Interdisciplinary Information Science PhD Program

PREPARATION GUIDE

WRITTEN QUALIFYING EXAM

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Study Guide

Preparing for exam

In the IIS PhD Program, the INFO 6660 Readings in Information Science course is designed to prepare students for qualifying examination. This course should be taken in the last semester of coursework prior to qualifying examination with the chair or co-chair of student’s dissertation committee, which should be formed (through completion, signing, and submission to IIS PhD Program Office the Committee Designation Form – Form F in the IIS PhD Program Handbook) prior to the last semester of coursework. As part of INFO 6660 course, student, in consultations with dissertation committee chair / co-chair, constructs the research interests statement, familiarizes with the scholarly literature relevant to the research interests declared in the statement and compiles the annotated bibliography of this literature, comes up with research questions for possible future dissertation topics, and thinks through the process of designing research studies to answer these questions. The research interests statement, the annotated bibliography and draft exam questions generated in this course will be submitted to IIS PhD Program Office at the beginning of qualifying examinations semester as part of registration for qualifying examination.

After you register for qualifying examination, you will have 5-6 first weeks of the semester to prepare before the examination starts. In the process of your preparation, please make sure to find and re-familiarize yourself with print and electronic materials -- such as notes, lecture handouts, books, and papers -- from your INFO 6660 course as well as other doctoral courses (e.g., INFO 6000, INFO 6700, INFO 6940, INFO 6945). These materials may be helpful to tickle your memory of key topics and helpful resources and give you ideas. If your materials are dated, update them. For instance, three major authors on concepts of information science are Marcia Bates, Michael Buckland, and Tefko Saracevic: you might search for recent publications they have written or edited. Organize the resources in print and electronic folders so they are easily accessible. This may include published works, bookmarks/favorites of your favorite online searching tools/engines, and course resources lists. Also, please refresh your skills using the UNT Libraries electronic resources if you have not used them recently, such as electronic indexes and the LIS subject guide. The UNT Library staff have some excellent research tools and online tutorials and guides (e.g., http://www.library.unt.edu/research; http://guides.library.unt.edu/lis etc.) that may be very helpful. We also recommend to review Dr. Schamber's Tips for Coursework (http://courses.unt.edu/schamber/TipsForCoursework.pdf). It pertains to all writing and citing, including exam essays. Note especially the sections Avoiding Plagiarism, Citing Sources, Quoting Sources, Formatting Papers, and Editing Text. Please keep in mind that this guide was written some time ago and uses APA citation examples based on the previous, 5th, edition of APA Citation Manual; your references should be formatted according to the latest, 6th, edition of APA citation style.

Starting the exam

In the qualifying examination document (sent to you over email from IIS PhD Program Office on the morning of the first day of exam week), you will find your exam questions organized into 3 or 4 sections depending on your
program of study (general or concentration). You will be required to answer 4 questions from different sections of exam. In each exam section, you will have a choice of questions to answer. Choose questions that you clearly understand and that seem realistic for you to answer. Follow your intuition about what is the best topic for you. This should be a topic on which you can write a strong position paper, coupled with the availability of sources to support your position. You should feel confident writing about it with a minimum amount of time consulting resource materials.

At the same time, mentally review the courses you have taken and the kinds of materials/books/past papers/resources in your personal collection that may assist you in writing answers. Consider the types of scholarly materials that are likely to be available via the Web and UNT Libraries’ electronic resources.

Be prepared to search for recent authoritative sources, if necessary, in full-text or other databases. However, you do not want to spend valuable time doing extensive new research. You should already have strong knowledge of the literature.

Do NOT expect to cite non-scholarly sources such as Wikipedia.

Organizing

You will be given only 1 week (7 days) to complete your written qualifying examination. Time management is crucial to your success. Plan your time carefully, beginning as soon as the exam questions are sent to you. Determine how much time you can spend on each essay, with ample time for editing. Our general recommendation is to spend 1 day on drafting each of the 4 exam questions so that you have 4 drafts after 4 days of exam, and spend the remaining 3 days for editing the resulting drafts.

Formatting your essays at the outset will save time at the end when you need to focus on what you have written. Creating an informal outline of the essay or setting up section headings and then working toward filling out the full essay can help you to stay focused.

Support your points by citing appropriate sources. Do not try to find every possible resource; instead focus on the major and seminal sources. Organize and plan what you want to say during the process of gathering resources.

Limit the amount of time you spend searching for background material versus the time you spend writing: citations are useless without the body of the essay. Again, you should already have a strong knowledge of the literature.

Writing

Be sure to answer the questions directly and completely. Address all parts of multi-part questions: using headings and subheadings helps you organize and the reader understand.

By carefully attending to essay organization, first draft, and draft editing, you will increase your chances of writing complete, accurate essays that clearly communicate what you would like to say and build your case to support your answers. Follow your outline or organization plan, but change it as necessary.

If an idea won’t come to you or the wording seems awkward or wrong, move onto another section for awhile or take a coffee or stretch break.

Use scholarly sources to support the ideas, arguments, facts, and opinions you write in your essay. Cite all the sources you discuss (but not those you merely consulted), or risk a charge of plagiarism. This is far more important than style details.

Some students may develop several drafts of each essay during the course of the testing time. Copy edit the final drafts before submitting them. Perfect the ideas and organizational flow in each essay. Edit your work for sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. A good trick to keep you from reading instead of copy editing is to read the paper backward, starting with the last paragraph, to look for problems and errors. Be sure to do a word count and meet the criteria for length.
SAVE YOUR FILE OFTEN!! Name your document file at the beginning and remember to save often.

Finishing

This checklist is intended to help ensure that you have followed all the instructions.

- **All parts of each question are answered.** Incompleteness is a major reason that essays fail.
- **References are included wherever appropriate.** Plagiarism is another major reason that essays fail.
- Each source appears at least once in in-text citations and only once in reference list.
- Ideas are clearly stated and well organized under appropriate headings.
- Spelling and grammar are correct.
- Each essay meets the criterion for length.
- Each essay is a separate MS Word or equivalent .doc or .docx file, with margins, type, etc. formatted as assigned.

Core Readings: Some Examples

**IMPORTANT:** This is only a starting place for readings in information science and information behavior. It is not intended to be comprehensive and does not cover the core readings for specific concentration topics (e.g., cybersecurity, health informatics, etc.)


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* Fisher's earlier work is under the name K. E. Pettigrew.


