

## **Guide to Taking the Sociology Comprehensive Exam**

University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

The comprehensive exam is designed to test students' understanding of sociological theories, knowledge and methods. Students will pick the four content areas out of the eleven content areas that the department offers for their exam. [Please review the list of content areas that includes four sample questions.](#) Students will receive two questions in each of their four chosen areas and they will answer one question in each area. A completed exam will include a total of four 4-5 page essays. Students will have three weeks to complete their exams and submit them through Canvas in a single Word document, [please see the step-by-step guide to completing the comprehensive exam.](#)

When writing up your essays, please keep in mind the goals of the exam. This examination is a culminating event that allows students the opportunity to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their sociological knowledge. Each of your essays must demonstrate your comprehensive understanding of the key theories and sociological debates in that content area. Therefore, they should be envisioned as mini-literature reviews in that they build an argument about an existing literature and are heavily supported by evidence drawn from that literature. Syllabi and research papers from courses in the specific content areas should be used as a starting point to draw on when outlining and drafting your essays.

The comprehensive exam committee will use the following criteria when reviewing the essays.

- 1) Thesis statement
  - a. Does the essay make a clear, succinct and defensible argument that is neither derivative nor a truism?
- 2) Evidence
  - a. Does the essay mobilize a wide-range of academic sources as evidence to build an argument that persuasively demonstrates the thesis statement?
- 3) Broad knowledge
  - a. Does the essay use appropriate academic sources to demonstrate broad sociological knowledge of the content area?
- 4) Explanation of sociological phenomena
  - a. Does the essay provide a sophisticated analysis of sociological phenomena?
- 5) Social justice
  - a. Does the essay answer the “so what?” question and provide a sociological explanation of power relations?
- 6) Writing quality
  - a. Is the essay written clearly and free from typos or grammatical errors?
  - b. Does the prose use precise language that demonstrates specificity of sociological knowledge?

Please reach out to the Graduate Director if you have any questions or for additional guidance prior to receiving the prompts.