

Comprehensive Examination

The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to evaluate whether the doctoral candidate has successfully achieved the following core competencies and, therefore, is adequately prepared for dissertation research:

Broad knowledge of the field of mass communications and appropriate cognate fields and a specialized and comprehensive knowledge of at least one subfield of mass communications as defined by the committee.

Intellectual and research skills needed to discover and advance knowledge.

Communication skills to disseminate knowledge effectively.

Ability to integrate knowledge across subfields, understand how one's subfield fits into a larger framework of knowing, and to explore the social and ethical consequences of discovery and research (Upham).

The comprehensive exam is given and evaluated by the doctoral candidate's entire committee. The exam consists of written responses to particular questions from each member of the committee and a follow-up oral examination session with the full committee. A favorable vote of two-thirds of the committee members is required for passing. The exam may be retaken once.

The administration of the comprehensive exam is under the jurisdiction of the Graduate School. The oral portion of the exam is scheduled and announced officially by the Dean of the Graduate School upon recommendation of the College's Associate Dean. **The Graduate School requires at least three weeks lead time to formally schedule the meeting date and process the necessary paperwork.** While the Graduate Program Coordinator of the College will assist in scheduling the exam times and submitting the paperwork to the Graduate School, it is the responsibility of the student and his/her committee chair to initiate this process well in advance of the anticipated date.

The Graduate School requires that, before the exam is given, the candidate must have:

- Completed all (or substantially all) coursework.
- Satisfied the English competence and the communication and foreign language requirement.
- A minimum grade-point average of 3.00 for work done at the university, and no missing or deferred grades.
- Registered as a full-time or part-time student for the semester (including summers) in which the comprehensive exam is taken.

The comprehensive examination should be completed no later than one semester after finishing fulltime coursework. Barring exceptional circumstances, those who have not successfully passed the exam during this time period normally are deemed by the College not to be making expeditious academic progress for purposes of awarding Dissertation Fellowships and other optional financial support.

The doctoral committee chair is responsible for ensuring that the exam achieves the above-stated purpose and follows Graduate School policies (See "Graduate Student Committee Procedures and Responsibilities" in the **Academic Policies and Information** section). It is also important to note that the Graduate School requires written, formal reports from the chair of the student's doctoral committee testifying to the date of the exam, the fact that it has taken place and that all committee members were present. That same report will include a summary of the committee's evaluation of the student's performance on the written and oral portions of the exam. The College's Graduate Programs Coordinator processes this paperwork.

Portfolio

Doctoral candidates must submit a portfolio that is reviewed as an integral part of the comprehensive examination. The portfolio should be a greatly expanded version of what was submitted for the candidacy evaluation and should include, for example, an updated vitae, publications, conference papers, grant proposals, awards, teaching materials and other content that demonstrates comprehensive and specialized knowledge in the field, readiness to conduct dissertation research, and preparation for a scholarly career.

Written Portion of the Exam

The subject areas of the examination should be roughly mapped out at the candidacy evaluation and normally include questions which adequately address theory, methodology, specialization and cognate areas, as appropriate.

The final questions should closely match those previously agreed-upon subject areas.

Questions should be drawn from the content covered in the candidate's program of study. It is usually not appropriate to expect a doctoral candidate who has completed his/her coursework and fulfilled the requirements of his/her program plan to learn substantial new content areas and be tested on them in his/her comprehensive examination, unless the committee decides that the purposes of the examination can only be fulfilled with additional reading.

Every member of the committee is expected to provide a question or a set of related questions that evaluate the doctoral candidate's overall understanding of the discipline and/or research component specified as the area of responsibility for that committee member at the earlier candidacy meeting. Questions should go beyond the content covered in a specific course.

The exam may include dissertation-related questions but not to the exclusion of the primary purpose of the exam.

It is the doctoral candidate's responsibility to contact all committee members well in advance of the exam to discuss the written questions and expectations for answering them. Committee members should brief the candidates on the general nature of the question and may offer suggestions for background reading. Typically, committee members do not provide the specific question to the candidate prior to the examination.

All draft questions should be submitted to the committee chair, who should ensure that the final questions – in the aggregate – adequately gauge whether the doctoral candidate has successfully achieved the core competencies outlined at the beginning of this section. The committee chair should request that committee members revise their questions if necessary to achieve this goal.

The candidate usually will receive all of the questions at the beginning of the examination period. The examination period typically will be one week and usually is open book, at the discretion of the committee.

Each response should be prefaced by a brief abstract that highlights the essence of the answer to the question, with particular emphasis on the unique angle of the response, conveying the originality of the candidate's synthesis of the topic.

The answers normally are written in the style of a scholarly review essay. The answers should be original concise, and emphasize depth of understanding and critical analysis of the literature within a limit of not less than 10 and not more than 15 pages, not including references (double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margin).

Committee chairs have flexibility in the approach used to administer the exam -- consistent with Graduate School regulations, the spirit of this policy, and the high academic standards of the program.

Oral Portion of the Comprehensive Exam

The oral examination must be **held no earlier than two weeks after the written examination is completed**. This allows sufficient time for the committee members to review the written answers prior to the oral examination.

This portion of the comprehensive exam allows for extended discussion and further evaluation of the answers to the written exam and, in most cases, serves as a forum for a discussion of a range of issues associated with the material covered for the written portion of the exam. At the conclusion of the exam, the chair will solicit written evaluations and signatures on the appropriate Graduate School form for that purpose and will give that form to the College Graduate Program Coordinator.

The Graduate School requires that at least three members of the doctoral committee (including the thesis advisor or chair) must be physically present at the comprehensive, final oral examination. The graduate student must also be physically present at the exam. No more than one member may participate via audio or audiovisual telecommunications connection. **A request for the use of telecommunications connections for this meeting must be submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School for approval at least two weeks prior to the date of the exam. In addition, any special arrangements must be articulated to the student and the committee members well in advance of the examination.**

The dissertation proposal presentation (see below) and the oral comprehensive examination normally are separate meeting, although it is possible -- under exceptional circumstances -- to combine them into a single meeting. The decision to combine the oral comprehensive with the formal presentation of the dissertation proposal is at the discretion of the candidate's chair and committee. If the dissertation proposal meeting is to be held on the same day as the oral exam, copies of the dissertation proposal should have been distributed to the committee at least **two weeks** in advance to allow sufficient time for the committee's review and comments. The College Graduate Coordinator should be notified that the dissertation proposal will be reviewed at the oral examination meeting.

(Revised November 2011)