VPA Doctoral Field Examinations

For students who enter Fall 2022 and. Students who entered in an earlier year can “opt in” to the new structure or remain with the former.

You must complete exams in two fields, at least one of which must be supervised by a faculty member in the Visual and Performing Arts Program. Students have the option to complete two fields in Visual and Performing Arts or one field in Visual and Performing Arts and a second field under the supervision of a faculty member in another area of the School of Arts and Humanities.

Your fields must be broad fields, which is to say, they must reflect areas of specialization rather than narrowly defined topics. For example, “Film History and Adaptation,” “Queer Theory,” “Performance Studies,” “Contemporary Theatre,” “The History of Photography,” “Documentary History & Theory,” “Feminist Film Studies,” are all broad areas of specialization, whereas “Horror,” “New Materialisms,” or “Cindy Sherman” are not.

The bibliography or reading list for each field must contain between 35-40 items; an entire book, chapters in edited volumes, and articles or essays all count as one “item.” Each reading list should cover the main texts that a scholar or practitioner in the field would be expected to know, including those that reflect your specific interests. In addition, you may provide a supplementary list of visual or audiovisual items that inform, situate, and contextualize your research or creative practice, including film, video, audio, live and recorded performances, alternative forms of electronic and multimedia documents (e.g. hypertext, interactive applications, and media-rich websites, etc.).

Your exams will be evaluated by a three-member committee consisting of the two faculty members who serve as Supervising Professors, one of whom also serves as the Chair, plus a third member who serves as the Examining Professor. The Chair must be a faculty member in the Visual and Performing Arts Program. The second Supervising Professor can be from Visual and Performing Arts or another program in the School of Arts and Humanities. The Examining Professor is responsible for reading and evaluating the two written answers and participating in the oral examination. The Examining Professor does not supervise a field. At least two out of the three members of your committee must be faculty members in the Visual and Performing Arts Program.

In order to prepare for your field exams, you must enroll in at least 3 sections (9 semester credit hours) of Field Exam Preparation courses (one with each member of your field exam committee). At least two of these Field Exam Preparation courses will be VPAS 8305; if one member of your committee is from another area within the School of Arts and Humanities, your third Field Exam Preparation course will be either IDEA 8305 or LIT 8305. Please note that Field Exam Preparation courses are not designed to be “independent study courses” in the way we often understand the term—i.e., a one-on-one tutorial with regularly scheduled meetings, a schedule of readings, and various graded assignments. Instead, Field Exam Preparation courses are designed for you to work independently to master your two reading lists and produce your
two written answers, although your supervisors will be available to assist you throughout the semester.

Field exams are designed to be completed from start to finish in one to two semesters by full-time students. The required and suggested timeline for completion of your field exams is as follows: during the semester in which you complete 36 semester credit hours of graduate-level coursework (typically the fourth semester for full-time students), you will submit the “Examining Committee for Doctoral Field Examinations” form, which will need to be signed by you and each member of your committee. This form identifies the three members of your committee and the two fields you will be studying. You do not need to submit any reading lists at this time.

You may choose to do one semester that is primarily devoted to reading and then write your field exams in the second semester. In that case, you would sign up for 3 sections of Field Exam Preparation (1 with each member of your committee) in semester one during which you and your supervising professor will finalize the reading list and you will embark on your preparation. Then, in semester two, at any time, but no later than the second week during the semester, your supervising professor will give you a question or a list of questions from which you will choose. Once you have received the question(s), you will spend the semester reading the items on your list and writing an answer to the question (20-30 double-spaced pages).

You may consult with your supervisor as often as they agree to communicate with you throughout the process. However, your essays may be submitted as rough drafts for only one round of feedback before the final submission. The final step is an oral examination. You will submit both answers, along with copies of your two reading lists, to all three members of your committee at least two weeks before the date of your oral examination. To schedule your oral examination, you’ll submit the “Request to Schedule Oral Examination for Doctoral Field Examinations” form, which will be signed by you and the Chair of your committee.

If you choose to take the exams in one single semester, you simply compress this timeline and receive your questions no later than the second week of semester one, write your answers, and take your oral exams at the end of that same semester. Essays should be submitted in the same semester that questions are received, although exceptions are possible.