

March 2018

### Race & Ethnicity Prelim: Scope of Exam

This document synthesizes agreements that have been made in the past five years about the prelim. It is subject to amendment by the faculty oversight committee for the prelim. We suggest as a matter of practice that the syllabi for recently-taught courses in the area of race and ethnicity be compiled and included as information to prelim committees about what material has recently been taught. We recognize that the prelim will not be tied to any course syllabus, but the syllabi will be guides to the topics and issues students have been exposed to.

**The morning exam** will prioritize questions related to general issues about race & ethnicity that all race scholars should be aware of. Student will be asked to answer two questions from a relatively short list of choices. The broad general topics include:

1. Definitional debates about what race and ethnicity are and how they should be conceived in social science.
2. The social construction of race and ethnicity, what this means, what the key debates are, how social construction occurs. Race and ethnicity as a social construction-social process in the creation and reproduction of ethnic and racial boundaries
3. Defining race and ethnicity. Historical origins of analytical distinction. Theories of racial formation, conflict and resistance, and group position, providing historical and contemporary examples.
4. Debates about the role of science in defining "population" versus "race." How sociologists evaluate and use genetic science and genomics to argue that races are or are not genetic groups.
5. The role of states and movements or other institutions in the construction processes.
6. Debates about whether race and ethnicity should be distinguished, and how nation fits into this.
7. Distinctions between categories and groups and the significance of the distinction.
8. Issues of imposed versus asserted identities and the roles of individual and institutional actors in constructing race or ethnicity.
9. General theoretical issues about minority-majority group relations, including group size effects, how absolute or relative size of an ethnic group affects inter-group relations and status within society.
10. Definitions and use of core race/ethnicity concepts: race, ethnicity, class, nation, caste, racism, prejudice, discrimination, racial/ethnic identity, assimilation, stereotypes.
11. Theoretical approaches: racial formation, feminist theories/intersectionality, social construction
12. Theories of race framed by postcolonial theory, current immigration, and diaspora studies.
13. Issues in identifying the effects of race or ethnicity, including methodological issues and critiques and including tensions between constructionist theory and less constructionist measures
14. Issues of measurement of race/ethnicity. Ways to operationalize or measure race and ethnicity-debates, critiques of measurement methods, and exemplar models
15. Methodological issues in studying race/ethnicity
16. Knowledge of the basic information about the structure and history of US racial/ethnic categories. (In the morning exam, this should include an introductory-level understanding of what the categories are, how they are defined on the Census, what the major debates about these categories are, and the general historical origin of the peoples identified by the category and their position in the US racial hierarchy)

The **afternoon exam** will be constructed by allowing each examinee to submit two or three relatively broad empirical or theoretical areas (examples: prejudice, education, criminal justice, segregation, immigration, state-making, whiteness) and the committee will prioritize questions from these areas. These areas should be submitted to the Graduate Advisor, who will pass the topic list on to the committee. Here are some general topics that are acceptable. The committee is open to defining an area that combines or redefines items from this list or adds to this list if it is an area the committee is competent to write and grade questions for.

