Writing a PhD Comps Proposal in Systems Science

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*Disclaimer: This manuscript is not officially approved by the Systems Science Graduate Program, and may contain errors. Please email me if you find things that are incorrect or could be stated more clearly: tds@pdx.edu
1. When you are taking classes...
   a. **Try and take as many classes from the same professors as possible.** If you take every class from a different professor at PSU, you will have a ton of people (and schedules) to coordinate for your exams, which can be challenging.

   b. **Try to contact potential examiners as soon as possible.** This can start right after you take a class from them or even during. Hopefully you are doing well in their class, because they will feel more inclined to examine you that way. Early planning allows you to find alternative professors if they are not going to be available to examine you.

   c. **Keep your Syllabi from each class.** This will help you write your proposal. Also make sure you keep assigned articles and books so you don’t have to find/purchase them again.

2. When Forming your Comps Exam Committee:
   a. **Note that the Lead Examiners for each area will be the ones giving your Oral Exams.** Sometimes you can arrange the courses strategically so that the professors you know best are the ones giving you your Orals. For example, if you find yourself relying on a professor who you don’t know well, consider having him or her contribute to a couple of different exams, rather than being lead examiner on one exam. Make sure your professors are willing to be lead examiners, though – this is especially time consuming for them.

   b. **Do not assume that professors can cover multiple topics.** It’s worth checking what topics a professor can examine you on, because having fewer examiners simplifies things. But make sure they are comfortable examining you on each area.

   c. **Be appreciative.** It’s a huge favor (very time intensive), and they are not compensated.

3. When Planning your Exam Areas (For Multidisciplinary Track Option)
   a. **Be sure you take at least 6 Systems Science classes.** You have to have a GPA of at least 3.25 in your Systems Science exam area(s) (see Supplemental Rules document).

   b. **Be sure you put at least one Systems Science course in at least one non-SySc area.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYSC</th>
<th>SYSC</th>
<th>DEPT</th>
<th>DEPT</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>SYSC</th>
<th>SYSC</th>
<th>DEPT</th>
<th>DEPT</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>SYSC</th>
<th>SYSC</th>
<th>DEPT</th>
<th>DEPT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
4. When Writing your Comps Exam Proposal
   a. **Note that the Lead Examiners are the ones that are technically on your committee.** This means these people are the ones listed on the first page of your proposal.

   b. **Note that you have flexibility in which classes you put in which exam areas.** You can aim for a balance between theoretical coherence and practicality in how your exam areas are organized. For example, you may want to arrange them according to who you want for lead examiners and by examiner format (e.g., are notes allowed?).

   c. **Ask others who have gone before you.** Much of the info you will need will be a list of topics and sources. If you know of someone else who also ‘comped’ on the same class, ask to borrow their proposal. Professors may be able to direct you to someone, too.

   d. **Comps Proposals must be signed 3 months before you take your exams.** If you are aiming for the fall, it’s best to start setting up a ‘signing meeting’ halfway through spring term.

5. When Preparing for the Signature Meeting
   a. **Anticipate devoting time to Scheduling & Coordinating.** Doodle Polls can be helpful for coordinating schedules – many professors are very busy the 2nd half of spring term. Only lead examiners need to come to the signature meeting, but you can invite contributing examiners to attend if they would like to.

   b. **You can set up the meeting before your proposal is totally finished.** It’s good to send your proposal to your lead (and contributing) examiners 2 weeks before the scheduled meeting.

   c. **Plan to be a host/hostess.** You may be introducing some of the examiners to each other for the first time, and things will go more smoothly if they all get along. Be agreeable and appreciative of all their time and effort on your behalf.

   d. **Ask Examiners about their preferences.** The signature meeting is a good opportunity to confirm what kind of exam formats they like (e.g., “Closed Book, Closed Notes”). You can also ask lead examiners for a deadline for when they would like to have the contributed questions by. Once you know this you can tell the contributing examiners (1) who they should send their questions to, (2) when they should have them submitted by, and (3) how long the questions should take to answer.

