

SLIS

Student Guide

To the Comprehensive Examination

for the Master of Library and Information Studies Degree

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School of Library and Information Studies
University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma

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Introduction

The School of Library and Information Studies seeks to provide professional education for persons preparing for a career in the information professions, to advance professional knowledge by stimulating research, and to encourage a creative attitude toward effective service in libraries and other information agencies and professional activities. Grades received in course work constitute one measure of a student's performance in professional education. The comprehensive examination constitutes another.

Importantly, the University of Oklahoma requires an end-of-program assessment (for SLIS students, the three end-of-program assessment options are a thesis, a comprehensive examination, or a portfolio) for completion of a graduate degree. Therefore, successful completion of one of these three options is required of all persons who graduate with a master's degree from OU SLIS. This student guide applies specifically to the comprehensive examination.

Purpose and Philosophy of The Comprehensive Examination

The objectives of the comprehensive examination are 1) to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organize and synthesize knowledge developed throughout the program, 2) to test knowledge in specific subject areas, 3) to test the ability to solve problems, 4) to test the ability to establish and defend positions on current issues, trends, and problems in information and library studies.

The comprehensive examination requires each student candidate, who chooses this non-thesis end-of-program assessment, to write a research paper as a response to the examination's single question. The examination is designed to test mastery of a body of knowledge, not merely recall of specific factual data. Students are expected to use not only the information learned in their course work, but also information from a variety of learning experiences, such as reading the professional literature and other appropriate activities. Responses should demonstrate an ability to organize thoughts into coherent narratives. Further, students are expected to seek, organize, evaluate, apply information to problem solving, and to communicate a synthesized understanding of a solution that meets professional needs and expectations.

Development of the Examination

SLIS faculty members collectively generate a new question each semester. Topics for the examination are not "course specific" but allow the student an opportunity to integrate content from several course areas and additional appropriate learning experiences. The question focuses on six areas identified by the American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation that all students are expected to master. These are the:

- Philosophical and theoretical foundations of our field
- Organization and control of information resources
- Provision and analysis of user services
- Management of information agencies
- Acquisition of and access to information
- Application of research or evaluation methods within our field.

The successful student will be able to synthesize knowledge across these areas.

Eligibility for Examination

The single question examination should be taken in the last semester of the student's program unless the student is graduating in the summer. If a student plans to complete coursework for the degree in a summer term, the student may take the exam in the preceding spring semester or wait until the following fall semester. A student must be enrolled in at least two hours of graduate work during the semester that the comprehensive examination is taken and be admitted to candidacy for the master's degree (see "Admission to Candidacy/Program of Graduate Work" in "Registration for the Comprehensive Examination" below). A student must have completed 75% of the courses on the submitted program plan.

All required ("core") courses must be satisfactorily completed or in progress during the semester during which the examination is taken.

Incomplete (I) grades from previous semesters must be removed within two weeks in advance of the date of the comprehensive examination. If an Incomplete is received in the semester during which the exam is taken, it must be removed within six months of the end of the semester, or the exam will have to be retaken. The comprehensive exam may be retaken only once. Students who fail to pass the comprehensive examination in two attempts will not receive the degree.

Registration for the Comprehensive Examination

Admission to Candidacy/Program of Study (required):

Students will be notified on the student listserv and through the student digest to access and complete the Program of Study/Admission to Candidacy form near the beginning of the semester BEFORE they plan to take the comprehensive examination (fall or spring). Students planning to take the exam in a spring semester should complete the Program of Study/Admission to Candidacy form early in the previous fall semester. Students planning to take the exam in a fall semester should complete the Program of Study/Admission to Candidacy form early in the previous spring semester. Generally, the form will be due in the SLIS office by the third Friday in September for those taking the exam in the spring semester, and the third Friday of March for those taking the exam in the fall. Students will be informed of specific deadlines. The form is in PDF format and students must complete the form, print it, sign it, and submit it to the SLIS office prior to the stated deadline. The exam is not offered in summer terms. Students planning a summer graduation should take the exam in the spring semester prior to the planned summer graduation.