1. Research on discrimination. How it is measured, what the results of research on discrimination are for one or more institutional areas. Defining racism, discrimination and prejudice, outlining forms it takes, measuring discrimination, analyzing outcomes and theories for discrimination within various institutions and at multiple levels (i.e. housing, education, labor force, state). (You will be allowed to “specialize” in one institutional area)
2. Racial or ethnic dynamics within organizations. Role of ethnic attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices and preferences within institutions and organizations.
3. Microaggressions and other interactional issues
4. Segregation. Measuring segregation, limitations to different methods for measuring segregation, patterns of segregation for different racial/ethnic groups
5. Education and attainment patterns and disparities between racial/ethnic groups, including theories and explanations for group differences and institutional critiques.
6. Crime, mass incarceration, policing. Patterns and differences across racial/ethnic groups, explanations for these differences, consequences of these differences; includes institutional critiques
7. Wealth and poverty-theories on causes of poverty related to race, explanations for and consequences of racial differences in economic standing.
8. Assimilation and immigration. Patterns, concepts, models, theories, and indicators of assimilation, critiques, segmented assimilation, benchmarks of immigrant assimilation (incorporation and integration).
9. Intersectionality. Theories and research on how race intersects with other and multiple identities and subject positions (i.e. sex, gender, race, class), and empirical studies in this tradition
10. Whiteness. Key insights, critiques, theories. Concept of white privilege: how it is studied, controversies surrounding it, development, empirical works in this tradition.
11. White or majoritarian nationalist or racist movements and politics and the construction of white identity in these politics.
12. Comparative race/ethnicity: how race/ethnicity is defined in countries outside the US. in non-US settings. The questions, methods, findings of comparative research. You may specialize in a region, or may take a broader view to how race/ethnicity definitions differ on different contingents.
13. Racial attitudes among Whites, Asian Americans, Hispanics, African Americans and/or American Indians. Models of intergroup dynamics.
14. Multiracialism. Current research in the US. Debates on multiracialism presenting a challenge to the nature of racial boundaries in the US (evidence). Be sure to distinguish between issues about mixed-race people and blurred boundaries versus issues about multi-racial in the sense of going beyond the Black-White dichotomy.
15. More in-depth questions about how and why US racial/ethnic categories have been constructed over time.

## Some additional advice and guidelines

1. Studying for the exam
  - a. Instead of memorizing isolated flashcards, think of this as creating for yourself a mental “map” of the field, understanding the relations among works, concepts, and fields of study.
  - b. Seek to strike a balance between breadth and depth. While it is impossible for most people to “read everything,” you should have at least some acquaintance with the whole field at the level of what would be covered in an introductory political sociology class, and should have some depth of reading that goes beyond the introductory level in some subareas.
  - c. Courses and course syllabi should be seen as starting points for your reading but not as “reading lists” of all you need to read. Our image is that you start from a node and read in an area until you get a sense of what the research and debates are in that area. Ideally you read until you have closure in your reading
  - d. Some areas are organized around clear debates or a canon, while others are more diffuse.
2. The general format of the exam is four essays, two in the morning and two in the afternoon.
3. Grading guidelines:
  - a. Four clearly passing answers = exam pass; Two “fail” answers = exam fail; One “fail” answer and three clearly passing answers = exam borderline pass; One “fail” answer and three marginal or borderline answers = exam fail; One “fail” answer and a mixture of passing and marginal or borderline answers or four borderline answers = committee discusses the exam as a whole in rendering a decision
  - b. The exam as a whole is evaluated. Summarizing across all the answers, what do they reveal about the breadth and depth of your knowledge and about your capacity to answer questions and construct arguments.
4. A passing answer to a question answers the question that was asked in a coherent mini-essay that draws on the relevant literature and uses references to compare, synthesize, draw inferences, and make arguments. Exhibiting knowledge of what different authors said is important, but so too is exhibiting knowledge of relations among different arguments and exhibiting your own ability to comment on what you have read. Another way of saying this is that your answer should demonstrate both accurate knowledge about the literature and competence in writing an essay and making arguments. It is a higher order level of knowledge, not just memorization.
  - a. You should answer the question that is asked. Inclusion of irrelevant material can be downgraded. Do not just summarize references; use them in constructing an argument. Answers that are obviously memorized “dumps” of information are often downgraded, especially if they do not address the question that was asked.
  - b. It is wise to begin your answer by stating your interpretation of what the question is asking you to do, especially if there is any possible ambiguity about this.
  - c. It is wise to write an outline of your planned answer before embarking on the writing itself. If you run out of time completing the outline and you have competently executed the parts you have written, you may often be given more credit for knowledge than if you merely end abruptly. This is especially important if you will not be able to write long answers.
  - d. A good answer will also typically have a thesis statement in the first paragraph, that is, a statement about the overall argument you will be making in your answer. Alternately, the opening to a good answer will state how you plan to go about answering the question. A concluding paragraph that summarizes your answer is good, too.
5. While an exam necessarily tests the overlap between what you know and what the examiners know, and figuring out what we know from our syllabi and writings is legitimate, answers that excessively focus on the works of UW faculty or the exam committee are often not well received. We think we are testing your knowledge of the literature, not your ability to pander to our egos.