

Notes from 12/8:

1. Goals

What are we testing?

What is the function of the general exam?

- a gateway?
- level of competency in coursework?
- demonstrating critical thinking and understanding of major ideas in the field?
- synthesis across classes?
- test of readiness for dissertation?
- unique contribution to the field?
- to write ch. 2 of dissertation?

One person said that previously exams were much more about recall, but there was question about how authentic recall exams are. Also, as fields "explode," how feasible is it to have exams that cover the general knowledge base of a field?

There was a lot of discussion about the trend toward exams as dissertation preparation, or of becoming more professional vs. academic.

Related to this was the discussion of take-home vs. sit-down exams. It was felt that students perceived take-home exams to be easier. Some stated that students prepare differently for a paper vs. and an exam and wondered whether we have gone too far. They noted that there is a difference between a literature review for an exam and one for publication.

Why do we have exams? What do they measure that is different from the dissertation or coursework? Do we have an obligation to guarantee they have content knowledge?

2. Equity

Equity was discussed a lot, and what exactly it meant. The main discussion centered around the tension between being equitable while at the same time being sensitive to student differences.

- Should the strengths/weakness of the student be taken into account when designing the exam?
- What about international students? One suggestion was to make on question about negotiating cultural differences
- Should exam reflect where they are going (back to another country or to a different type of institution). If so, what does a pass on the exam from OSU mean?
- Should it be tied to the intellectual readiness that varies with different students?
- How do we balance rigor vs tailoring to students' individual needs?
- Should there be a specialist degree for those not planning to become academics?

3. Preparation

- Is a student borderline because of the student or because of how we prepare them? How do we prepare them?
- Are criteria given to the students? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Should committee plan to cover different levels of questions as well as different content areas?
- Should we give practice exams?

4. Grading

Several people commented on the difficulty of grading exams and the need for better criteria, for defining programmatic expectations of the faculty collective.

Other questions were how do you tell someone they failed and should/does writing affect grading.