[Program of Study Form for MLIS/BAIS Accelerated Program](#)

[Program of Study Form for MLIS](#)

Application for Graduation (required):

Students will be notified on the student listserv and through the student digest to complete and submit an application for graduation in the semester in which they complete all degree requirements. This is usually the semester in which the exam is taken, but it could be a subsequent semester if the student is completing coursework after the exam is completed. Apply for graduation through your one.ou.edu account.

Schedule for the Examination

The comprehensive examination is administered two times each year, once during the fall semester and once during the spring semester. During the fall semester, the administration of the exam will begin at 12:00 noon (CST) on Thursday of the eighth week of classes and end at 9:00 AM (CST) on the following Monday; the spring administration of the exam will begin at 12:00 noon (CST) on Thursday of the week immediately after spring break and end at 9:00 AM (CST) on the following Monday. If any of these dates are on holidays, the exam will begin on Thursday of the next week. The examination will begin with its distribution to students through a Canvas site in which all students taking the examination will have been enrolled prior to the exam. Answers to the exam must be submitted through the Canvas dropbox by 9:00 AM (CST) the following Monday. The comprehensive examination dates are posted to the student listservs.

An examination paper that is submitted late **will be counted as a failed first attempt. An examination paper that is not submitted at all will be counted as a failed attempt. Neither of these failures will permit the student to request a verbal re-examination.**

Students may make two attempts at passing the exam, including a verbal re-exam if the written exam is assessed as not passing. If the exam is not passed on the 2nd attempt, the student will not receive the degree.

Structure of the Examination

A single question examination is developed by members of the SLIS faculty for each spring and fall administration of the comprehensive examination. The examination is a written, take-home endeavor which the student is to access through Canvas on a Thursday at 12:00 noon (CST) and return to the Canvas dropbox the following Monday by 9 AM (CST). Each student will receive and answer one question. All students receive the same question. The question may provide an expected framework for the response or allow the framework to develop from the student's individual approach to the response. Questions are not distributed prior to the time of the examination.

Orientation for Students

FAQs about the examination and this guide are provided on the SLIS Web site. Students should consult with their advisors prior to the comprehensive examination, though no consultation with faculty may take place during the examination period or prior to the release of examination results.

Preparing for the Examination

If a student is participating in the comprehensive examination process, the Graduate College requires that the student be enrolled in at least two hours of graduate credit.

Although the comprehensive examination question is not based upon subject coverage in any one class, students preparing for the examination are strongly encouraged to review course objectives, course notes, texts, and supplementary readings, particularly those from the required courses within the program. Students should not try to memorize specific facts, titles of materials, or dates; however, they should:

- Consult the School's published [student learning outcomes](#).
- Review the current journal literature in library and information studies, scan major LIS journals for the past two or three years, and read selected articles that report trends in the profession, general concepts, and the ideas of leaders in the profession.

- Possess competency in the use of the University of Oklahoma Libraries' information resources (<http://libraries.ou.edu>) or the OU Tulsa Library information resources (<http://library.tulsa.ou.edu>).
- Keep your schedule open in order to focus on the exam.
- Read the examination question carefully, being certain to respond to all of its aspects.
- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the literature as well as abilities to synthesize knowledge and to conduct research that solves information problems.
- Provide reference in the style of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition) in support of statements, evidence, statements, evidence and positions taken.
- Review best practices for outlining and writing academic essays.

The comprehensive examination must be a product of individual endeavor. Therefore, upon submission of the completed examination, students will be accepting the following statement:

“This paper represents my own academic work. I have applied my own knowledge, research skills, and endeavors to this new and original work, without discussing or sharing questions or responses. I have not consulted the OU Writing Center during the administration of this examination. I understand that noncompliance with the process may result in failure of the examination. I have utilized the spelling and grammar check functions of my word processing software and the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edition.”

