Ph.D. Program in Theatre
Second Exam Review

The second exam: Description and learning goals

The second exam is the examination of three reading fields that are selected by the student in consultation with the faculty adviser and individual field supervisors. It has written and oral components comprising three written essays and a two-hour oral (see details below).

The second exam is a hurdle requirement for entry to dissertation candidature and supports the development of the dissertation project. In compiling field bibliographies students demonstrate advanced research skills. Students conduct literature reviews and evaluate texts in a similar manner to the requirements of dissertation research. The essay and oral exam components assess the student’s ability to apply their reading in analytical, critical, historical and/or theoretical modes of academic thinking and writing.

The handbook states

The Second Examination must be taken within one academic year after the completion of all course work (60 credits). The Graduate Center requires that the student be officially registered both in the semester before he or she takes the exam and in the semester of the exam. It will be given at the start of each semester, with the aim of having results decided in time to benefit students’ registration and level changes. Students will be asked to sign up for the Second Examination during the semester before it is taken.

Grading and evaluation

The handbook states that the Second Examination will be written and graded by the student’s individual committee; it will consist of written and oral components, as follows:

(1) On each of three days, separated by at least one day, the student will answer a question about a chosen field. The questions may have subdivisions, but there will be no choice of question. To answer these questions, the student will draw upon and cite the books on his or her reading lists and will be expected to demonstrate a breadth and depth of knowledge within the confines of the reading lists.

(2) The student will then go on to a two-hour oral examination, to be scheduled as soon as convenient after the writtens (within two weeks, if the calendar permits). The oral will begin with discussion of the writtens, but will branch out to material not covered on the writtens, though within the parameters of the reading lists. The mentor, not the student, is responsible for confining discussion to the agreed-upon list. The results of the examination will be announced to the student at the end of this meeting: high pass/pass/fail.

Either part of the exam, or both parts, may be repeated once, if necessary. A student who fails must repeat the exam at the next sitting. Two failures will result in termination from the program

(http://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Doctoral-Programs/Theatre/Program-Overview/Handbook#second-exam)
Review: Second exam participation and results for academic years 2012-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FA 2014</td>
<td>Denyer, Heather</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gelles, Barrie</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kircher, Andrew</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Krumholz, Brad</td>
<td>“high” pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP 2014</td>
<td>Liu, Si (Sissi)</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA 2013</td>
<td>Clark, Emily</td>
<td>“high” pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friedman, Andrew</td>
<td>“high” pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Galella, Donatella</td>
<td>“high” pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jones, Stefanie</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mytilinaki, Maria</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP 2013</td>
<td>Goldstein, Julia</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hooker, Jacob</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yuh, Jo-Hyon (Kayla)</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA 2012</td>
<td>Berkin, Nicole</td>
<td>“high” pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Del Vecchio, Jessica</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>El Zein, Rayya</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hilborn, Debra</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hooker, Jacob</td>
<td>Failed (passed on second attempt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Just, Sascha</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silsby, Christopher</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data shows that 20 students completed the second exam in survey period; five students were awarded high passes, 14 students were awarded pass, and one student failed (25 % high pass, 70 % pass, 5 % fail). The second exam has enjoyed an excellent completion rate. There are no problems or concerns with the structure and administration of the exam.

Student evaluation of second exam

Student evaluation of the second exam was conducted in the form of an on-line ‘survey monkey’. Students who completed the exam in the past two years were invited by email to complete the survey, which was anonymous and elective. The survey included the following questions:

- When did you undertake take the second exam (semester and year)?
- How long after completing the first exam did you sit the second exam?
- Did you have a clear understanding about the aims and expectations of the second exam? Did you feel well prepared?
- Do you have any comments about your experience either in undertaking your fields and/or undertaking the second exam?
Do you have any comments about the second exam and its place in your overall plan of study? Did it prepare you for dissertation work?

Do you have any comments about how the second exam process could be improved?

Findings of Survey: student experience of the preparation for and completion of second exam

Number of respondents: 5

Responses to question one
Respondents reported sitting the exam in 2012 (2 respondents), 2013 (1) and 2014 (2). There was no bias towards recently completing students.

Responses to question two
Respondents report the median interval between completing the first and second exam as 2.5 years. Details are: Interval: 1.5 years. (1 respondent), 2 years (2), 2.5 years (1), 3 years (1).

Responses to question three
Clear understanding of aims and expectations.
Four responses answered yes, very clear, and one ‘somewhat clear’.

Responses to question four
Experience of taking exam.
Two respondents were very positive, ‘It was a very positive experience’, ‘I found the entire process to be worthwhile, edifying and gratifying’. One response was surprised by an expectation that examples from reading lists be recounted in detail. One response reported disappointment at the mixed level of engagement of different faculty in supervising each field. One respondent did not address this question.

Responses to question five
The place of the second exam in overall plan of study
All responded that the second exam was helpful as preparation of the dissertation work. Comments included: ‘it made me realize how much (work) I have to do’, ‘The second exam being close to the dissertation proposal is good for the dissertation lit. review and proposal’ ‘helped with dissertation work’, it directly prepared me for my dissertation work’. Two responses qualified their answer: ‘it was a different kind of reading than for the dissertation’ (being too broad and shallow), I wish I had changed one field’. The overall response to question five was that the second exam is helpful to preparing for candidature.

Responses to question six
Comments on improving the second exam.
No one theme or suggestions emerged. One respondent wanted to know if students could take a field with professors working in non-theatre and performance areas. (The answer is ‘yes’, see recommendations, below). Two respondents noted the time pressure for the written exam and suggested a take home exam would be better. One noted the importance of taking language exams in good time prior to preparing for the second exam.

Evaluation and conclusions
Overall the second exam is an effective hurdle requirement and measure of student progress. It is an effective mode of assessment for the fields. It is an effective means of preparing students for candidacy and preparation of the dissertation. It has an excellent completion and pass rate. It is well regarded by students.

With regard to the guidance rubrics for assessment review reports, we note the following:

- Preparation: The evidence of student feedback and almost complete successful completion indicate that the exam structure serves the learning goals. Students indicate that they understanding the expectations and criteria for passing the exam. The students have adequate resources including access to libraries and computer resources in the department.
- Process: The exam process helps students prepared for their dissertation work. The process mirrors dissertation supervision. In most instances at least one of the fields is centrally connected to the student’s chosen dissertation topic. Moreover, the option of taking one field as a teaching field is also worthwhile and popular among students as a way of preparing them for academic employment.
- Timing: The timing of the second exam is appropriate.
- Grading: Students generally perform well in this exam. This is expected as they are generally coming to the exam with considerable academic experience.
- Outcomes: Second exam topics are diverse and respond to student’s individual interests in research and teaching. Students report a high degree of satisfaction with the second exam. Faculty see the second exam and an important bridge helping students transition from course work to dissertation writing.

**Recommendations**

- Continue with the second exam in its current format.
- Advertise the fact that it is possible for students to take one of their fields with academic mentors in co-located areas where appropriate.

Peter Eckersall

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