

School of Library and Information Science

The Catholic University of America



CUA/SLIS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION INFORMATION PACKAGE

**FOR NEXT EXAM DATE:
July 18-19, 2008**

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OVERVIEW & SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

A candidate for the M.S.L.S. degree must pass a comprehensive examination that tests a common knowledge base that will qualify the candidate to perform professionally at the time of his/her first appointment, and enable the individual to acquire greater expertise as needed.

Students are expected to demonstrate knowledge of the philosophy, history, current issues, social roles, and major problems of the profession in general and in such areas as applications of technology, organization of resources, provision of service, and management of libraries and other information agencies. They will be asked to demonstrate knowledge of the theories and principles on which current practices in the information professions are based. In addition, they will be expected to demonstrate their awareness of the research literature in library and information science and related fields and of their ability to evaluate research findings by supporting their answers with references to the professional literature and to class content.

In addition to the University's policy on comprehensive examinations, the School of Library and Information Science faculty requires that eligible students have a minimum grade point average of 3.0 in classes taken in the School of Library & Information Science, with no outstanding incomplete grades.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS:

If you feel that you need special accommodations for any reason, please talk with the Dean. Requests for ADA accommodations must be cleared through the campus Office for Disability Support Services (Suite 207, Pryzbyla Center; 202-319-5211; email cua-disabilityservices@cua.edu) -but you are still welcome to come to us first to discuss your needs if you feel more comfortable doing things that way. You may download the Request for Accommodations form from <http://slis.cua.edu/forms/CompsAccommodationsRequest.pdf> or print it out from the Appendix of this document.

Students whose native language is not English will be allowed extra time (10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.) on the examination upon request, and they are allowed to use dictionaries in their own language. (There will be English-language dictionaries in the examination rooms.) Requests should be made of Timothy Steelman (steelman@cua.edu).

Students entitled to special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act should contact both Timothy Steelman and the CUA Office of Disability Support Services (Suite 207, Pryzbyla Center; 202-3195211; email cua-disabilityservices@cua.edu) to discuss their needs.

Students taking comps for the second time are also given special accommodations (including privacy and extra time: 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.).

REGISTRATION CHECKLIST

1. Fill out and return the Comprehensive Examination Ticket You may download the **Comprehensive Examination Ticket form** from http://slis.cua.edu/forms/Comps_Ticket.pdf or print it out from the Appendix of this document. You may also come into the office and pick up the form. Once you have completed the form, please return it to the SLIS office in one of the following ways:

e-mail it to: cua-slis@cua.edu or steelman@cua.edu *fax it to:* 202-319-5477 *mail it to:* School of Library and Information Science
RE: Comps Ticket
The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC 20064

If you require special accommodations (e.g. ADA accessible room, extra time due to learning disability, etc.) please fill out the **Request for Accommodations form** and return it to the SLIS office along with your comprehensive exam ticket. You may download the Request for Accommodations form from <http://slis.cua.edu/forms/CompsAccommodationsRequest.pdf> or print it out from the Appendix of this document.

Please note that the exam is now given on computer. If you would like to take the test long hand in blue books, you may request to do so by filling out a Request for Accommodations form.

2. Fill out and return the Diploma Application You may download the **Diploma Application** from <http://slis.cua.edu/forms/DiplomaApplication.pdf> or print it out from the Appendix of this document. These forms are also available in the SLIS office or in the registrar's office. Once you have completed this form, please return it to the SLIS office by e-mailing, faxing or mailing it to the SLIS office. (See above for addresses and fax number.)

3. Register for the exam through Cardinal Station

In order to take comps, *you must be registered for the comprehensive exam through Cardinal Students*. You register for the exam in the same way that you register for a class. The comprehensive exams are found under the subject "COMP" (not under the usual "LSC" or "CLSC" for library science classes.) If you are taking classes in the same semester during which you are taking comps, please register for "COMP 598 Master's Comps (with classes)." If you are not taking classes in the same semester during which you are taking comps, please register for "COMP 599 Master's Comps (no classes)."

WHAT HAPPENS THE DAY OF COMPS

The first day (Friday), please check in with Timothy Steelman (in Marist 228) at least half an hour early i.e. 9:30 A.M., to get your room assignment and the special number (known only to Assistant Dean Steelman) by which you will identify yourself on your exam papers. Normally your room assignment will be the same for both days of comps – but if not, Mr. Steelman will also give you instructions for the second day. You are encouraged to bring food and drink if you wish, as well as a pen or pencil with which to jot notes on scrap paper. If you find the noise of others working at computers is distracting, you might want to bring earplugs. Please note earphones for portable audio/mp3 players are not allowed.