Students who disregard the University of Oklahoma's policies on academic integrity risk failure of the examination. Students are strongly encouraged to review these policies at <http://www.ou.edu/integrity>

Writing the Examination

At noon on Thursday of the week of the exam, each student will receive (through Canvas) a broad-based comprehensive examination question. The question will address some aspect of or problem within the information professions. Students will then have the opportunity to conduct an information search and literature review relevant to the question. The results of that search, the student's expertise, and the student's knowledge of a specific area of interest should inform the answer to the question.

Students, if they have not yet done so, should analyze carefully the school's stated objectives for the comprehensive examination, which are to:

1. Give students an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organize and synthesize knowledge developed throughout the program
2. Test knowledge in specific subject areas
3. Test ability to solve problems
4. Test the ability to establish and defend positions on current issues, trends, and problems in information and library studies.

A successful student will demonstrate mastery of these objectives.

The question to be answered will focus on the American Library Association Committee on Accreditation's standards, specifically the "six identified areas that all students are expected to master":

- Philosophical and theoretical foundations of our field
- Organization and control of information resources
- Provision and analysis of user services
- Management of information agencies
- Acquisition of and access to information
- Application of research or evaluation methods within our field.

A successful student will be able to demonstrate a synthesis of knowledge in these areas.
Specific instructions are:

1. Students may access the examination question by 12:00 noon (CST) on the Thursday during the week that the exam is offered.
2. Students should carefully review the University of Oklahoma's policies on academic integrity or risk failure of the examination.
3. Students will follow instructions regarding identification.
4. The paper will have a minimum of 2,000 and a maximum of 3,000 words (not including the title page, references, and appendices).
5. The paper will be double-spaced in Times New Roman (12-point font) and word-processed.
6. The paper will be appropriately documented.
7. The required style manual to be used is the Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th edition).
8. The paper should be submitted as a Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) document. The completed paper must be in the Canvas dropbox by 9:00 AM (CST) on the Monday following the receipt of the examination question. As previously noted, an exam paper that is late, or an exam paper that is not submitted at all, will constitute a failure on this attempt at the exam and will not permit the student to request a verbal re-examination. Students may make two attempts at passing the exam, including the verbal re-examinations (with the exception of failed submissions as noted above.). If the exam is not passed on a 2nd attempt, the student will not receive the degree.

The successful student will attend to details.

Evaluation of Examinations

The School's Graduate Studies Committee provide general oversight of the examination, and the three faculty members of the committee sign each student's comprehensive examination report form (the official notification to the Graduate College).

Each student is allowed two complete attempts (not within the same semester) to pass the comprehensive exam, and each attempt is read by three faculty members (as assigned by the Director of the School of Library & Information Studies) who individually determine whether the outcome of an exam is assessed as

pass or fail, and then consult as a group to reach a consensus regarding each outcome. Faculty readers are never made aware of the identities of the students whose written examinations they are assessing.

All written examination responses will be reviewed by Turnitin (see Appendix 2 of these guidelines for an overview of Turnitin) and the Turnitin results are made available to the faculty readers.

In evaluating a written examination, the faculty will take into consideration the quality and application of the evidence offered in support of the paper. The question to be answered will focus upon at least one of the “six identified areas that all students are expected to master”:

- Philosophical and theoretical foundations of our field
- Organization and control of information resources
- Provision and analysis of user services
- Management of information agencies
- Acquisition of and access to information
- Application of research or evaluation methods within the LIS field.

The successful student will be able to synthesize knowledge across these areas.

