



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

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Qualifying Exam in International Relations

March 2006

1. Frequency and Structure of Examinations

The IR Qualifying Exam will be offered twice annually, once at the beginning of the Fall term and once at the end of the Spring term. Students will be asked to answer a total of three questions: each answer should be between 2000 and 3500 words in length including footnotes but not bibliography, diagrams or tables.

The exam will have three parts corresponding to the topic areas of international theory, international security and international political economy. All students taking the exam at one time will receive identical questions. (Their answers should not be identical.) The exam will take place over three days. At the start of each day students will be given the questions for that day's segments; students will answer one question from two or more options. Completed answers should be returned to the exam administrator eight hours later. (Delivery by e-mail attachment can be arranged.) Essays should be type-written, double-spaced, in 12 point font. While students are free to consult any written source, they are not free to consult other exam-takers or anyone else. The text of the exam should be original with no copying or cutting and pasting of material that has been previously prepared. Standard rules of plagiarism apply.

Each answer will be read by at least two (and usually three) faculty in international relations who will evaluate the performance of all students taking the exam. Students may receive "pass", "not pass" or (rarely) "honors" on the exam. Readers may also pass the student on some parts of the exam but not on other parts. In accordance with departmental policy, students who do not pass the exam in their first attempt may retake the exam at a subsequent offering. (The same applies to students who do not pass parts of the exam.) If a student fails to pass the entire exam in two attempts, their retention in the Ph.D. program will be under review.

II. Preparation and Reading Lists

Students who wish to take the IR qualifying exam must inform the Department by May 1 for the Fall offering and by November 1 for the following Spring.

The faculty will maintain a standing reading list of approximately 40-50 items. While the list includes works that are representative of the range of materials that we expect students to master, they are only representative. The list does not include all the important works in the field – for example, we include none of our own work – and it would be possible to excel on the exam by substituting other works for some of those on the list. Our concern is not knowledge of specific texts but the development of a comprehensive sense of the field including the big questions, contending theoretical approaches and diverse methodologies. In this light, none of our exam questions are likely to have singular “correct” answers.

We encourage students to collaborate in preparing for the exam provided that all collaboration ceases entirely during the exam itself.

III. Faculty Members in International Relations

All regular faculty members in the Political Science Department who list courses under the IR subfield will be asked to contribute potential questions to the exam. Each year, one faculty person will take charge of assembling the exam under consultation with other faculty.