

MIMM 701 - Comprehensive Examination

Course Coordinator: Prof. Benoit Cousineau (benoit.cousineau@mcgill.ca)

Ph.D. candidates entering the program with an M.Sc. degree must take their comprehensive examination within 2 years of their initial registration as a graduate student in the Department.

The comprehensive examination includes the submission of a written research proposal, an oral presentation of the research accomplishments to date and an oral testing on the understanding of the research area and of relevant scientific areas related to the student's research project. Students are expected to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of their research area and a good understanding of relevant scientific areas related to their research project.

Students must register for MIMM 701 in the semester in which they plan to have the comprehensive examination. Late withdrawal fees will be incurred if the examination is not taken during the term of registration.

Exam Organization

1. Student and supervisor must select an examination committee. The committee must be composed of:
 - One member of the MIMM Graduate Program Committee or approved delegate to serve as chairman of the examination ([Committee members](#)).
 - One other departmental member (Faculty member or Associate member)
 - One member external to the department
 - The supervisor
 - The co-supervisor (if applicable)
 - Note that members of the students' advisory committee are not eligible, with the exception of their supervisor (or co-supervisor). Under exceptional circumstances, following the pre-approval of the course coordinator, a member may attend the exam by Skype.
2. Committee selection MUST be submitted to the Course Coordinator for approval, using the [Comprehensive Examination Committee Nomination Form](#).
3. Upon approval of the committee selection by the course coordinator and the Graduate Program Committee, the student and supervisor are responsible for contacting the exam committee members, scheduling the exam, and book a room. The exam may be held during any time of the year (Fall / Winter / Summer).

Please inform the committee members to allow 3 hours for the exam.

The exam can be held anywhere at McGill. Room bookings at the Lyman Duff building can be made through the MIMM Office (office.microimm@mcgill.ca or 398-7492).

Exam details (final committee membership, date, time, location) must be submitted to the course coordinator, a minimum of 30 days prior the exam. It is suggested that the student / supervisor arrange and seek approval of the exam members well in advance of the 30-day deadline to ensure availability of the committee members.

Exam Components

The comprehensive examination includes:

- Submission of a written research proposal.
- An oral presentation of the research project and experimental progress to date.
- A period of questioning aimed at evaluating the student's understanding of the research area and relevant scientific areas related to the student's research project.

Exam Details

Duration: Oral presentation: 20 min; questioning period: 100-120 minutes. The examination should not exceed 3 hours including committee discussions prior to the start of the exam and the evaluation and feedback period following the exam.

Written Proposal: The written proposal should include an Abstract of 250 words or less, an Introduction section, which describes the nature of the research question and the hypothesis to be investigated, a Preliminary Results section that describes the experimental progress to date, and a Future Direction section. The written proposal should be typed double-spaced using a 12-point Times font and not exceeding 10 pages. Figures, figure legends and references are presented on additional pages. Students are required to include an abridged and clear description of the methods used in the figure legends.

The written proposal must be submitted to the exam committee members and the course coordinator two weeks prior to the oral presentation.

Oral Presentation: The oral presentation should be an overview of the students work to date, reporting the general significance and relevance and highlighting key experimental data, finished with brief conclusion and future work. The oral presentation should not exceed 20 minutes.

Questioning Period: The students are tested in-depth by the members of the comprehensive examination committee on their understanding of their research area and on relevant scientific areas related to their research project.

Typically, the first round of questions is related more specifically to the project and the second round of questions is meant to test the boundaries of the student's knowledge (general knowledge relative to the student's research area). The Supervisor may participate in the question period. The question period should not exceed 120 minutes.

Exam Grading

The examination committee decides whether the student passed or failed by consensus or, if a disagreement occurs, by majority vote. The Supervisor / Co-supervisor does not participate in this discussion.

If the student has passed, each committee member evaluates the student independently and the final grade is an average of the three evaluations.

- Each committee member assigns a grade to each component of the exam (research proposal, oral presentation, questioning period). These grades are recorded on their individual grading sheets. The Supervisor / Co-supervisor does not grade the student.
- The final grade is assigned by the average of the marks given by each committee member. The average of the marks for the written proposal and the oral presentation each accounts for 25% of the final grade. The average of the marks for the questioning period accounts for 50% of the final grade. No change of grade is permitted after the examination committee has made a decision.

If the student fails the comprehensive examination, the student receives a grade of "incomplete" (HH). In the case of an incomplete grade, the student is required to repeat the comprehensive examination within 6 months of the date of the first examination.

In case of a fail, a written report of the comprehensive examination and subsequent deliberations of the examination committee is prepared by the committee Chair and provided to the course coordinator, the student and the supervisor(s).

In the event that the student fails the second comprehensive examination, a grade of Fail (F) is assigned and the student is required to withdraw from the graduate program.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Students unable to have their comprehensive examination in the semester in which they register for MIMM 701 must drop the course within the course change (drop/add) period. If the student misses the course change deadline, he/she must withdraw from the course and pay the associated fees. Failure to withdraw will result in a grade of "J" (incomplete/failure), which counts as "0" in GPA calculations, unless circumstances have been discussed ahead of time with the course coordinator. In all cases, students should register for the course in the following semester.