The faculty evaluation of each student’s written examination is submitted to the SLIS Coordinator for Admissions/Academic, and Student Support Services who will compile the information and report the results to the Director. When a student's response has been judged as not passing, the faculty readers for the question provide a written statement explaining why the student’s answer was not successful. The faculty explanation and an accompanying letter, signed by the SLIS Director, are then emailed to the student. No faculty member knows the identity of any examinee until after all results are in and posted. Individual results are discussed only with the student involved and with the appropriate authorities (*e.g.*, the Graduate College) who track student academic progress.

Verbal Re-Examination

In the case of an unsuccessful written examination attempt, the student will have the option of requesting a verbal re-examination upon his or her knowledge of the content of the examination question. As this verbal re-examination is considered part of the comprehensive examination process, it falls under the same provisions of the OU Academic Integrity Code. This means that a student may not consult regarding the exam with any other student, faculty advisor, or other SLIS faculty member, etc. prior to taking the verbal re-examination.

The verbal re-examination must be requested from the SLIS Coordinator of Academic & Student Support Services or the Director of the School of Library & Information Studies either in person or by phone call to the school within one week of receiving the initial written examination results. Requesting a verbal re-examination will not affect the student’s ability to sit another comprehensive examination in a subsequent semester if eligible to do so.

Students eligible for OU Disability Resource Center accommodation must make this known during the request for a verbal re-examination so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Verbal re-examination may be held at the school in Norman or via Zoom. All arrangements must be approved and made by the

School in advance of the re-examination date. The re-examination date will be scheduled by the school within one week of a student's request to exercise the re-examination option, and the re-examination itself will normally take place within one week of the date on the student is notified of the time and location of the reexamination. The verbal re-examination process will normally take no longer than 60 minutes, and will be conducted by three SLIS faculty members, one of whom will be acting as the chair of the reexamination panel and who will also monitor the time schedule. None of these faculty members will be made aware of the student's identity until immediately prior to the start of the re-examination.

Unless a student has special Disability Resource Center accommodation arrangements made in advance allowing an exception, students will not be allowed to utilize any written materials or to consult any other individual during the verbal re-examination and doing so will be grounds for immediately terminating the reexamination.

The chair of the verbal re-examination panel will read the original examination question to the student, as well as the evaluation of the content of the written response received by the student from the school, and will then ask the student if he or she wishes to add to or change any part of the written response. The student will be allowed no more than 20 minutes to respond to this question. After the response, the panel will then have the opportunity to ask any additional questions relevant to the initial written examination question that they may have. The chair will then ask the student if there are any final questions or comments about the responses made, after which the verbal re-examination process will be declared complete. The re-examination process should take no more than 60 minutes, barring any interruptions or technical difficulties. The panel will then make its decision based on the verbal re-examination and will convey this decision to the SLIS Coordinator of Academic & Student Support Services and the Director of the School of Library & Studies, who will then inform the student within 24 hours of the result of the verbal re-examination.

Retaking the Comprehensive Examination

If a student's outcome from the first attempt to complete the comprehensive examination (including the verbal re-examination) is not successful, the student will have a year to retake the examination. To be successful, the student must pass a retake of the comprehensive examination within one year and during the examination's administration during a fall or spring semester. Students who successfully complete the comprehensive examination must do so within two attempts. Students may retake the examination only one time (including a verbal re-examination if desired.) Students who fail to pass the comprehensive examination in two attempts will not receive the degree.

Dissemination of Examination Results

The Student Services Specialist compiles the results of the examination and notifies the Director of the School of Library and Information Studies of those results. Students will receive an e-mail from the Student Services Specialist informing them of the results of their comprehensive examinations. When a student's response has been judged not passing, the student will also receive notification from the Graduate College.

Examination results are certified by the three faculty members of the School's Graduate Studies Committee. The Student Services Coordinator notifies the Graduate College of the results of the examination. After the students who have taken the exam have been notified of their individual results, summary results of the examination will be disseminated to SLIS faculty.

