May 10, 2018

To: Public Policy Doctoral Students,

We are pleased to announce that the Graduate School has approved the School of Public Policy’s proposal to change the comprehensive exam process for PhD students. Attached is a description of the new exam process, how it will work, and whom it will apply to. Beginning in 2018-2019, we will phase out the old 72 hour test-based comprehensive exam in favor of a more individualized comprehensive exam paper. Importantly, as part of this change, we are also replacing the PUBL 700 Dissertation Proposal course with PUBL 609: Social Science Approaches to Public Policy. PUBL 609 will be a comprehensive exam-focused course to support students in the semester they complete the comprehensive exam paper.

The new policy will apply doctoral students entering fall 2018. Any current doctoral students who have not already passed comps have the option to take comps under the old system or the new system. Some responses to anticipated questions are below. Please read these carefully and contact your faculty adviser or Associate Prof. Jane Lincove ([jlincove@umbc.edu](mailto:jlincove@umbc.edu)) if you have further questions about your PhD pathway.

**FAQs**

**What was the process to make this change?**

A faculty subcommittee was created in 2016, tasked with improving linkage between PhD coursework, comprehensive exams, and successful completion of a dissertation. The committee consulted with students (pre- and post-comps), PhD alumni, core and affiliated faculty, and administrators to develop the new system, which was approved by the graduate school and faculty in April.

**When will PUBL 609 be offered?**

PUBL 609 will be offered each spring. Dr. Jane Lincove will be the instructor in spring 2019.

**What material is covered in PUBL 609?**

Reading and discussion will include theories of public policy, frameworks for applied policy analysis, and strategies for identifying and articulating theory-driven research questions. Class activities will support students to develop their comprehensive exam paper and dissertation proposal.

**When do I enroll?**

Permission of an adviser and completion of core PhD coursework is required. Talk to your adviser about your progress to decide when you are ready. You can enroll concurrently with up two final core courses, with adviser permission.

**How are PUBL 609 and the new exam graded?**

100% of your grade will be based on successful completion of the comprehensive exam paper. Your grade (pass/fail) will be determined by consensus of your advisor and the PUBL 609 instructor.

**Can I still take the old exam?**

Yes! We will continue to offer the old exam twice a year for students who enrolled before Fall 2018. Sally will announce deadlines for January and August exams, as usual. The old exams will be written and graded by a team of faculty graders, as in past years.

**What if I previously failed the old exam?**

Current students who are planning to retake comps can choose to enroll in PUBL 609 or to retake the old comprehensive exam format. Talk to your adviser.

**Does this add extra credits the PhD curriculum?**

No. Students taking the new pathway (PUBL 609) are not required to take PUBL 700. Total credits required have not changed.

**What if I have passed comps but have not completed PUBL 700?**

You can enroll in PUBL 609 to support development of your dissertation proposal, or you can use PUBL 801 as an independent pathway to completing your proposal. Talk to you advisor about what is best.

**What about field exams?**

Field qualifying exams have not changed. They will continue to be offered twice a year, as usual.