General Information

Purpose:

The Preliminary Written Examination is a comprehensive examination in which students demonstrate the ability to integrate ideas and produce original thought, and to demonstrate the potential to contribute to scholarship in their field of study.

Although coursework on the degree program is approved and reviewed by the committee as they develop the questions for the exam, students are not re-tested on course content. Students are expected to integrate and build on knowledge acquired from coursework.

The possible results:

Pass. Satisfactory performance on 90% of the exam is a pass.

Re-write a question or section. A minimum of 70% of the exam must be passed to qualify for a re-write. The re-write must take place within 30 days, and must be in written form. Only one re-write is permitted.

Not eligible for re-write. The student is discontinued from the program.

What you should know:

You must demonstrate both depth and breadth in your answers.

Theory:

- What are the major theories in this field of study and who developed them?
- How do they compare? Critique both similarities and differences.
- How can they be used to develop a research project?
- Reference major scholars in this field, beyond those discovered in coursework.

Examples of Theory Questions:

1. Select one of the major theories used in your field of research or practice. Describe it, explain the basic assumptions that underlie it, discuss its usefulness, what types of
problems it is used to solve, and what are its benefits and limitations. Give examples where possible.

2. In the development of theory, one of the significant elements is a concept. Conceptual meanings develop over time and from different points of view. Taking any concept in this field, compare and contrast how at least two different perspectives have developed in the literature.

**Methods:**

- What are the major research methods used in this field of study and who developed them?
- How do they compare? Critique both similarities and differences.
- How can they be used to develop a research project?
- Reference major scholars in this field, beyond those discovered in coursework.

Examples of Methods Questions:

1. Develop four different research questions related to your topic and for each question, identify the research method you would use (should be somewhat different for each question). For each question, also identify the type and number of subjects, and a rationale for using these subjects.

2. Here are three articles. Choose one to read in depth, and summarize the article. Describe the strengths and shortfalls of the article. Extend the article’s methodology or concepts to your own research, and describe how it supports or challenges your work.

**Concentration:**

- Provide an overview of the major work in your field.
- Discuss significant developments in this field of study.
- What is the future of this field of study?
- Reference major scholars in this field, beyond those discovered in coursework.

Examples of Concentration Questions:

1. Speculate where the field representing your area of expertise might go in the future and why. As you look forward into the future, what new topics will be important for us to consider, and why? Will we create new methodologies? If so, what might they look like? This question is being left open in order for you to: a) show your creativity; b) provide a logical explanation for the direction your creativity is taking; and, c) and the coherent organization of your thoughts.

2. Identify possible stages in the design process. Develop a course outline for a class in design methods where these stages are explored. What would be required of the students at each stage? What questions would you ask of the students to help them to develop an awareness of the process of design?
**How to study for the preliminary written exam:**

- **Practice answering questions.** Typically, students select one question per four-hour period to answer. Select a sample question from the Track-specific questions included in this information packet and answer it within a four-hour period.

- **Talk to peers** about their experience with the preliminary written exam.

- **Work with a peer who is also preparing for the Preliminary Written Examination,** writing answers to sample questions, then discussing how the answers could be refined and strengthened.

- **Citations.** This is a closed-book examination, and quotations and full citations are not required. Confer with your adviser and committee regarding expectations for citations.

**How the exam is set up:**

**Format of the Examination**

Two formats are available:

- **Closed-Book,** no access to course materials, library resources, books, journal articles, internet, and the like.
- **Open-Book,** access to course materials, notes, books, library materials, and the like.

The format of the examination is determined by the student. It is the student’s responsibility to provide written documentation of any disabilities that may affect the student’s ability to complete the examination as outlined so that accommodation may be made by the examining committee.

**Expectations for the Examination**

Students writing the exam are expected to adhere to University definitions regarding scholastic dishonesty and plagiarism. Review definitions in the University of Minnesota student conduct code [http://writing.umn.edu/tww/preventing/definitions.html](http://writing.umn.edu/tww/preventing/definitions.html)

- A minimum of two questions and no more than four questions are answered for each part of the examination. For each part of the examination, at least one question more than the minimum number of questions that the student is asked to answer is supplied. Example: If two answers are required, three questions will be supplied to the student so that the student has some choice in determining which questions he/she will answer on the examination.

February 2014
• The committee may require that one specific question be answered within a part of the examination and then provide a choice among remaining questions for the student to answer.

**General expectations for student performance on the written examination.**

• The responses must include appropriate in-text citations.
• Responses should be concise and written in a professional manner.
• Responses should demonstrate depth and breadth of knowledge across the area of specialization along with integration and syntheses of knowledge.
• The committee may provide guidelines as to how many hours each question may take a student to answer but it is ultimately the student’s decision to allocate their time.

**Closed-Book Option:** The written examination is scheduled in three sessions within a five-day period. The location of the examination is in a private space within McNeal hall. No materials may be brought to the examination. The student has a total of eight hours per session to develop and write their responses.

• The student receives the examination questions and an external storage device at the beginning of each day.
• The student turns in the storage device with the responses at the end of the day to the graduate program assistant. At the end of the final session, the graduate program assistant prints a hard copy of the examination and sends the completed examination electronically to the student and the adviser.

**Open-Book Option:** The written examination is scheduled over five consecutive days. The location where the examination will be written is determined by the student.

• The student is given all the examination questions at the beginning of the first day of the examination and an external storage device
• The student turns in the external storage device before 4:30 pm on the last examination day. The program assistant prints a hard copy of the examination and sends the completed examination electronically to the student and the advisor.
• This option requires that the student supply complete references for in-text citations.
• This option requires that the student provide an extensive coverage of literature relevant to responding to questions.
• This option requires that the response be correctly formatted according to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th Edition*.
• Due to the open access nature of resources for this option, expectations are that responses are extensively supported and edited.
How the exam is evaluated:

1. Directly after the final day of your examination, your adviser distributes your examination to the committee members, usually comprised of the faculty in the Design Graduate Program, although external committee members may be involved as well.

2. The committee has four weeks to read the results of your examination. Each committee member reads your responses to the questions.

3. The adviser contacts the committee members for their appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of your responses. The committee determines if you have passed, if you need to re-write, or if you are not eligible to re-write the exam.

4. Your adviser contacts you with the information after your committee has discussed the results of your examination.
   a. **Pass.** Satisfactory performance on 90% of the exam is a pass.
   b. **Re-write a question or section.** A minimum of 70% of the exam must be passed to qualify for a re-write. The re-write must take place within 30 days, and must be in written form. Only one re-write is permitted.
   c. **Not eligible for re-write.** The student is discontinued from the program.

For more information, see the Preliminary Written Examination policy of the Design Graduate Program Handbook, Section D: Doctoral Degree, pages 9-12: http://dha.design.umn.edu/programs/grad/documents/DesignSectionD_000.pdf