   e. **You can polish your proposal after the meeting.** You can still make minor changes to your comps proposal after they have signed the signature page, although most of the details should be hammered out by then.
Format for the written proposal

1. Title Page
   a. “Comprehensive Examination Proposal”
      “Systems Science”
      “PhD Program, Fall 2011”
   b. Your Full Name
   c. “Committee Members”
      Your List of Committee Members (indicate “Chair” for the top one) and their positions
      (e.g., “Professor of Systems Science, Portland State University”). You do NOT include
      contributing examiners on this page
2. Signature Page

a. “The members of the comprehensive examination committee for <Your Name> hereby approve of the comprehensive examination exam proposal submitted herewith.”

b. Lines for the signatures of all lead examiners.

c. “Approved by” and a line for the acting director of SYSC.

The members of the comprehensive examination committee for Teresa Schmidt hereby approve the comprehensive examination proposal submitted herewith.

Wayne Wakeland, Chair

__________________________________________

Martin Zwick

__________________________________________

Tod Bodner

__________________________________________

Bowen McBeth

Approved by

George G. Lendaris, Ph.D., Acting Director
Systems Science Ph.D. Program

Teresa Schmidt 2 12-May-2011
3. Statement of Personal Intent

a. Heading: “Statement of Personal Intent”

b. Introduction:
   “This is my Proposal saying I want to take the comp exams in <term, year>.”

c. Overview of Proposal:
   “I’m going to have these four exam areas, and they will help me do my dissertation and also be successful in my future career!”

d. Description of Proposal:
   Provide a short paragraph on each area – what it encompasses and how it relates to your overall degree.

e. Additional Experiences (Optional):
   Write a paragraph about other experiences (research, teaching, other opportunities) that have added benefit to your degree.

f. Career Plan Check-in:
   Write a paragraph about what your plans are after the exams. Basically, write what your dissertation is going to be like and how it will draw from these exam areas.

g. Conclusion:
   “I am ready to take these exams.”
4. All Relevant Coursework

a. Here you list all the classes you have taken at PSU. Columns are:
   i. Term taken (e.g., Fall, 2008)
   ii. Subject Abbreviation (e.g., SYSC)
   iii. Course Number (e.g., 511)
   iv. Title
   v. Faculty (who the instructor was)
   vi. Number of Credits
   vii. Your grade in the class

b. At the bottom include your total number of credit hours and your cumulative GPA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2008</td>
<td>PSY</td>
<td>614</td>
<td>Advanced Applied Social Psychology</td>
<td>Mankowski</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2008</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>Empirical Methods &amp; Knowledge Building</td>
<td>Brennan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2008</td>
<td>SYSC</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>Systems Approach</td>
<td>Landis</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 2009</td>
<td>PSY</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>Group Process</td>
<td>Mankowski</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2009</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>Social Problem Analysis Assessment</td>
<td>Keller</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 2009</td>
<td>SYSC</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>System Theory</td>
<td>Zwick</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>PSY</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>TDF Brown Bag Development Seminar</td>
<td>Mankowski</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
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<td>SW</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>Social Problem Analysis Intervention</td>
<td>Wokan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
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<td>640</td>
<td>PhD Seminar</td>
<td>Coleman</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>SW</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>Social Problem Analysis Evaluation</td>
<td>Powers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
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<td>631</td>
<td>Introduction to Quant Research Methods</td>
<td>McHale</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 2010</td>
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<td>571</td>
<td>Health Psychology</td>
<td>O'Brian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
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<td>SYSC</td>
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<td>Seminar</td>
<td>Landis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
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<td>TOP Social Networks</td>
<td>Kindermann</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2010</td>
<td>SYSC</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>Seminar</td>
<td>Landis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2010</td>
<td>SYSC</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>621</td>
<td>Univariate Qualitative Methods</td>
<td>Yang</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 2011</td>
<td>PSY</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>Multivariate Qualitative Methods</td>
<td>Becker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 2011</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>Community and Social Networks</td>
<td>Ravash</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 2011</td>
<td>SYSC</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>Seminar</td>
<td>Landis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>PSY</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>Research Design in Applied Psychology</td>
<td>Becker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>SYSC</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>Seminar</td>
<td>Landis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>SYSC</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>Research-Sys Dynamics Modeling</td>
<td>Wokan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Credit Hours: 96
Total GPA: 3.69
5. **Coursework Meeting Systems Science PhD General Requirements**

Total Credit Requirement = 72 Credits

- a. This table is almost the same as the one before. This time you have one extra column called “Credit for Comps.” It says how many of the credits for each class go to your overall requirements of 72 credits.

