

**Texas A&M University  
Department of  
Psychological and Brain  
Sciences**

**Industrial/Organizational  
Psychology Area**

**Comprehensive Exam  
Policy Statement**

Revised August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
[Preceding version was dated June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021]

## 1. Effective Date

Revisions (which are highlighted) reflected in this version of the *Industrial/Organizational (I/O) Psychology Area Comprehensive Exam Policy Statement* represent updates to the previous version of this document which was dated June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The changes go into effect with the August 2023 administration of the exam.

## 2. Objective

The primary objective of the I-O Psychology Area Comprehensive Exam is to determine if PhD students have adequate mastery of the subject matter in the field. The policy stated in this document follows the official guidelines for the required Preliminary Examination established by the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies (see the **Preliminary Examination** section of the most recent edition of the *Graduate and Professional Catalog* < <http://catalog.tamu.edu/> >). The I/O area will require all students entering the PhD program to take this area comprehensive exam to fulfill the written portion of the Preliminary Exam requirement of the Graduate College. Students should consult the most recent edition of the *Graduate and Professional Catalog* (< <http://catalog.tamu.edu/> >) for eligibility requirements. This document provides information about the I/O area policy on comprehensive exams to assist students in their preparation.

The faculty expect students to successfully complete the comprehensive exam requirement by the end of their 4<sup>th</sup> year in the program. Students who fail to meet this requirement will be considered as not being in good standing and not making satisfactory progress towards the completion of the PhD degree requirements.

## 3. Written Exam Content and Format

The written exam will be area-based and will be constructed by the members of the I/O faculty. A new exam will be developed for each administration. There will be three major content areas covered on the written exam—quantitative and research methods, personnel psychology, and organizational psychology. Consistent with the philosophy that the exam is intended to assess mastery of the essential subject matter of I/O psychology, the exam will **not** be based on a specific reading list. However, in preparing for the exam, students may want to obtain the most recent syllabi and associated reading lists of the pertinent courses and also review recent issues of the major journals in the field. Thus, students should note that this exam is *not* designed to cover *only* material that has been specifically covered in previous graduate courses. Most of the content will, of course, be included in I/O courses, but there may be material covered in other areas where the student may not have had formal course work.

The exam uses an essay format. The exam will consist of three sections—quantitative and research methods, personnel psychology, and organizational psychology and it will be administered in three blocks over two consecutive weeks—Monday/Tuesday (quantitative and research methods), Thursday/Friday (personnel psychology), Monday/Tuesday (organizational psychology). For each block, questions will be distributed at 8:00 am of the first day with answers due no later than 11:59 pm of the second day. There will be four (4) questions for each section and students will be required to answer all questions. The answer to each question will

be typed and should **not** exceed four (4) pages of text (double-spaced). It is expected that all citations in an answer will be referenced. The 4-page limit does **not** include the references.

The exam will, of course, be open book.

#### **4. Administration of Written Exam**

One member of the I/O faculty will coordinate the scheduling and administration of the written exam each year. The written exam will be offered twice each academic year—in August and January. Pertaining to specific administration dates, the first block will commence two weeks before the start of the specified term (i.e., fall for the August administration and spring for the January administration) ensuring the exam is completed before the start of classes.

Students must declare their candidacy for a specified administration to the faculty exam coordinator 8 weeks in advance of the scheduled exam date. Unless it is due to unusual circumstances (e.g., death in the family, university excused absences), a student who fails to take the exam upon declaring their candidacy will be considered to have failed the exam.

#### **5. Grading of Written Exam**

Written exams will be graded by members of the I/O faculty. The grading process will be coordinated by the faculty exam coordinator. The grading scale for each question will be as follows:

4 = Clear Pass. Very complete, comprehensive, and well integrated answer. Demonstrates clear mastery of knowledge of content area. Consistently uses the appropriate professional terminology. Regularly integrates and cites supporting literature. Approaches questions and problems critically.

3 = Marginal Pass. A moderately complete and comprehensive answer. Demonstrates moderate knowledge of content area. Displays few gaps in knowledge and understanding of concepts and principles. Integrates and cites supporting literature.

2 = Marginal Fail. Inconsistent in use of professional terminology. Makes small critical errors. Displays some gaps in knowledge and understanding of concepts and principles. Limited integration and citing of supporting literature.

1 = Clear Fail. Displays large gaps in knowledge. Demonstrates very limited, no knowledge, or erroneous knowledge of content area. Shows limited understanding of concepts and principles. Makes major and fatal critical errors; does not cite, mention, or integrate supporting literature. Does not make use of professional terminology.

To ensure reliability, at least 2 faculty members will grade each question. If there is a score difference of 1.00 or greater between any 2 raters for a question for a candidate, the I/O faculty will meet to discuss the rating.

Question scores (ranging from 1 to 4) *within* each section (quantitative and research methods, personnel psychology, and organizational psychology) will then be averaged to provide 3 section scores. To pass a section, the student must (a) score at least a 3.0 on two of the questions in the section, **and** (b) obtain an average score of at least 3.0 for the section. Furthermore, in the case where the student passes 2 out of 3 sections, to advance to the oral exam, the student must have a minimum score of 1.5 on each of the four items in the failed section.

In the event that an answer is **not** provided for a question, no score will be assigned to that question. However, the denominator for computing the average score for that section will still be a 4.

The result of this grading process will be 1 of 4 possible outcomes:

- Outcome #4 = Pass 3 of 3 sections
- Outcome #3 = Pass 2 of 3 sections
- Outcome #2 = Pass 1 of 3 sections
- Outcome #1 = Pass 0 of 3 sections

If **Outcome #4** or **Outcome #3** occurs, then the student will schedule and take his/her oral examination. Again, note that to advance to the oral exam, the student must have a minimum score of 1.5 on each of the four items in the failed section.