When you reach the room where you will take the exam, the exam proctor will give you a sealed manila envelope containing everything else you will need: a computer disk, a copy of the questions, and some scrap paper. You will be asked not to open this envelope until the exam begins. Exam rooms will have clocks and English-language dictionaries, as well as extra supplies (disks, scrap paper, pens). The proctor on duty will be a member of the SLIS faculty or staff.

Each day, there will be five questions on your exam. You choose two (2) to answer, and are given three hours in which to write. When you are finished, you save your work to the disk you were given and print copies of each answer. (Paperclips will be provided to clip these together). You put the disk and print copies of your answers in the manila envelope you were given, and give them to the proctor.

When you are done with the Friday exam, you are free to leave. On Saturday, you should normally go straight to your exam room. There is no need to check in with Mr. Steelman again. When you are finished with the Saturday exam, please join us for a party to celebrate. AGLISS traditionally throws a party for comps takers at the end of the second day of the exam.

GRADING OF COMPS:

The comprehensive exam is graded on a pass-fail basis. Students must pass three of their four questions to pass the exam. All SLIS faculty participate in grading. The student's identity is kept confidential throughout the grading process. You'll be known only by the special number that Mr. Steelman gave you specifically for taking comps.

The comprehensive exam is written and approved by the faculty each semester. The process begins with each faculty member submitting at least two questions to a committee that prepares a draft of the exam. The committee presents its draft, along with copies of the questions they didn't use, for the faculty's approval. The faculty makes changes, substitutes questions, etc., until they have an exam acceptable to all.

After students have completed the exam, two faculty members are assigned to read each question. Normally one of them is the faculty member who originally wrote the question. In this first round of grading, responses to each question are graded either "passing" or "marginal". Students who pass at least three of their four questions have passed the exam.

Students with two or more "marginal" answers advance to a second round of grading, in which all their marginal responses are read by the entire faculty (with the exception of the dean) and are graded either "pass" or "fail". Faculty do this individually and record their grades and comments. Any student who has passed at least three of four questions after this round of grading has passed the exam.

The faculty then meets to discuss only the students who wrote two or more answers failed by a majority of the faculty. Comments made by each faculty member are read, the decision is discussed, and a final vote is taken (with the dean voting only if needed to break a tie). Only at this point is a decision to fail final. Students failing two or more questions fail the comprehensive exam. The dean first notifies failing students by telephone, and then sends out written notification to everyone. Students who fail are asked to meet with

the dean to hear comments on the questions, to help in preparing to retake the exam, and choose a faculty member with whom to work in preparing for this. The comprehensive exam may be retaken once, by registering to take comps along with other students at the regularly scheduled time in a future semester or summer session. Special examinations are not given.

PREVIOUS YEARS QUESTIONS

These questions are provided to help students become more comfortable with taking the actual exam. They are meant to help students review for the exam by practicing how to write and answer comp questions. To view other comp exams please see the SLIS website at <http://slis.cua.edu/courses/comps/pastquestions.cfm> -but don't go back too far. Questions are written by current faculty and reflect current content of the program.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION PART 1: FRIDAY, October 26, 2007

Answer two of the following five questions. You MUST save your answers as a Microsoft Word file with the file name: StudentID#(write in your Test ID number)Question(write in the number of the question you are answering) i.e. StudentID#99Question2

In answering questions, discuss professional matters, principles and issues that apply to the question asked.

Answers should be supported, whenever possible, with references to the professional literature and/or course content, whether or not this is actually stated in the question.

