

# **COMPREHENSIVE QUALIFYING EXAM (“COMPS”): POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

The purpose of comps is to ensure that students have mastered a broad, deep, and integrative knowledge of the field of I-O psychology prior to becoming a Ph.D. candidate. The exam preparation process should reinforce what has been learned in coursework and research and build a foundation in other areas that are important for competent research, teaching, and practice. Thus, comps have a developmental and a certification function.

## **Administration**

Comps are offered every Fall and Spring semester, typically starting in the third week of classes. Each student must submit a request for approval to take comps. The Area Director will send an email in advance of each administration with notification that it is time to declare one’s intent to take the exam and choose subject areas (subject areas are discussed in the next section). Students must meet the deadline provided by the Area Director.

## **Exam Structure**

The exam comprises written questions in eight subject areas (four required and four elective). The four *required* areas are Industrial, Organizational, Methodology, and Ethics. The four *elective* areas are selected by the individual examinees at the time intent to take comps is declared, and the selections are subject to faculty approval. For guidance concerning the elective areas, please see “Policy on Elective Comps Areas” later in this document.

The I-O Area Director will assign question writers and reader based on expertise. He/she will also provide the schedule of question administration. Normally there will be eight 2-hour sessions over two weeks, with questions administered on Tuesday and Thursday, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. It may be necessary to adjust this schedule depending upon holidays, unforeseen events, and the inability to cover all the elective questions in that number of sessions. These testing sessions are “closed-book” meaning that no notes, outside materials, or searching the internet for information is allowed. Students whose native language is not English may request to be allowed an additional hour per session.

## **Answer Format**

Each area must be answered in a maximum of 8 double-spaced pages in 12-point font with 1” margins. Any tables, figures, or appendices the student chooses to include (such displays are optional) do not count toward the page limit, but they should not be excessive. Responses must present clear arguments and demonstrate expertise in the subject area. Responses should refer to empirical findings from relevant literatures. If an area has more than one question, or a question with multiple parts, each question/part must be answered completely within the page limit.

## Grading

A single overall grade will be assigned for each area (even for areas with multiple or multi-part questions). Answers to the question(s) in each subject area will be graded on a four-point nominal rating scale by the writer and reader:

- 1 = failed with significant and substantial deficiencies, new question recommended
- 2 = failed with deficiencies, remediation recommended
- 3 = low pass
- 4 = pass

If both the writer and reader assign a grade of 3.0 or greater, the student passes the area; otherwise, the student fails the area. If there is disagreement about passing, the writer and reader will discuss the answer(s) and try to reach consensus. If they are unsuccessful, a second reader will be used to break the tie. If the second reader's grade is 3.0 or greater, the student passes the area; otherwise, the student fails the area.

## Passing

**Every subject area must be passed in order to “pass comps”** and advance to doctoral candidacy. If a student fails 3 or fewer areas, the student may resolve those failed areas as described below. **If a student fails more than 3 areas, the student must retake the comps** (re-take(s) as needed).

## **Retesting**

If a student fails comps for the semester, the student must retest the next semester in which comps are offered. As discussed under “Passing”, this retest may involve the entire exam or only those areas that were not resolved successfully. The student will answer new questions under closed-book conditions. If the student failed an elective area, the student may select a different elective area for their retest. However, if a new elective area is chosen, this still constitutes a “retest” (i.e., there will not be another opportunity to retest in this new area).

As students are allowed only two opportunities to take and pass comps, the student must pass all areas upon retesting. The same conditions for resolving a failed area apply.

If a student fails comps 05s

which we have two doctoral seminars (see point 1 above) that share some overlap (e.g., assessment centers and selection).

6. The combining of two elective topics to form a third topic area is not acceptable (e.g., students cannot select personality, selection, and personality in selection as three of their four optional areas).

7. Students are encouraged to span both the I and the O side of I-O psychology in selecting their elective areas and should do so in consultation with their major professor.

<sup>1</sup>Students completing the OHP concentration must take OHP as one of their four elective areas.

I-O Faculty approved on August 19, 2022

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