Academic Appeals Procedures

According to OU [Graduate College Bulletin](#), a “Graduate College Academic Appeals Panel will be appointed and given authority to hear all appeals involving qualifying examinations, comprehensive examinations, general examinations, theses and dissertations, and other appropriate matters as determined by the Graduate Dean”

The **Graduate College Bulletin** also explains:

- “Appeals must be filed in writing in the Graduate College office.”
- “Complete information about Graduate College academic appeals may be obtained from the *Graduate College Academic Appeals Guidelines* (available by contacting the Graduate College) and the *Student Code*, Title 14.”

Reasonable Accommodations

The University of Oklahoma is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all students with disabilities. Any student who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities on the comprehensive examination should contact the OU Disability Resource Center to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate educational opportunities. The OU Disability Resource Center accepts requests from students for reasonable accommodation after the student has self-identified as an individual with a disability and has provided the appropriate documentation that substantiates both the disability and the request for accommodation. Accommodations are not retroactive and begin only after documentation is received and a reasonable time for accommodation development has been allowed. For Norman students, here is the link to the [OU Accessibility and Disability Resource Center](#) website. Tulsa students should contact the [OU Tulsa Student Affairs office](#).

Checklist of Activities for The SLIS Comprehensive Examination

1. A calendar of all comprehensive examination dates and related deadlines for an academic year is posted and otherwise publicized before September 15th of each year.
2. An official notice of the examination is posted on the student listservs by September 15 for the fall Semester, and by February 1 for the spring semester.
3. Students who plan to take the examination should:
 - a. Check their program plans and with their advisers make certain they are eligible to take the exam.
 - b. Watch for information posted to the SLIS Student Digest and to the SLIS student listserv on deadlines for completing the Admission to Candidacy/Program of Study form in the semester prior to taking the comprehensive examination. (Please see the **Registration for the Comprehensive Examination** section, beginning of page 4 of this handbook.)
The Admission to Candidacy/Program of Study form will be due in the SLIS Office by the third Friday of September for those planning to take the exam during the spring semester, and by the third Friday of March for those planning to take the exam during the fall semester.
Specific dates will be posted to the student listserv and the student digest. **Students filing forms after published deadlines will be required to provide a petition, including an explanation why the forms are being submitted after the deadline.**
 - c. Receive a copy of the comprehensive examination from Canvas at 12:00 noon on Thursday of the week of the examination.
 - d. Complete the examination and return it in the assigned Canvas dropbox by 9:00 AM on the following Monday.
4. Before the end of the semester in which students take the exam, they will be notified of the results by email from the Student Services Coordinator.

APPENDIX 1: RESOURCES ABOUT ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM

The web page at <https://integrity.ou.edu/> states the University of Oklahoma's expectations of academic integrity for students and faculty, defines misconduct, provides examples of prohibited conduct (including plagiarism, improper collaboration, and Internet cheating), and explains sanctions for misconduct. It also provides videos and interactive tutorials relevant to this important issue.

Students are strongly encouraged to consult these resources.

APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF TURNITIN

All examination responses will be reviewed by Turnitin.

Use of Turnitin allows faculty to identify plagiarism in students' work.

The Turnitin databases contain 14 billion current and archived Web pages, 150 million student papers and millions of articles from libraries and publications.

Turnitin shows how much of the student's paper matches content from the Turnitin databases so instructors can quickly understand how much of the paper is unoriginal. While Turnitin highlights quotes as being unoriginal, its purpose is to recognize unsourced/improperly cited material (correctly referenced quotes will be highlighted as "unoriginal"). The intent is to find non-cited and poorly cited material.

Turnitin preserves the original format of the paper allowing instructors to view the student's original text, formatting, imagery and layout.

Faculty can view students' sources. Matched sources from the paper appear in an easy-to-understand format revealing color-coded sources corresponding to non-original work.

Faculty can control what information appears in the originality report by filtering out bibliographic, quoted or small match sizes.

Information for students and instructors, including videos, is available at <https://www.turnitin.com/>