***Globalization Comprehensive Exam Sample Questions[[1]](#endnote-1)\****

Sociology PhD program

George Mason University

1. What are the key debates among scholars about globalization, such as the theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects of research about it? Your answers should include debates about the economic, political, cultural, and social aspects of globalization that are most relevant. What is at stake in these debates? What is distinctive about a sociological approach to contemporary globalization? What contribution to our understanding of globalization has sociology provided? Choose an empirically grounded topic of your choice – for example, the decline in unionization rates, or the rise of social inequality or right-wing populism or corporate collection and commodification of personal digital data -- to illustrate how taking different positions from those debates would affect research and writing about that topic .

2. The concept of transnationalism has often been used to refer to the construction, diffusion, and/or transformation of social, political, economic, and cultural discourses, practices, formations, and processes that operate beyond the boundaries of nation-states. Moreover, in contrast to “internationalist” approaches, it challenges the Westphalian view of a world comprehensively ordered (in terms of power, authority, and legitimacy) within an international system of states, and the assumption that the boundaries of nations are coterminous with those of states. Transnational perspectives, while still taking seriously the powerful role that states continue to play in in shaping the world, sometimes even promoting transnationalism, provide a deeper understanding of contemporary phenomena like corporations, migration, campaigns, social movements, categories of knowledge, non-institutional as well as institutional governance (including that of states), political mobilizations, piracy, drug wars, and political violence and conflicts. Discuss a topic of *your* choice to illustrate how a transnationalist approach to it yields different substantive sociological insights than a(n) (inter)nationalist approach, and explain why these sociological insights are significant.

3. Select three (3) major theories of international migration given in the research literature and explain how empirical research since the 1990s has supported or refuted them. Explain also the role of globalization in recent population flows across national borders and how they are spurring resistance against them. Then answer either (not both) of the following two sub-questions:

(1) Some contributions to the research literature on international migration emphasize the significance of gender. How has recent research shown migration to be a gendered process? What are some key unanswered questions with regard to gender and international migration? -or-(2) Describe how social networks matter for international migration flows. What research work best shows the impacts of social networks on international migration flows? What are some key unanswered questions with regard to social networks and international migration?

4. How has globalization impacted our understanding and practice of human rights? And how have human rights shaped the unfolding processes of globalization, and the institutions sustaining and challenging it? What does a sociological approach contribute to our understanding of both the opportunities for and obstacles to developing universal standards for human rights that respect the diversity of the world’s cultures but the need to protect the rights of all people? In answering these questions, be sure to identify theoretical debates shaping sociological approaches to understanding globalization and human rights, and to draw on empirical sociological research. Ideally, in discussing sociological approaches to understanding globalization, you should be able to reference or extend your analysis in Question I of this comprehensive examination.

5. Instead of phrases such as the “periphery” and “third world,” scholars are increasingly using the term “global South” to signify the global geopolitical relations of power that undermine and marginalize those from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. Theories, sub-fields, and perspectives such as intersectionality, postcolonial studies, the sociology of transnationalism, and critical geography question the modern/traditional, development/underdevelopment, and self/other binaries that have marked earlier discussions. How have the theories and methodologies enabled by such perspectives from the global South contribute to a more robust sociological understanding of contemporary globalization? Sociology has a long and varied tradition of studying power. What’s new and what’s not about the understandings of power that these perspectives identify? Finally, using empirical examples, what new lessons or insights about social agency do these global Southern perspectives provide us for coping with, living beyond, resisting, or transforming the neoliberal practices around globalization that render people socially vulnerable?

6. Discuss the relevance of public sociology for a sociology of globalization. Be sure to clarify your own understanding of public sociology in the context of contemporary debates over its meaning and significance. Explain how your own understanding of (or vision for) public sociology might impact or influence the development of a sociology of globalization.

7. What lessons does Classical Social Theory still hold for understanding contemporary globalization? Drawing on the work of Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Polanyi, Simmel, Du Bois, de Beauvoir, Mumford, Khaldun or any other classical social theorists, explain why a scholar seeking to understand the social dynamics of contemporary globalization should read their work.

8. Imagine you have been hired to teach an introduction to globalization course. Select four books that serve as exemplars of empirical research on globalization. (These should not be works specifically about globalization theory.) Explain why you would select these works and what you hope students would get from these works.

9. Neoliberal globalization has contributed to environmental destruction in a phenomenal way through its extractive and speculative models of growth. What sociological theories are useful in understanding the environmental crisis today? What potential solutions/alternatives can one derive from those theories?

10. World system theorists and historical sociologists like Janet Abu-Lughod, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Giovanni Arrighi have argued that a world interconnected through trade and market have existed long before now and what we see in contemporary globalization is yet another enactment of the cycles of capital accumulation that started in the sixteenth century through mercantilism and colonialism. What is new (and what is not) about contemporary globalization in your view? [Note: if you elect to answer this question, you might consider integrating into your answer to Question #1 and indicate to the Exam Committee that you are doing so. But in doing so, be sure to clearly answer both sets of questions.]

1. \* Last updated April 2020 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)