POA First Comprehensive Examination: Background and Grading Procedures

The “first examination” consists of qualifying exams that covers three major areas:

1) Criminology and Public Policy
2) Criminal Justice Process and Policy I & II
3) Statistics I/Advance Policy Analysis/Methods I

Background
The qualifying examinations are intended to test students’ (1) understanding of enduring issues of the field of criminal justice, and (2) familiarity with current debates and developments. Students should have read a number of classics closely enough so that they understand why they are significant and can articulate their implications for subsequent literature and for the general growth of ideas, techniques, and policies in theory, research and practice. Additionally, students should be acquainted with leading books, journal articles, and literature reviews that address the problems within the examination sub-fields.

The core classes provide an introduction to the topics covered on the qualifying exams, and the assigned readings in these courses make up part of the reading lists. Students are required, however, to “go beyond” the core classes and delve deeply into the key issues in the field. One way to do so is studying the materials listed on the reading lists, including academic journals. The reading lists include articles, books and journals that can provide students with a solid grounding in the main themes and current issues of the discipline. In addition to the readings suggested, students should actively read top journals in the field (e.g., Criminology, Criminology & Public Policy, and Journal of Quantitative Criminology) and understand the importance of following current debates that are taking place in the field as they relate to particular areas of study. Students are expected to synthesize what they have learned in the core courses, their own readings, and information they have obtained from their intellectual interaction with colleagues, CUNY professors, and other scholars at conferences or meetings.

Grading Criteria and Procedures
Comprehensive examinations are graded based upon the following criteria:
Does the essay answer the question that is asked?
Does the essay demonstrate that the student has accumulated a sufficient base of knowledge that will allow her/him to continue to “grow intellectually” in this area?
Does the essay critically analyze the subject matter?
Is the information clearly, coherently and concisely synthesized and presented?

The student must demonstrate proficiency in the topic area. Since the qualifying exam is given after the student’s completion of only the core courses, it is recognized that few students will come close to demonstrating absolute mastery of the area. The qualifying examinations are graded as “entry” exams as opposed to “exit”, or comprehensive, exams.

Grading
Each topic area will be graded by three professors. Each professor can assign one of four grades per essay question: 3 (high pass), 2 (pass), 1 (low pass), or 0 (fail). In order to pass the exam in each topic area, the student must receive at least four points in each topic area to pass. Students who fail can retake the examination a second time the following January. If a student fails the examination a second time, the Executive Committee will review the student’s progress in the program and make a determination as to whether the student can continue in the program.