

Philosophy of Science Area Examination

Students who are embarking on a dissertation in Philosophy of Science must pass the Philosophy of Science Area Examination. The point is to demonstrate that, in addition to expertise in the topic of your dissertation (which will be displayed in the dissertation itself), you have the competency in Philosophy of Science that will be expected of anyone who specializes in the field.

It is expected that this competence will be acquired during the course of your studies at Western, and that the studying you do in preparation for the exam will be aimed at filling in gaps and refreshing your memory.

What we're looking for: demonstrated familiarity with basic issues in the field and with major texts, as well as philosophical acumen. A good answer to a question will not only display familiarity with the literature, but also the ability to engage in a meaningful way with the question asked. Ideally, the question you are answering will be one you've given some thought to, prior to the exam. For this reason, we include a broad variety of questions on each exam.

The Reading List. This is meant to be a guide to your studying. Being familiar with everything on the list is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for passing the comp.

Procedure. Every exam is read by every member of the Philosophy of Science Area Committee. The usual procedure is: copies of the answers are distributed to Committee members, who then independently communicate their judgments to the Area Committee Chair, by e-mail. In the event that there is no clear consensus as to whether the exam is a pass or a fail, the Committee will meet to discuss the exam, and reach a consensus.

Strategies for studying and taking the exam.

- Get a sample copy of a test (available from Grad Programme Assistant), answer at least some of the questions on it, and practice taking the test under timed conditions.
- It's *not* a good idea to go into the exam with some memorized answers that you plan to use, whether or not the questions to which these are answers are asked. Answers are judged by how successful they are at answering the question asked.
- It's not a good idea to try to play to the prejudices of any one committee member. Answers are read by everybody. Don't try to guess what we want you to say. Show us what you know, and tell us what you think.