1. A recent *American Libraries* article scrutinized the relevance of the Library Bill of Rights. Using the Library Bill of Rights or another code of ethics for information professionals as an example, describe the relevance of codes of ethics to the profession. As you construct your answer, consider the following questions: Can one set of standards govern and guide professionals in all areas of library, archival, and information science? How are such standards relevant in a continually changing profession? Can the field unify and design standards to meet the diversity of the profession? Include references to the literature as appropriate.
2. Many libraries have included electronic resources and free Web resources in their collections. But managing the addition of such resources is not the same as adding print resources. From a collection development point of view, explain why building a good collection of electronic resources is different from building a good print collection and describe what the differences are. Include references to the literature as appropriate.
3. "Save the time of the reader" is one of the Five Laws of Library Science proposed by S. R. Ranganathan. Along the same line, Michael Gorman encourages librarians to "use technology intelligently to enhance service" and Alireza Noruzi recommends librarians should "save the time of the user." Discuss how this important concept has been applied in both organization of information and reference services. Give specific examples in each area to illustrate your points. Include references to the literature as appropriate.
4. It is not uncommon to see various statistics that indicate the pervasiveness of Google as a search engine for information on the Internet. In fact, in a recent OCLC study, Google was selected as the starting point for an information search by the majority of respondents. Conversely, the online catalog was not very popular, and it was infrequently referred to as a

starting point. These types of statistics, and the ascendancy of Google, suggest that the librarian's role will change. Drawing on the knowledge you have gained from the SLIS program, discuss how Google will (or will not) influence the role of the information professional in society. Include references to the literature as appropriate.

5. Librarians and other information professionals must balance protecting the privacy of their patrons and clients with opportunities for enhancing information accessibility using technology. In particular, information professionals must maintain an awareness of, and respond to new challenges to information privacy engendered by technology deployment. For an information setting of your choice, identify three current technologies or technology trends that have an impact on information privacy and accessibility. For each one, discuss its impact on serving users, delivering information and protecting privacy. Include references to the literature as appropriate.

PREVIOUS YEARS QUESTIONS, con't

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION PART 2: SATURDAY, October 27, 2007

Answer two of the following five questions. You MUST save your answers as a Microsoft Word file with the file name: StudentID#(write in your Test ID number)Question(write in the number of the question you are answering) i.e. StudentID#99Question2

In answering questions, discuss professional matters, principles and issues that apply to the question asked.

Answers should be supported, whenever possible, with references to the professional literature and/or course content, whether or not this is actually stated in the question.

6. One striking development in society is the growth of user-created content. Whether it is YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, del.icio.us, Wikipedia, or PennTags, user-created content is becoming ubiquitous. For a library or information service setting of your choosing, discuss the role of user created content. Include the nature of resources offered and services provided in your answer. Include references to the literature as appropriate.

7. A 2005 article posted in T.H.E. Journal (Technology Horizons in Education), a publication especially for P-12 educators, itemized a list of concepts that every educator should be knowledgeable about including: distance education; database management; web site design; computer security; and copyright. These concepts are not just essential for classroom teachers, but also for librarians and media specialists. Select two of these concepts. Define and describe them. Explain why each of the two you selected are essential for librarians and media specialists. Include references to the literature as appropriate.

8. Studies indicate that a "Net Generation, also known as Millennials" -people who are currently between 16 and 29 years of age – differ in important ways from previous generations in our society with respect to their communication and information seeking behavior. Discuss these generational differences and their impacts on library and information services in a setting of your choosing. Include references to the literature as appropriate.

9. Many libraries are reporting a significant increase in the number of virtual reference transactions, and more libraries are offering these services. Discuss the implications of offering a virtual reference service in terms of human factors, organizational planning, and technology. Include references to the literature as appropriate.

10. Changes in information technology, the social environment, content, and politics are driving changes in professional roles in the field of library, archival, and information science. As the positions and roles change, job titles change as well. We now see positions advertised with titles such as: information architecture librarian, digital curator, cultural heritage information manager, content and access specialist, information analyst, knowledge analyst, and information architect, to name a few. Choose one of these jobs or another emerging job. Discuss how you think it differs from the historic job of an information professional, and how you think it is the same. In your answer, incorporate examples of concepts you learned in your graduate library and information science education that specifically prepare students for this selected position. Include references to the literature as appropriate.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TAKING COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS

