GUIDELINES TO COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS  
*Effective September 1, 2019. These guidelines apply ONLY to PhD students admitted in and after the Fall semester of 2019. Students admitted prior to this semester should observe and consult the former Guidelines.

Comprehensive Exams  
Comprehensive exams consist of three major scholarly tasks, set in consultation between the student and the supervisory committee, and are expected to coincide with the supervisory committee’s areas of research expertise of. Comprehensive exams are intended to demonstrate breadth and depth of knowledge in recognized fields of scholarship in gender, sexuality and women’s studies, prepare the student for the development of the thesis proposal, and aid in the writing of the PhD thesis.

To reflect these aims, the three scholarly tasks should consist of the following:

1. A detailed course outline (15-20 pages) in the field of Feminist Theory based on a thirteen-week term. The course outline must include the following elements:
   - a rationale (2-3 pages) for the course which comments on: the learning objectives and goals of the course, the intended audience, the range and aims of specific pedagogical activities, and the overall pedagogical approach
   - a course description that outlines major themes
   - a list of topics and class schedule
   - description of assignments and the method and criteria for evaluation
   - an annotated bibliography of assigned and recommended readings

The course outline should demonstrate knowledge of the main scholarly literature, themes, and debates in the field as well as reflect the student’s own areas of research interest. This task should be completed within the first academic year of the student’s program.

2 & 3. Two take-home exams (20-25 pages each) that cover major fields of research deemed necessary by the supervisory committee. Students are expected to gain the depth and breadth of theoretical knowledge and methodological procedures they need for researching and writing the PhD thesis. These two exams should normally be completed within the second academic year of the student’s program.

Reading Lists  
Reading lists for each of the three tasks should comprise 45 books or the equivalent in journal articles/book chapters. (4 articles/chapters are assumed to be the equivalent of 1 book.) The student is expected to establish these lists in consultation with their supervisory committee.

Evaluation  
Each task should be marked by two readers, including the senior supervisor and one other person on the supervisory committee. All comprehensive exams, both written and oral, are be graded on a pass/fail basis, where pass indicates performance equivalent to at least a grade of 3.00 (B). Criteria for a pass is evidence of wide reading and critical and interpretive engagement with
the material. Each task may be attempted only twice. If a student fails a task, the second attempt must be made within four weeks of notifying the student of the failure. The second attempt should respond to the comments and criticisms provided by the markers. A second failure of any comprehensive will result in the student’s withdrawal from the program. If two readers disagree on whether a student should pass or fail a comprehensive exam, a third reader from the supervisory committee will be asked to read the exam and make a decision. If a third reader is not available, the Graduate Chair will read the exam and make a decision.

Oral Critique
An oral critique is expected to take place after the written components of all three tasks are marked as “passed.” The oral critique should address the work done in all three tasks. It is expected to take place no later than three weeks after the completion of the final task. It should be attended by the students’ supervisory committee and chaired by the GSWS Graduate Chair or designate. The oral critique is an opportunity to review the student’s knowledge of the field and its debates before they refine their research focus and embark on the research and writing of the PhD thesis. The committee may ask questions about any aspect of the three comprehensive exams, but the goal of the critique is a discussion of issues rather than a review of performance. The Senior Supervisor will summarize the discussion for the student’s file. Normally, the oral critique should be completed by the end of the student’s second year in the program.