If **Outcome #2** occurs, then the student will be required to retake the written exam in the two failed sections at the next administration of the comprehensive exam. However, the oral exam will cover all three sections.

If **Outcome #1** occurs, no oral examination will be scheduled and the student will be given one automatic full re-examination at the next administration of the comprehensive exam.

In accordance with the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology > Program Requirements > Retake of Failed Preliminary Examination policy articulated in the *Graduate and Professional Catalog* to the effect that "a student who has failed the preliminary examination may be given one re-examination" (emphasis added), this revision to the program comprehensive exam policy document simply clarifies and articulates that commencing with the August 2023 administration, students will be permitted only one (full or partial) retake of the exam. Furthermore, because passing the comprehensive exam is a requirement to remain in the program, in the event of a Fail grade on either a full or partial re-examination, the student will not be able to remain the program as per the *Graduate and Professional Catalog*.

## 6. The Written Exam Questions

The written exam questions will be conceptual and integrative in nature, as opposed to items that simply ask for a definition of a concept. See the sample exam items in Section 9 of this document for examples.

The answer to each question should **not** exceed four (4) pages of typed text (double-spaced). It is expected that all citations in an answer will be referenced. The 4-page limit does **not** include the references.

## 7. Oral Exam Content, Format, Administration, and Grading

Consistent with the *Graduate and Professional College*, the format of the area's comprehensive exam consists of both a written and oral component (see the **Preliminary Examination** section of the most recent edition of the *Graduate and Professional Catalog* <<http://catalog.tamu.edu>>). So, when students successfully complete the written exam, an oral exam will be scheduled and administered. The I/O faculty expect that the oral exam will be administered **within the same semester** as that in which the written exam is taken. Thus, students are strongly encouraged to schedule the oral exam (two hours) as soon as possible after the announcement of the written exam results. Note that the administration of the oral exam is contingent on successful performance on the written exam. The coordinator of the I/O area exam will report the results of the written exam directly to the student and the chair of the student's advisory committee. Students will be provided with their written test results as soon as the grading has been completed.

The oral exam is unstructured, that is, there is not a list of predetermined questions. So, like the written exam, the student should be prepared to speak to and discuss any issues in the field. That said, it would be prudent for the student to review their answers to the written questions in advance of the oral exam, paying particular attention to their weakest answers.

It should be emphasized that the oral exam should not be considered to be or approached as a mere formality regardless of the students' performance on the written exam. It is possible for a student to fail the oral exam and thus the comprehensive exam even after obtaining passing scores on the written component. Grading of oral exam performance is on a pass/fail basis. The outcome of the oral exam determines whether the student has successfully passed the comprehensive exam or not. In the event of a failure of the oral exam, decisions regarding any further re-examinations will be as per the *Graduate and Professional Catalog*.

Because it is possible, although certainly not common, that an I/O student could have an advisory committee composed of faculty members outside of the I/O area, it is required that a minimum of two I/O faculty members be present during the oral exam. Thus, it would be advantageous from an administrative point of view for I/O students to ensure that their advisory committees contain at least two I/O faculty. The oral exam will not include questions and discussion regarding the dissertation proposal.

Students are not permitted to bring notes or other material to the oral exam unless expressively asked to do so. Students will be furnished with a copy of their answers at the exam.

## **8. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy**

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Resources in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit <https://disability.tamu.edu>. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

## **9. Past Questions and Sample Questions**

All past comprehensive exam questions are in the public domain. Thus, although the I/O faculty do not distribute past questions to candidates, to make the purpose of the written exam more concrete and to aid in their preparation, students are encouraged to obtain and review these questions. As a general rule, it is the practice of the faculty to not ask article-specific questions.

Some sample questions are presented below for illustrative purposes.

## **QUANTITATIVE and RESEARCH METHODS**

1. One of the guiding principles of research with human participants is a cost-benefit ratio, such that the benefit to participants and society clearly must outweigh costs to participants. Many social psychologists argue that deception in true experiments benefits society by providing internally valid research, but IRBs increasingly are less amenable to deception research because of costs to participants. Outline what you believe are the best pro and con arguments for each position. Illustrate your points using a tradition that often relies upon deception research (e.g., stereotype threat).
2. Here is a small dataset. You hypothesize that Z moderates the association between X and Y in these data. Test this hypothesis and report your results, using text, figures, and/or tables as needed.

## **PERSONNEL**

1. Some would say that general mental ability (GMA) is the single best predictor of job performance. (a) Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Be sure to discuss the advantages and disadvantages to using tests of GMA for selection purposes. (b) What other constructs might one consider for selection purposes? Describe at least three constructs other than GMA that could be used for selection. Be sure to provide a brief summary of what the empirical literature has to say about using these constructs in selection testing.

2. In response to a recent rise in reported on-the-job injuries and worker compensation claims, a small bottling factory has hired you to help them develop a new safety training program. (a) Describe the training strategies/principles you would apply in developing this program. (b) Describe how you will evaluate the training program, including a research design and the variables you would measure. Be sure to explain why this research design is appropriate and useful. Assume you have all the participants you would need for sufficient power. (c) How will you ensure that your program is successful?

## **ORGANIZATIONAL**

1. The following position has been advanced regarding the construct of job satisfaction: "Job satisfaction is not affect and it is time we stopped saying it is." (a) Explain the meaning of this assertion. (b) Describe the literature that supports this statement (or fails to support this statement). (c) Demonstrate how streams of research on job attitudes over the past 30 years reflect the impact of this statement.
  
2. (a) What is organizational commitment? (b) What is organizational identification? (c) How do these constructs differ? (d) What is their relationship? Be sure to draw on both empirical findings as well as theory to describe the relationship between organizational commitment and organizational identification.