

## Field Examination Guidelines

**Context.** At the start of their second year (PhD 3), Ph.D. students need to select two major fields, and one minor field. To complete a major field, a student will also need to pass the two courses offered in that field. In addition, a student must enroll and pass the Ph.D. Field Synthesis course for that field. To complete the minor field, a student will need to pass two courses in that field, and at least one of them must be taught at McGill Economics.

The major fields need to be selected from the fields offered by the department which typically, subject to staffing, includes Microeconomic Theory, Macroeconomics, Econometrics, Financial Econometrics, Labour Economics, and Development Economics. The minor field and the courses underlying it, are the student's choice.

However, they require approval by the Graduate Program Director. The main criteria for approval are the compatibility of the courses for the field, and the compatibility with the academic standards for the Ph.D. program. The Graduate Program Coordinator will send an email at the start of the academic year with specific instructions on how to seek the GPD's approval.

The Ph.D. Field Synthesis courses' main role is to conduct an examination of the student's knowledge in the two major fields. The points below contain a description of how this field examination shall proceed. This description will also be found in the course syllabi.

**Objectives.** To ensure that students master the material in the two chosen field areas of Economics. Students should be able to read, understand, and critically assess frontier research work, and make significant original contributions to those fields.

**Requirements.** Students must pass two Ph.D. Field Synthesis courses at the end of their second year (PhD 3), in the two major fields. As a pre-requisite to registering in a Ph.D. Field Synthesis course, students must have passed the two relevant field courses underlying it.

**Format.** The exams are written, usually with an allotted time of 3h30, and normally take place in May (a supplemental is normally offered in September, following the same guidelines).

**Range of material.** Each exam is based upon the material in all relevant field courses taught during the academic year. Students normally have a choice of questions and may answer only those more closely related to the two field courses they have taken. However, questions are not strictly bounded by the material from these courses. Thus, students should also expect questions pertaining to basic concepts (perhaps covered in detail at the undergraduate /MA/PhD 2 level) that every person in the relevant field should know about, or to simple applications of the tools taught in those courses to new situations. To prepare for the synthesis exams, students should follow the same basic approach they have used to prepare for the two underlying courses they have taken, namely they should refer to the syllabi for those courses for the basic material to be covered. The department has an archive of past field examinations that students are strongly encouraged to access and work on.

**Field committee.** Each Ph.D. Field Synthesis course is taught/administered by a committee of co-instructors formed by all the professors who taught all the relevant field courses during the academic year. All committee members write and grade exam questions. One of these professors, from McGill Economics, will act as the committee chair. The main role of the committee chair is to write down the course syllabus, and communicate with the student on behalf of the whole committee, namely to address students' questions about the field exam format and grading, otherwise each professor has equal weight in writing and grading questions. The course syllabus will specify the exam format.

**Assessment protocol.** The assessment outcome for each student (pass/fail, where the passing grade is 65%) is reached by consensus within the committee.

**Feedback.** The committee chair, upon consultation with the rest of the committee, shall provide written feedback to the student having failed the field exam, indicating the reasons for the decision, including identifying specific strengths and weaknesses, and advice on how to improve. This will be provided to the student in sufficient detail to allow the student to understand the decision. At a minimum this must include the scores for each question, and ideally should also include an answer key. Students are encouraged to reach out to the committee chair by email with specific questions about the grading. The committee chair, upon consultation with the rest of the committee, is then responsible for addressing these questions, also in writing.

**Failure policy.** Students need to pass both Ph.D. Field Synthesis courses, and they have two chances to do so. If a student fails either of the courses in May, he/she can take a supplemental examination (only option available upon failure), normally offered in September. In the event of a failure in the supplemental, a grade of F will be reported to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the student will be asked to withdraw from the University.

**Absence.** Just like for any other course, an absence to the Ph.D. Field Synthesis examination must be properly justified (e.g. via formal medical note), and the student needs to formally apply for an exam deferral (<https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/registration/exam>). Otherwise it will result in a fail.