

# Comprehensive Exam

*Effective September 2016*

## Comprehensive Exam Objectives

The purpose of the comprehensive examination is for students to demonstrate mastery of knowledge in a substantive area of social work or social welfare. The exam is intended to demonstrate the student's ability to concisely communicate:

- an integration and synthesis of empirical and theoretical knowledge
- a critical analysis of prior research, and
- implications for future scholarly work.

The comprehensive exam is viewed as the passageway to the dissertation project and is intended to demonstrate the student's ability to bridge coursework concepts to their eventual dissertation research. The exam allows the student to explore their field of interest, identify gaps in the literature and move towards developing their dissertation research question and methods.

## Comprehensive Exam Policy & Procedures

The Comprehensive Examination begins in the spring after a student has completed their four courses. The student's Doctoral Committee (supervisor, internal and external members) must be constituted by the end of the first spring semester (June) of the student's program.

- To begin the Comprehensive Exam process, students must submit a **2000-2500-word comprehensive exam proposal** to the Doctoral Committee with the following elements:
  - An introduction to the intended PhD research area
  - Proposal of 2-3 questions with a justification for both the topics and the number of questions. These questions are typically focused on theoretical frameworks, empirical knowledge and methodological issues.
  - An initial bibliography (not included in the word limit).
- The Doctoral Committee will determine the final **two or three exam questions**. When the questions and timeline for the exam are determined, the student and all committee members must **sign the [PhD Confirmation of Comp Exam Questions Form](#)**.
- The comprehensive exam begins the day after the student is given the final exam questions.
- The student registers for the exam (SWRK 701 Comprehensive Examination) in the semester in which they expect to submit their final written component of the Comprehensive Exam.

# Timeline

<b>September</b>	Student begins program by registering in full-time <a href="#">Coursework</a> (minimum of 2 courses per semester). Students should begin thinking about research directions.	
<b>January</b>	Students will begin to discuss the comprehensive exam proposal and the composition of their Doctoral Committee with their supervisor.	
<b>By early June</b>	Doctoral Committee is formed and <b>Committee form</b> is submitted.	
<b>Between May 1<sup>st</sup> – July 15<sup>th</sup></b>	Student submits 2000-2500-word Comprehensive Exam Proposal to Doctoral Committee	
<b>Within a month</b>	Committee discusses proposal and determines final questions.	
<b>Between May 15<sup>th</sup> – August 15<sup>th</sup></b>	Comps Exam questions are communicated to the student and the Comps Exam form is submitted the day before the student begins writing the exam. Student begins the 3-month Comp Exam writing phase.	
<b>Between August 15<sup>th</sup> – November 15<sup>th</sup></b>	Student submits written component of the Comp Exam and Committee has 3 weeks to review.	
<b>Within 3 weeks</b>  Evaluation of Written Component	Doctoral committee members agree on their evaluation of the written component of the exam.	
	<b>Pass:</b> Within a month, student moves on to the Oral Defense component of Comprehensive Exam.	<b>Pass with Revisions:</b> If only one of the written exam questions is unsatisfactory, the student must resubmit that question within 2 weeks of receiving the Committee’s detailed feedback on the unsatisfactory question. The committee will then have 2 weeks to determine whether the revision is a Pass or a Fail (which would count as their first Fail on the exam).
<b>Within 1 month of passing Written Component</b>  Oral Defence	The Dissertation Committee meets for the student’s Oral Defence.	
	<b>Pass:</b> Student becomes a PhD Candidate and proceeds to the <a href="#">Dissertation Project</a>	<b>Fail:</b> Student receives detailed written feedback on the oral presentation through the supervisor and may repeat the Oral Defense a month later. If the student fails a second time, they will be required to withdraw from the PhD program.
<b>February – May</b>	Dissertation Seminar	

N.B. All concerns about the timeline should be discussed with the GPD.

## Written Component of the Comprehensive Exam

Before beginning the Comprehensive Exam, the Committee must submit the Comp Exam Question form.

Once the period of the exam has begun, the student may not have contact with the committee members about the exam. They must use their academic judgement in determining the scope of the essays and be prepared to defend their decisions.

The written component must not exceed **15,000 words** in total (balanced between the questions), excluding bibliography.

The student has a maximum of *three months* to complete the written part of the exam. After receiving the final submission, the committee has three weeks to complete their evaluation.

### Passing or Failing the Written Component

The Committee, by consensus, or failing consensus, by a majority, must evaluate the written exam to:

- **Pass**, in which case the student may continue on to the oral defence; OR
- **Pass with revisions**, when a maximum of one of the questions is unsatisfactory. The student must receive written feedback on the unsatisfactory question and resubmit that question within 2 weeks. The committee then has 2 weeks to reevaluate the resubmitted question; OR
- **Fail**, when more than one of the questions is unsatisfactory. The student will receive detailed written feedback on their exam and has three months to rewrite and resubmit. If the Committee evaluates the work to be unsatisfactory a second time, the student is then considered to have failed the exam and is withdrawn from the program.

### Evaluation criteria (not an exhaustive list – please see Document 2: Written Exam Evaluation Form)

- An integration and synthesis of empirical and theoretical knowledge
- Critical analysis of prior research, and
- Implications for future scholarly work
- High level of scholarly writing.

## Oral Defence Component of the Comprehensive Exam

Once the student has passed the written component of the exam (including with revisions), the student must complete the oral defense. This defense occurs during a Doctoral Committee meeting and is chaired by the Joint PhD Program Director or delegate. The defence lasts no more than 2 hours.

- The student is asked to **summarize the key outcomes of their comprehensive exam** (maximum 20 minutes).
- The student **responds to questions posed by the Doctoral Committee**. The Committee will then determine whether the student demonstrates the necessary knowledge to be permitted to continue in the Joint PhD program to the Dissertation Proposal.

## Evaluation criteria (not an exhaustive list – please see Document 4: Oral Exam Evaluation Form)

- Knowledge of the discipline
- Understanding of the proposed field of research
- Ability to present and defend material orally
- Ability to respond to questions about the implications of the exam findings.

## Passing or Failing the Oral Defense

The Committee will determine whether the student passes at the end of the scheduled exam time. The options are:

- **Pass:** When the student passes the oral defense, the student is considered to have passed the Comprehensive Exam and becomes a PhD Candidate.
- **Fail:** Should the student fail the oral defense, he or she is allowed a second attempt within one month of the first attempt. Failure on the second attempt means the student is required to withdraw from the PhD Program.

Upon completion of Comprehensive Exam, the [PhD Comprehensive Exam Form](#) should be submitted to the Student Affairs Coordinator, in the Social Work General Office.