Father Theall's Suggestions

1. Answer the question that is on the examination --not the question you wish had been asked instead, nor the question that some sixth sense told you to prepare for that is not on the list. In order to do this properly, read over carefully the five questions given each day and take a few minutes to decide which ones you are best prepared to answer.
2. The comprehensive questions are designed to be broad in scope and to cut across narrow subject lines: it is normally expected that you draw upon materials from several courses. If, for example, the question deals with the nature of "professionalism" in librarianship, you should indicate several areas in which the librarian is given an opportunity to show that he/she is really a "professional". Above all, do not single out one particular area and dwell on that to the virtual exclusion of all other aspects of the problem. The professional librarian, for example, in the selection process must take into account aspects of censorship and intellectual freedom --but selection involves much, much more than that.
3. If there is a question involving a topic about which you have strong personal feelings (and censorship is a good example), take care not to be overly emotional, to the point of irrationality and incomprehensibility. You are perfectly free to disagree with what faculty have said about, e.g., the purposes of the American public library, the responsibility of the public library to serve youngsters doing homework assignments or their parents solving puzzles, or the vexing problems of censorship. But what you may say must be factually sound, logically defensible, compatible with professional (and professional association) policies and standards, and enunciated with civility toward those who hold other views.
4. Even if it means spending a bit of time making a preliminary outline of your answer, see that it is characterized by unity, coherence, and logic -and ideally proper grammar, syntax, and spelling. The comprehensive examination is supposed to give evidence not only of the acquisition of factual material names, dates, expressions of library philosophy, etc., but also of the ability to synthesize these things and express this synthesis with reasonable clarity.
5. In answering any question, it is expected that you be able to cite two or three books, articles, or other sources with which you are familiar that bear on the subject, ones that are truly relevant.
6. Finally, and perhaps the most important of all: do not dismiss a question in three or four paragraphs. Even allowing for time to choose questions on your strong points and to make a brief outline of your answer, you still have more than an hour to write on each of the two questions. It is impossible to lay down quantitative requirements, but I don't see how any single question can be answered in very much less than a thousand words. Don't resort to such devices as extra-wide margins, spectacularly large fonts, etc. This is not to say that you are to "pad" your answers or use irrelevant "filler" material. When you feel that you have fully answered the question, stop. If the question seems trivial to you and deserving of a short answer, remember that, though one faculty member may have formulated it, the entire faculty approved it for inclusion.

Dr. Pierce's Suggestions for Preparing for Comps

1. First, register. See the checklist at <http://slis.cua.edu/courses/comps/registration.cfm> that covers everything you need to do. Register for COMP 598 "Master's Comps (with classes)" if you're taking another course as well as comps, and COMP 599 "Master's Comps (no classes)" if you're not. Comps are free if you're also registering for a class, but there's a charge (equivalent to one credit hour) if you're not.

2. Review your notes, and look at textbooks and readings currently used in core courses (551, 553, 555, 557). Questions drawing on the content of these courses always appear on comps. 600-level electives – e.g., cataloging, collection development, and management – can be useful too, so review any you've taken. I also suggest that students who have time might browse through a year of Library Journal and/or American Libraries, reading articles on current professional concerns.

3. Find a study group, or create one of your own. It's more pleasant to go through this with friends, and you learn more by discussing material with others.

4. Review and try to answer questions asked previously – on the SLIS website at <http://slis.cua.edu/courses/comps/pastquestions.cfm> – but don't go back too far. Questions are written by current faculty and reflect current content of the program. For good advice on taking essay exams, see the Purdue OWL [online writing lab] web site at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_essay.html.

5. When you take the exam, two things to remember:

Choose your questions carefully. The graders will assume they're reading answers written in your strongest areas – make sure that's true! Sketch out a rough outline, to make sure you're covering the whole question, with some sources you plan to cite. Then be sure your answer covers the real question asked – and answers all of it. Many people fail because they fail to answer the question they were asked – not because what they said was wrong. If you don't answer the question asked, the graders will assume it's because you didn't know how to answer it.

Referring to the literature is very important--though full and exact citations aren't expected. Be prepared to mention things you read (by author and/or title or even "a recent

6. Advice from the Purdue OWL Website (see don't know) on writing an effective essay exam:

Read all the questions carefully. A weak answer to one question can defeat the whole question.

Underline key words (or words) which will be relevant to do for each question.

Choose a key word and plan your answers on scratch paper in the margin here.

Write your answers as quickly and as legibly as you can; do not take the time to recopy.

Begin each answer with one or two sentence thesis which summarizes your answer. If possible, phrase the statement so that it rephrases the question's essential terms into a statement (which therefore directly answers the essay question).

Support your thesis with specific references to the material you have studied.

Proofread your answer and correct errors in spelling and mechanics.

There's more! Take a look: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_essay.html

COMPS BRIEFING: SOME DEFINITIONS

The most common faculty comment when someone fails comps is: "They didn't answer the question!"

