

AFRICAN AMERICAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES (AAAS)

Policy Statement -The Oral Exam

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When Did AAAS Establish the Oral Exam?

The introduction of a “third” exam (taken after the first and second “general” and “concentration” exams, and before the fourth exam, the “dissertation proposal defense”) was ratified by the AAAS Core Faculty in April 2010. The oral exam would be an option for doctoral students who as of April 2010 had a handbook which did not mandate the oral exam; but the oral exam would be mandatory for incoming doctoral students who hold 2010-11 and subsequent year doctoral handbooks which incorporated the new oral exam policy into the doctoral exam structure at AAAS. The current third year doctoral student cohorts are the first set of AAAS doctoral students who are required to take the oral exam.

Why Did AAAS Establish the Oral Exam and What is the Objective of the Oral Exam?

Oral exams were introduced as part of the doctoral exam structure at AAAS to strengthen the quality of graduate students’ academic and professional skills beyond mere “written” knowledge of the discipline and thus to further expand students’ delivery of such knowledge through oral and digital communications presentation. Orals would prepare students for the required public dissemination of disciplinary knowledge at conferences and workshops, but would especially help students compete for academic employment through the academic job talk as well as prepare students for the delivery of the deep content of and the public speaking skills required for teaching in the African American and African Studies’ discipline.

How is the Oral Exam Organized/Scheduled? Two Options: Independent or Fused

Guidance committees directed by committee chairs may organize “oral” exams by scheduling an “independent” oral exam immediately (3 weeks) after the completion of the Concentration exam whereby committee members will query, quiz, debate doctoral students who have passed both exams on deeper directions, silences, absences, clarifications, defenses of their answers.

A second option is to schedule a “fused oral/proposal defense” exam long proposal defense exam (at least a three hour exam) whereby half of the exam is dedicated to questions committee members may have drawn from the General and Concentration exam responses as envisioned above; while the second half is dedicated to defending the proposal dissertation. If this is the option selected, “fused oral” exams may be scheduled within a period of three months after the student has passed his/her Concentration exam, but candidates must be prepared to be rigorously assessed on *both* the General and Concentration exams as well as the Proposal Defense Exam.

This will give the candidate enough time to prepare for the proposal defense paper which should be at least 25-30 pages and well researched, presenting a compelling dissertation research objective, a thorough lit review, methodology and research design, and a plan of action through a table of contents chapter preview/overview.