

PhD Comprehensive Examination

Purpose

The Comprehensive Examination primarily serves as a means to ensure that students have the necessary foundational knowledge to do a dissertation. Specifically, the examination seeks to assess whether students have general knowledge about the field of Information Studies, about research methodologies, and about their specific research area.

The Examination also serves as a preparation for the dissertation by facilitating the development of a conceptual base for research in the student's area of study and ensuring that the student's knowledge is sufficiently broad and conceptually structured to provide a solid basis for research in the field.

Interdisciplinary research at SIS relates to the broad domain of human-information interaction, with projects in the areas of human-computer interaction, information behaviour & services, and information & knowledge management. This interdisciplinary research often draws upon complementary research domains outside of information studies. Students should be able to situate their research area within these research domains, to articulate which aspect of information studies research their work relates to, and (as applicable) how this is complemented by other research domains.

Learning outcomes

Through the comprehensive examination, students should be able:

- discuss broadly the Information Studies research field
- identify how their own research area fits within the both the information studies research landscape, and other research fields (as applicable)
- synthesize findings from the literature about their own research area
- analyze the methodologies and methods used in Information Studies research
- communicate effectively about scholarship and research, both in writing and orally.

Comprehensive exam process

The entire Comprehensive Exam consists of a sequence of 3 parts: the comprehensive exam bibliography, the written exam, and the oral exam. The timing of the sequence is explained in the Timing section below.

1. Comprehensive exam bibliography

The bibliography establishes the scope of the comprehensive exam – students may be examined on any content within the listed references, but not on content that is not included in the bibliography. The student, in consultation with the supervisor, shall submit to the Examination Committee a bibliography of up to 100 items. The items in the bibliography will generally be selected from the 705 readings, course (702, 703, 704) readings, as well as from any additional courses. The Examination Committee may suggest additional references to add to bibliography.

To assist the examination committee in evaluating the bibliography, the student will write a short (1500 word maximum) explanation the context and scope of the references. This document should include:

- a brief description (1-2 paragraphs) of the student’s research area
 - This may include a short summary of their dissertation research goals, but should not be a proposal
 - note that this is intended to set the context for the materials included in the bibliography (i.e., the research area for which the readings were selected)
- an justification/explanation of what literature is included in the bibliography
 - why it is relevant to the student’s research area
 - it will be helpful to organize both the description, and the bibliography, by topic/theme
 - note that this is NOT an annotated bibliography – discuss the selected readings by topic/theme, not by individual reference

2. Written Examination

The examination committee will determine a set of exam questions in 3 sections. The table below describes the scope of what might be examined in each part of the exam, and the main (not only) source of readings to support the questions.

- broad, general knowledge of information studies research
- detailed knowledge of the student’s research area
- research methodologies and methods

Part	Scope	Main source of readings
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad, general knowledge of information studies research • Interdisciplinary aspects of information studies research • Relationship between information studies and complementary research fields (as relevant to the student’s research area) 	GLIS702; independent reading
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth, detailed knowledge of the literature about the student’s research area • Relationship between the student’s research area and the broader information studies (and complementary fields as appropriate) research 	GLIS705; GLIS702
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodological frameworks in information studies research • Research methods in information studies research 	GLIS703; GLIS704; additional research methods/methodology courses

The supervisor will email the exam questions to the student; the student must acknowledge receipt of the questions. The student has **up to 3 weeks** to complete the written exam.

Format: The written exam shall be between 12,000 and 15,000 words, including tables and graphs but excluding the bibliography. A standard formatting and citation style should be used (e.g., APA, ACM), in consultation with the student's supervisor.

Evaluation: Evaluation criteria include, but are not limited to: relevance of the answers, appropriateness of the references, clarity of the writing, and general quality of the presentation.

3. Oral Examination

The format of an oral examination based on the written take-home examination is similar to a dissertation defence and thus gives students practice at defending their ideas, and offers an opportunity to engage in a structured dialogue with faculty members about research.

Format: The oral examination typically lasts 2 hours. The candidate presents a concise oral summary (20 minutes maximum) of the written submission. This may include audiovisual aids (e.g., PowerPoint). Following the presentation, the Examination Committee members question the candidate on both the written submission and on the oral summary.

Students should have a copy of the written submission on hand, as they may be questioned on specific points from either the written submission or the oral summary. Students must be prepared to answer questions and discuss points that were not included in the oral summary.

Evaluation: Evaluation criteria include, but are not limited to: clarity of the presentation, appropriateness of presentation, relevance and precision of the responses to the examiners' questions.

Examination Committee and grading

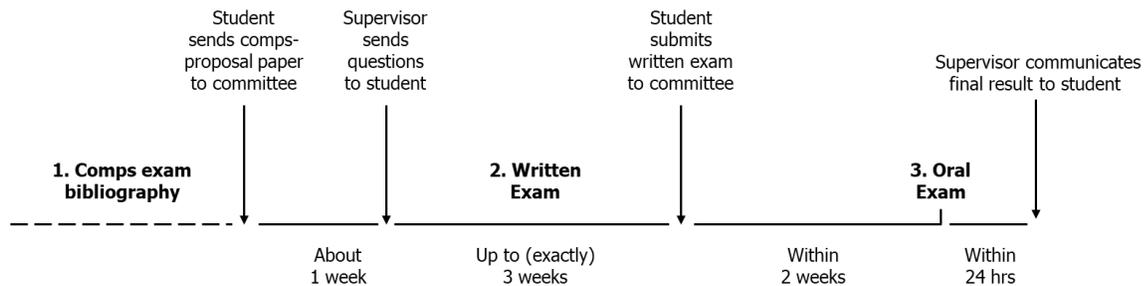
The examination committee consists of the supervisor and two additional members with expertise relevant to the student's research area and who agree to serve on the Examination Committee. The two additional members are identified by the supervisor in consultation with the student. These individuals are often members of the student's advisory committee, but need not be.

The Examination Committee is responsible for assessing both the written and oral examinations. The Committee will determine the final grade of the student and agree on a grade of P (Pass) or F (Fail). This will be communicated to the student within 24 hours of completion of the oral exam.

In the case of an F grade, a student may be allowed to retake the examination in accordance with the regulations established by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (https://www.mcgill.ca/study/2021-2022/university_regulations_and_resources/graduate/gps_gi_phd_comprehensives_policy#topic_77E18489C7304DFEB8080CD83C8818A1).

Timing

The Comprehensive Examination normally is typically scheduled during the term following the student's completion of required and other recommended coursework, and ideally not later than the fourth term in the program.



- **Bibliography:** A student who has completed their coursework and is ready to write the Comprehensive Examination should first discuss the examination with their supervisor. The paper and the bibliography shall be submitted to the Examination Committee prior to the written examination.
- **Written examination:** Students will have three weeks to write their exam (i.e., if the student receives their exam questions on Monday 12pm, then they should submit their written on [or before] the Monday twenty-one days later at 12pm). A copy is to be sent to each member of the Examination Committee.
- **Oral examination:** The oral examination should follow the submission of the written examination within a maximum of two weeks (typically between 8 and 14 days).

Comprehensive Exam Completion Award

Students who successfully complete the comprehensive exam by the end of the fifth term in the program will receive the comprehensive exam completion award of \$500.

Updated: Dec. 2021