
I-O PROGRAM DOCTORAL PRELIMINARY EXAM

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PRELIMINARY QUALIFYING EXAM: ASSUMPTIONS, PHILOSOPHY, AND PURPOSE

THE PURPOSE OF PRELIMS

There are two purposes to the preliminary qualifying exam (i.e., “prelim”). First, it serves an assessment function. Each student demonstrates through the prelim that he or she has achieved a sufficient mastery of theory, research, and application within and across the areas of Industrial Psychology, Organizational Psychology, and Quantitative Methods/Measurement to earn the Ph.D. degree. Second, it serves an educational (i.e., developmental) purpose. During the first year of the program, each student gets a broad overview of the IO field in the Industrial Psychology and Organizational Psychology courses. In studying for prelims, each student gets another overview of the field, one befitting an individual at this advanced level. The assumption is that one’s mental model of the field of IO psychology develops during his or her first three years of coursework. The prelim exam preparation is an opportunity to refocus on topics covered, now with the benefit of a more complete understanding of the field as a whole. In other words, the preliminary exam serves as a “capstone” educational event. Studying IO psychology through the lens of a developed mental model should deepen students’ understanding of the field, enable them to identify connections among the topics studied, and enrich their knowledge structures in the process.

ASSUMPTIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES

The SIOP guidelines for education and training at the doctoral level in IO psychology underscore the importance of “both the theory and application associated with all content areas” (SIOP, 1999, p. 2). The SIOP guidelines add that a “dual emphasis on theory and practice is needed regardless of a student’s intended career path” (SIOP, 1999, p. 3). Prior to graduating, all IO students at NC State must demonstrate: a working knowledge of past research and theory in IO psychology; proficiency in using preexisting science, theory, and applications to solve IO problems; and skill in using research methods and measurement to advance the science and practice of IO psychology.

Any question about IO psychology, science or practice, is legitimate fodder for the preliminary qualifying exam. This is based on the view that prior to graduating, each student must demonstrate mastery of the range of competencies needed to function successfully as an IO scientist and practitioner as recommended by SIOP and the program faculty.

Students must not only demonstrate knowledge of each topic area independently; during prelims, they must also demonstrate an integrated understanding of how various topic areas covered by their coursework interrelate.

The preceding requirements pertain to all students in the IO psychology program at NC State, indicating a need for uniformity during the preliminary exam assessment. Prelims will be consistent across students within a cohort just as the majority of coursework is consistent across

students. The preliminary exam process will not be a mechanism for customizing the student's education. Rather, customization will occur through the selection of internship assignments, thesis/dissertation topics, and elective courses.

"Psychologists undertake ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competence" (American Psychological Association, 2002, Ethical Standard 2.03). They have a responsibility to keep abreast of developments in the field. There is an expectation that students will independently keep up with advancements in the field which occur after the conclusion of a given course or courses. During prelims, students are responsible for new material emerging after the conclusion of their coursework.

PRELIM STRUCTURE

During the 2006 & 2007 faculty retreats, the program faculty met and agreed to standardize the format of the preliminary exam. What follows is the result of these deliberations.

TIMELINE

- The written exam will take place on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of the first week (Week 1) of the [three-week prelim process](#). Currently, the IO program requires that the written portion of the preliminary examination be given during the fourth *full* week of the fall semester with the oral portion of the examination to take place during the sixth full week.
- Thursday and Friday of Week 1 and all of Week 2 will be dedicated to grading.
- Students will receive official notice of their written exam performance no later than 5:00 PM Friday of Week 2.
- Students will schedule their Oral Exam for some point during Week 3. See the Oral Exam section of this document for details.

WRITTEN EXAM

- All eligible students (students that have successfully completed the MS degree requirements) will take the exam in the fall of their 4th year in the program (with exceptions for extraordinary circumstances).
- No exams will be offered in spring or summer semesters.
- All students concurrently taking the exam will take the same exam (i.e., the exam will be standardized and not custom tailored for individual students)
- Students will take the three-part exam on three consecutive days, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, with one exam per day during Week 1.
- Students must answer all questions on each exam.

- If students are participating in an official minor, they should be advised that there may be an additional requirement through the minor granting department (e.g., Statistics).
- Time will be limited to 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM on the examination days.
- Students will not be allowed to consult any resources, including one another, books, notes, the internet, etc., during the examination.
- The I-O program written exam will be administered in an unaltered format for all I-O students, regardless of the presence or number of committee members from outside the I-O area.
- All students scheduled to take the exam on or after Fall of 2011 will take the standardized exam.