Words are important. Be sure you know what the question is asking before you start. There will be a dictionary in the room if you need one. Here are definitions of some verbs often used in comps questions:

Compare and Contrast

To discuss both similarities and differences between or among two or more things

Critique

1. A critical review or commentary, especially one dealing with works of art or literature.
2. A critical discussion of a specified topic. [**NOTE: critical** is defined as “exercising or involving careful judgment or judicious evaluation”]

Describe

1. To characterize; to tell the facts, details, or particulars of
2. To trace the form or outline
of

Define

1. a. To state the precise meaning of (a word or sense of a word, for example).
b. To describe the nature or basic qualities of; explain: *e.g., define the properties of a new drug; a study that defines people according to their median incomes.*
2. a. To delineate the outline or form of: *e.g., gentle hills that were defined against the sky.*
b. To specify distinctly: *e.g., define the weapons to be used in limited warfare.*

Discuss

1. To investigate by reasoning or argument
2. To present in detail for examination or consideration

Explain

1. To make plain or comprehensible.
2. a. To offer reasons for or a cause of; to justify
b. To offer reasons for the actions, beliefs, or remarks of.

Identify

To ascertain the origin, nature, or definitive characteristics of.

APPENDIX: FORMS



COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION TICKET

- **Complete this form and mail, fax or e-mail it to the school:**

The Catholic University of America School of
 Library and Information Science Washington,
 DC 20064 Fax: 202-319-5574 E-mail: cua-slis@cua.edu or steelman@cua.edu

- **Please print** your name as it appears on your diploma card and your previous degrees. This information will appear in the commencement program in May.
- **Note:** The comprehensive examination is taken on a computer. If you would like to write your answers long hand, please fill out the accommodations form found online at <http://slis.cua.edu/forms/>.

NAME: _____

STUDENT ID #: _____

CURRENT ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: (HOME) _____ (WORK) _____

E-MAIL: _____

PREVIOUS DEGREE(S): _____

SEMESTER YOU PLAN TO TAKE COMPS: _____

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY – DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BOX

CREDIT HOURS REQUIRED FOR GRADUATION: _____

CREDIT HOURS COMPLETED: _____

CREDIT HOURS CURRENTLY REGISTERED: _____

CORE CURRICULUM COURSES:

LSC 551 () LSC 553 () LSC 555 () LSC 557 ()

APPROVED TO TAKE COMPS:

YES: _____ NO: _____



The Catholic University of America School of Library and Information Science

REQUEST FOR ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

The CUA School of Library and Information Science strives to meet the needs of students who require accommodations in order to take the comprehensive exam. Use this form to indicate what accommodations you are requesting. Note that if accommodations are related to a physical disability or a learning disability, you must submit your request and supporting documentation to the university's Office of Disability Support Services (Pryzbła Center, Suite 207; 202-319-5211). **Return this form to the School of Library and Information Science, Office for Student Services, room 205 Marist Hall, 202-319-5085.** If you have questions, contact the School's Assistant Dean. Indicate the accommodations you are requesting and provide additional information as needed.

English as a Second Language: The usual accommodations for students for whom English is not their first language are extra time to take the exam and the use of a native language/English dictionary (provided by the student). First language must have been noted in application to the school.

_____ My first language is _____

Physical Disability: Recommendations for accommodations related to a physical disability are made by the CUA Office of Disability Support Services based on documentation provided by the student.

_____ I am requesting accommodations related to a physical disability

_____ I have already met with the Disability Support Services office and have provided the necessary

_____ I have scheduled an appointment with the Disability Support Services office on _____

_____ Accommodations may include: _____ **Learning**

Disability: Recommendations for accommodations related to a learning disability are made by the CUA Office of Disability Support Services based on documentation provided by the student.

_____ I am requesting accommodation related to a learning disability

_____ I have already met with the Disability Support Services office and have provided the necessary documentation. _____ I have scheduled an appointment with the Disability Support Services office

on _____ Accommodations may include:

Other Conditions: If accommodations are needed due to pregnancy, the effect of medication, or some other condition, check the appropriate box. For conditions related to health or medication (but not a learning or physical disability) attach a letter to the Assistant Dean from your doctor including a range of suggested accommodations.

_____ Health or medication-related condition _____ Other

Name (Print): _____ **Date:** _____

Signature: _____ **Student ID #:** _____

