplary of either family, health or life course research. What special methodological challenges did each of these studies face?
Part 3

Discuss three theoretical approaches and three methodological approaches you could apply to your intended dissertation topic. Discuss the rationale for each approach and the implications of using it. It should go without saying, but be sure to clearly explain your dissertation topic.
Ph.D. Specialty Examination  
Department of Sociology  
September 2011

Gender and Sexuality Exam

Part 1 (select one)
1. Discuss the evolution of ideas concerning variations in sexual and gendered identities. Summarize the primary sociological approaches to sexual and gendered identities, making specific reference to major proponents of each approach. How have these ideas changed over time, and why? What is the current state of ideas regarding sexual and gendered identities, and where do you anticipate the field will go from there?

2. Critique a classical social theorist's ideas about gender. How does gender factor into the theorist's analysis (or how is it excluded)? How does this inclusion (or exclusion) strengthen (or weaken) their theoretical argument?

Part 2 (select one)
1. What methodological issues tend to arise in studies of gender and sexuality? What studies, if any, have corrected for or addressed these problems?

2. Discuss the ethics of studying populations with unconventional genders or sexualities. As a researcher, what responsibility do you have to protect participants, and how do you balance this with presenting findings that respondents may find unflattering or even disagree with? How is the researcher's own gender or sexuality implicated in the study of gender and sex issues? Why does the field view ethics as more problematic in studies of gender and sexuality than some other issues, is this caution correct or misplaced, and what do you recommend regarding the research ethics of studying gender and sexuality?

Part 3
Discuss three alternative theoretical approaches and three alternative methodological approaches you could apply to your intended dissertation topic. Discuss the rationale for each approach and the implications of using it. It should go without saying, but be sure to clearly explain your dissertation topic.
GENDER AND SEXUALITY EXAM

Part 1 (select one)

3. How have changes within social institutions affected gender- or sexuality-based power dynamics during the last 100 years? In turn, how have changes in the way gender or sexuality is viewed, performed, and structured impacted other social institutions? Please include at least one “classical” era scholar and one “contemporary” era scholar in your discussion.

4. Discuss what you see as the five most crucial trends in sociological thought regarding gender- or sexuality-based power relations as they relate to one of the following: work (in and out of the paid labor market); embodiment; education; religion; medicalization; or cultural representations. Please include at least one “classical”-era scholar in your discussion, and at least one scholar who considers issues globally.

Part 2 (select one)

3. Take one issue within the specialty area of gender and sexuality and discuss how different scholars have approached its investigation methodologically. Please discuss at least one primarily qualitative approach, one primarily quantitative approach, and one mixed-methods approach. Consider the relationships between methods and the theoretical orientations of the scholars whose work you discuss. Which methodological approach to the issue is most appealing to you, and why?

4. Discuss the ethics of studying populations with unconventional genders or sexualities. As a researcher, what responsibility do you have to protect participants, and how do you balance this with presenting findings that respondents may find unflattering or even disagree with? How is the researcher’s own gender or sexuality implicated in the study of gender and sex issues? Why does the field view ethics as more problematic in studies of gender and sexuality than some other issues, is this caution correct or misplaced, and what do you recommend regarding the research ethics of studying gender and sexuality?

Part 3
Discuss three theoretical approaches and three methodological approaches you could apply to your intended dissertation topic. Discuss the rationale for each approach and the implications of using it. It should go without saying, but be sure to clearly explain your dissertation topic.
Part 1 (choose one)

5. Discuss the various critiques of the color-blind framework. These could include critical race theory, political economy, feminist theory, and theories of social change, among others. In your response discuss how each critique addresses the persistence of race-based inequality and clearly explain the assumptions of each theoretical critique and the color-blind framework.

6. Explain how new patterns of immigration (which have influenced both multiculturalism and new forms of inequality) have affected the political economy of cities over the past twenty years. Be sure to address how this has affected the geographic organization of the metropolis, both cities and suburbs, and how these processes have differed regionally.

Part 2 (choose one)

5. In light of the recent cheating scandal in Atlanta Public Schools, design a study to assess the relationship between levels of black-white segregation, low school performance, and incidences of cheating across schools in the metropolitan region. In addition to explaining all aspects of your study design, from data sources to data analysis, discuss the methodological challenges of conducting such a study.

6. In race and urban studies, measurement challenges are common. Two distinct concepts that are particularly problematic in terms of measurement are “racial/ethnic identity” and “neighborhood effects.” Briefly, define each of these concepts. Then provide a detailed discussion of the various ways these concepts have been measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. What are the issues related to measuring each of these concepts? With respect to the concept of “racial/ethnic identity,” specifically consider the confounding issue of multiracial identities/ “interracial” marriages. With respect to the concept of “neighborhood effects,” specifically consider the challenge of concurrently measuring proximity, geopolitical boundaries, social networks/personal connections, and a subjective sense of one’s neighborhood. How do you believe these concepts are ideally measured? If you were to conduct a study of how neighborhood context shapes racial/ethnic identity, how would you measure each of these concepts?
Part 3
Discuss three alternative theoretical approaches and three alternative methodological approaches you could apply to your intended dissertation topic. Discuss the rationale for each approach and the implications of using it. It should go without saying, but be sure to clearly explain your dissertation topic.
RACE AND URBAN STUDIES EXAM

Part 1 (select one)
7. Discuss the theoretical debates concerning the concentration of poverty in urban areas. In your judgment, what are the main causes of concentrated poverty based on your read of the relevant literature? What role does racial residential segregation and the ‘exodus of middle-class blacks’ play in the concentration of poverty? What are the consequences of concentrated poverty and what solutions/remedies do you advocate, if any?

8. Explain how new patterns of immigration have generated new forms of inequality over the past twenty years. In your response be sure to address the manifestation of this inequality both in terms of race and ethnicity and the urban landscape.

Part 2 (select one)
7. You have decided to conduct a study of the varying reason why individuals and families become homeless in Atlanta. How would you go about designing such a study? More specifically (1) what would be your sampling frame and sampling method; (2) how would you go about recruitment; (3) what types of data collection instruments would you utilize and why; and (4) what are the challenges to conducting such a study?

8. In race and urban studies, measurement challenges are common. Two distinct concepts that are particularly problematic in terms of measurement are “racial/ethnic identity” and “neighborhood effects.” Briefly, define each of these concepts. Then provide a detailed discussion of the various ways these concepts have been measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. What are the issues related to measuring each of these concepts? With respect to the concept of “racial/ethnic identity,” specifically consider the confounding issue of multiracial identities/ “interracial” marriages. With respect to the concept of “neighborhood effects,” specifically consider the challenge of concurrently measuring proximity, geopolitical boundaries, social networks/personal connections, and a subjective sense of one’s neighborhood. How do you believe these concepts are ideally measured? If you were to conduct a study of how
neighborhood context shapes racial/ethnic identity, how would you measure each of these concepts?

Part 3
Discuss three theoretical approaches and three methodological approaches you could apply to your intended dissertation topic. Discuss the rationale for each approach and the implications of using it. It should go without saying, but be sure to clearly explain your dissertation topic.