

# **Research Methods Examination**

(Revised: October 9, 2023)

The research methods examination (RME) is part of the certification process for doctoral students in psychology programs at Teachers College. The examination measures students' knowledge of statistics, measurement, and research design and is developed by the Research Methods Examination Committee. The committee consists of Caryn Block (Department of Organization and Leadership), Jim Corter and Tyler Watts (Human Development).

## **What does the examination cover?**

As stated above, the examination covers statistics, measurement and research design. The relevant statistics and measurement courses are: Probability and Statistical Inference (HUDM 4122), Applied Regression Analysis (HUDM 5122), Linear Models and Experimental Design (HUDM 5123) and Psychological Measurement (HUDM 5059). The relevant research methods courses are: Methods of Empirical Research (HUD 4120) and Research Methods in Social Psychology (ORLJ 5040).

## **When is the exam given?**

The examination is typically given in October and February. The exam is not administered during the summer. Please check the online academic calendar for the exam dates.

## **How is the exam administered and structured?**

The exam is administered in one day, over 6 hours: 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the afternoon. The morning session consists of 3 questions:

- Statistics (recommended time—45 minutes). This section has two parts. In the first part, students have to compute and interpret a simple descriptive statistic or inferential technique for some sample data. A formula sheet is provided, but students are expected to know how to compute the sample mean and variance. In the second part, either a short research scenario is presented and students are required to choose a statistic(s) appropriate to the analysis of the data presented, or some statistical output from a software package is provided and students are required to interpret the results.
- Research vignettes (recommended time—30 minutes). Three research vignettes are presented. Students must identify the major flaw(s) in each.
- Design a study (recommended time—1 hour, 45 minutes). Students are asked to choose one of three research scenarios and plan a study for that

scenario. A detailed answer is required, including how the data would be analyzed and how they would bear on the research question.

In the afternoon session, students read and analyze/critique a published research article (3 hours).

Some parts of the exam influence the final score more than others. The study design and article analysis/critique are worth 20 points each. The statistics question is 10 points and the research vignettes question is 6. Distribute your time accordingly.

### **Can I review old examinations?**

Some of the previous exams are available in a Google Drive. Here is the link: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EAn4FccjI3bT73i4eIDSCF2QqP2ZWqty?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EAn4FccjI3bT73i4eIDSCF2QqP2ZWqty?usp=share_link)

### **When should I take the examination?**

Students should take the examination after they have completed all of the aforementioned courses, in consultation with their advisor. The committee highly recommends, and most programs require, that students take the examination in the spring of the second year or the fall of the third year of their programs of study.

### **How do I sign up for the Examination?**

Applications for the examination are available online through the Office of Doctoral Studies (<http://www.tc.columbia.edu/doctoral/forms/>). Application deadlines change from year to year. *Do not miss the deadline!*

### **In what format can I take the examination?**

You can choose to take the examination via paper (blue books will be provided to you at the examination site) or computer. You must indicate your choice on the RME application. *If you take the examination by computer, you cannot access the internet.*

### **Can you use Excel?**

Yes

### **Can I still use bluebooks if I choose to take the exam on computer?**

If you choose to use the computer, you can still use a blue book to write the answers to some questions, for example, questions that involve statistics. If you use a blue book when taking the examination on computer, *please indicate that on your examination.*

## **Can I bring anything to the examination or access any resources while taking the examination?**

You can bring a calculator and a dictionary and nothing else. Also, *you are not allowed to access the internet or to bring any type of electronic device into the examination room, other than a calculator.*

## **Are accommodations available?**

Accommodations are available if you are registered with the Office for Access and Services for Individuals with Disabilities (OASID) or if English is your second language. If you are registered with OASID, it is your responsibility to contact them and make arrangements for the accommodation(s) once you have signed up for the exam. If English is your second language, your advisor must write a letter to the Office of Doctoral studies stating that English is your second language and requesting additional time.

## **Religious Observance**

The exam is always administered on a Friday. If the timing of the exam poses a problem for religious observance, please contact the Chair of the Research Methods Examination Committee, Caryn Block, to discuss options.

## **How do I study for the exam?**

The Committee recommends that students: (a) review texts and notes from the classes that are the basis of the exam (discussed above), (b) form study groups, and (c) practice answering past exam questions that are available online. Answers to previous exams are not available.

## **Can I talk with a member of the committee before I take the exam?**

Caryn Block, the chairperson of the committee is available to meet with students to discuss the exam. Because the number of students taking the exam can be quite large, she prefers to meet with groups of students, by program or department. Email her (cjb17@tc.columbia.edu) to set up an appointment.

## **How do I get the results?**

The Research Methods Examination Committee Chairperson, Caryn Block, sends the results to the department/program chairs. It is their job to make sure that the results of the exam are communicated to the students in their department/programs.

### **What information do I get about my performance on the exam?**

You are told if you passed or failed (there are two exceptions to this, which are discussed briefly below). Scores are not conveyed to programs/departments or to the Office of Doctoral Studies.

### **How long will it take to get the results?**

It typically takes about a month to get the results of the exam, depending of course, on the number of students who take the exam.

### **What is the passing score?**

The passing score is 70.

### **What if I fail the Exam?**

If you fail the exam, set up a meeting with the chairperson of the committee, Caryn Block. She will briefly review your overall performance (including your scores) and provide detailed feedback on the portions she scored. She will advise you to make appointments with other members of the committee to get feedback from them.

You can take the examination twice. If you fail both times, your doctoral candidacy will be terminated. *But please, take heart. Most students pass the exam the first time and almost everyone who fails passes the second time.*

Some students have asked if they have to retake the whole exam or just the portion (i.e., AM or PM) on which they did poorly. If you fail the exam, you have to retake the whole exam.

### **Will the committee review the results of the exam with everyone who has taken the exam?**

No, only for those who have failed the exam.

### **I've heard some receive a letter of commendation. Is that true?**

Yes, if your score is 90 or above, I will write a letter to you and copy your advisor that says how well you did (including your score).

**Is there information that the committee does not provide?**

The committee provides information on the content of the exam and students' performance. We do not provide information on the administration of the exam. Those questions should be directed to the Office of Doctoral Studies.