THE EXAM ITSELF

- The exam will be composed of three parts with one part per day. These parts will be:
 - Industrial Psychology (e.g., Job Analysis, Selection, Training, Criterion Development)
 - Organizational Psychology (e.g., Motivation, Leadership, Counterproductive, OD and Change)
 - Research Design, Quantitative Methods, and Measurement
- Questions will be drawn from content from the entire field. We suggest that that students be familiar with the content areas of I-O Psychology as recommended by SIOP: <http://www.siop.org/PhDGuidelines98.aspx>
- Each of the three sections will be composed of 6 questions, corresponding roughly to the breakdown below, though there may be some deviation from this as needed:
 - 2 integration or theory questions (potentially integrating within/across all I-O/Methods)
 - 2 applied/practice questions
 - 2 method or analytical questions

GRADING

- Two faculty will grade each item
- Faculty will assign a score ranging from 1 to 9 for each question on each student's exam.
- In the case of serious disagreement (i.e., 4 or more grade points where one of the scores is below 5) among faculty members regarding the quality of any one student answer, a third grader will be sought out.
 - The two faculty graders can meet to discuss for specialized content areas in which no suitable 3rd rater is available.
- Grade calculation:
 - For each section (i.e., set of 6 questions), grades will be computed by first computing an average score (across graders) for each of the 6 questions.
 - Next, the average of the 6 question grades will be computed (i.e., section grade).
 - This section grade must be *at least a 5.00* to be considered passing for that section.

- In order to pass the exam:
 - None of the three sections of the exam may receive a score lower than 3.50.
 - No more than one of the sections of the exam may receive failing grades (>3.49 <4.99).
 - The average score across the three sections must be 5.00 or higher.
- Failing scores:
 - If a student fails the exam as a whole, they will repeat the entire process the following fall.
 - Should students fail one of the three sections of the exam (with a grade of >3.49 < 5.00) but pass the written exam, the highest possible final determination after the oral exam will be conditional pass.

FACULTY ROLES

- The exam will be written by the entire I-O Faculty, or a multi-person committee drawn exclusively from the I-O faculty (to be determined by the I-O faculty).
- The I-O faculty exam coordinator will:
 - Select the final set of examination questions from those composed by the program faculty at large. The final set of questions must be approved by a majority of the I-O program faculty.
 - Identify and assign potential raters for each question (and 3rd raters for tiebreaker purposes).
 - Be responsible for calculating scores and disseminating this info to the faculty.
 - Ensure that the identity of the exam takers is not known to the other faculty.
- At least two program faculty will grade each question blind to the student identity when possible (an exception would be the case in which only one student is taking the exam, or in some cases in which the exam coordinator may know the identity of the student).
 - When grading an examination question, faculty should grade responses of all students to that question.
 - Generally speaking, the author of the exam question is expected to serve as a grader of all students' responses to that question.

ORAL EXAM

TIMING

- Oral exams can be scheduled for any time during Week 3.
- Students will get the oral exam assignment exactly one week prior to the oral exam.

- Students may or may not know whether they passed the written exam when they receive the oral assignment.
- The oral examination will not be allowed to go forward if the students did not pass the written exam (even though they may have already received the oral assignment).

CONTENT

- The oral exam will not include questions related to written prelim content, as currently is the case.
- The oral exam will consist of a role play that includes a short presentation on the part of the student. Faculty will role-play members of the organization being addressed by the student. Specifics of roles will be provided to students in their instructions.
- Each student will receive assignments targeting areas outside of his or her area of focus or that otherwise is most developmental for the student.
- Faculty will not help students with the exam. Faculty are in character from the time the questions are given to students.

MISCELLANEOUS

- The prelim coordinator will be responsible for coordinating the writing of the oral exam.
- The student's advisor will not write the oral question for the student.
- The prelim coordinator will be responsible for ensuring all questions are of equal difficulty and that the rest of the faculty has input in the process.
- Oral questions can only come from members of the university community, but may draw on applied experiences of faculty, alumni, and others.
- Students will be allowed to draw on any resource they wish, including other students, alumni, etc. in preparation of their oral exam.
- Oral exam grading will be based on the committee's qualitative assessment of the student's performance during the oral exam.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (2002). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Inc. (1999). *Guidelines for education and training at the doctoral level in industrial/organizational psychology*. Bowling Green, OH: Author.

SIOP CONTENT AREAS AS OF 11.29.10

Subject to Change by SIOP without Notice. Current list available at:

<http://www.siop.org/PhDGuidelines98.aspx>

1. Consulting and Business Skills
2. Ethical, Legal, and Professional Contexts of I-O Psychology
3. Fields of Psychology
4. History and Systems of Psychology
5. Research Methods
6. Statistical Methods/Data Analysis
7. Attitude Theory, Measurement, and Change
8. Career Development
9. Consumer Behavior
10. Criterion Theory and Development
11. Health and Stress in Organizations
12. Human Performance/Human Factors
13. Individual Assessment
14. Individual Differences
15. Job Evaluation and Compensation
16. Job/Task Analysis and Classification
17. Judgment and Decision Making
18. Leadership and Management
19. Organization Development
20. Organization Theory
21. Performance Appraisal and Feedback
22. Personnel Recruitment, Selection, and Placement
23. Small Group Theory and Team Processes
24. Training: Theory, Program Design, and Evaluation
25. Work Motivation