Comp Exam Committees

A Comp Committee is appointed for each of the core areas listed at
http://www.math.illinois.edu/GraduateProgram/Study/study.html

The committee consists of two faculty members, preferably those who have recently taught the
associated core course. The sole responsibility of the committee is to set and grade the
Comprehensive Exams offered in its area.

Comprehensive exams are offered three times per year, in August (at the beginning of the Fall
semester), in January (at the beginning of the Spring semester) and in May (at the end of the
Spring semester). The committee’s appointment covers a one-year cycle: January-May-August.
The committee is thus responsible for three exams. The exams may be set, and deposited in the
Graduate Office for safekeeping, at any time prior to the exam dates. This option should be used
if committee members anticipate being away or otherwise unavailable during the weeks
immediately preceding any of the exams.

Other useful information:

1. **Deadlines**
   a. The Graduate Office needs to have the exams two days before the date of the
      exam (or at least one week in advance if assistance in typing the exam is needed).

2. **The exam**
   a. The exam is a two hour written examination covering the syllabus as described at
      http://www.math.illinois.edu/Bourbaki/Syllabi/syllabi.html#graduate-course-
      syllabi
   b. The purpose of the comprehensive examination system is (a) to ensure breadth of
      knowledge in our Ph.D. recipients and (b) to identify students who have a poor
      prospect of completing a Ph.D. degree. The goal is not primarily to identify
      exceptionally strong students. The exam should be constructed so that well
      prepared students will finish early and have time to review their answers. The
      problems chosen for the exam should not be more difficult than ones chosen for a
      standard final exam.

3. **Grading and solutions**
   a. Possible grades are Pass and Fail. However, students often ask for fuller
      information, such as their ranking, how many points they got, and the minimum
      passing score.
   b. Students are to be notified of the results within one week of the exam.
   c. Separate copies of the completed exams will be furnished to each examiner for
      simultaneous grading.

4. **Other important rules**
   a. Written solutions must be deposited with the Director of Graduate Studies before
      the exam is administered.
   b. An examiner for each unit should be available in person or by phone while the
      exam is in progress.

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