- b. Seminar does not count towards this overall requirement.

- c. Neither do any other classes that are not featured in your comp exam areas.

- d. This column fits between “Number of Credits” and “Grade” columns.

- e. Include “Total Credit Hours” (72) at the bottom.
6. Coursework Meeting Systems Science Multidisciplinary Track Ph.D. Requirements
(or another track)

a. Here you want to talk to verify you’re your advisor the specific requirements for your track. There is a helpful website (http://www.pdx.edu/sysc/overview-exam-requirements) that contains a table with different track options. This table is also pasted at the end of this document.

b. Mine says:
   i. Courses taken to meet Systems Science PhD Primary Components Requirements (Part A: 16 Credits)
   ii. Courses Taken to Meet Systems Science PhD Seminar Requirements (3 credits)
   iii. Courses Taken to meet Systems Science PhD Secondary Components Requirements (Part B: 8 Credits)
7. Coursework to be examined over in Comprehensives

a. “Exam Area 1: <Your Title>”

b. Examiners
   (e.g., “Dr. Zwick (lead), Dr. Wakeland”)

c. Table listing courses in this exam
   i. Quarter
   ii. Subject
   iii. Course #
   iv. Title
   v. Faculty who taught it
   vi. Number of Credits
   vii. Grade

d. Total Credit Hours in Exam 1 and GPA
   i. To calculate your GPA for a few courses,
      look on Banweb at your trascript: They give you “GPA points” for each course. Divide your total points by your total credit hours to determine your GPA.
   ii. Examples: You got 16 points for two 4-credit courses, and 12 pts for two others. Then $16 + 16 + 12 + 12 = 56$ GPA points
      And $4 + 4 + 4 + 4 = 16$ Credit Hours
      $56 / 16 = 3.5$ GPA for that exam area.

e. Repeat for all other exams...
8. Close-ups of Each Exam

a. “Examination 1: <Your Title>”
   Examiners and Weights:
   “Dr. Zwick (lead, 70%), Dr. Kindermann
   (contributing, 30%)”
   Length: 4 Hours
   Format: “Closed book and closed notes.”
   Different exams may have different formats.
   Some Professors allow you to use a
   computer, notes etc. But all professors in
   one exam area must agree on the format.

b. “Supporting Coursework”
   List of courses– copy this from part 7 above

c. Examination Topics and weighted percents.
   20% is about 45 min., 30% is about 75 min.
   Topic list usually comes from the syllabus.

d. Source Materials
   Your source list also comes from the
   syllabus, usually. List the sources covered in
   each class for this exam. You can check with
   your professor to see whether you can omit
   or alter the list of sources or topics.
   Hint: You can send a list of “all possible
   sources” with some of them struck through
   (like this). That helps your professor catch
   errors of omission and commission.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Part A&quot; Required SySc Courses</th>
<th>&quot;Part B&quot; SySc Courses beyond the &quot;16&quot;</th>
<th>Required SySc 507 Credits</th>
<th>Total SySc Credits</th>
<th>Max Add'l 507 credits that may count towards 72/45</th>
<th>Details regarding two of the other exams beyond Part A</th>
<th>Details regarding 4th Comp Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Ph.D.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Over approved electives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multidisc. track PhD</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Two lead examiners must come from different disciplines (departments) and examine over &gt;= 12 credits within their disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. Ph.D.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>within Dept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Exam 2 is from SySc + approved list</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of these credits must be covered by the comp exams, either in one or two of the other three exams.