

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION GUIDELINES

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

In an effort to clarify the intent of Calendar Regulations for the PhD Comprehensive Examination in Social Work, the PhD program Committee, in consultation with faculty and PhD students, prepared the following guidelines. These do not replace the exam question stated in the University Calendar. They are meant to provide clarity about the process of the examination and the expectations of Comprehensive Examination Committees. The University Calendar states:

The Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination in Social Work will consist of a written paper and an oral defence. In the paper, the student will contextualize her/his substantive area using theories that inform social work and develop a research design relevant to this substantive area. The student will demonstrate a contextualized and in-depth understanding of the philosophical and theoretical frameworks informing the student's substantive area, including major critiques from competing theoretical, philosophical and historical understandings. In addition, the paper will demonstrate a thorough understanding of relevant methodological considerations and a justification for the choices made within the research design. The student will identify an area of empirical research that may be undertaken and will prepare a written paper that includes: an introduction of the substantive area and a formulation of the research question; a literature review that is consistent with the question, and which both presents a critical evaluation of the theoretical and research literature and synthesizes this literature into the student's own theoretical framework; a research design for answering the research question, including a critical analysis of the chosen methodology as well as the methods of data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations. The focus and content of the written work will be defined by the Examination Committee in consultation with the student and will be approved by the Chair of the Ph.D. Program in the School of Social Work. The body of the paper will be no less than 50 pages and not more than 75 pages. It shall be defended orally. The student shall have 13 weeks to submit the paper for examination, following the comprehensive exam process approved by the Ph.D. Studies Committee.

Process Prior to Writing the Comprehensive Paper:

- The student must form a Supervisory Committee consisting of no fewer than three persons (the Supervisor must be a faculty member in MUN School of Social Work).
- Candidates must complete all required course work and the internship.
- The exam will normally be submitted no later than the seventh semester of the PhD program.
- The Ph.D. examination procedure shall be initiated by the student's supervisor who will notify, in writing, the Associate Dean Graduate Studies and Research (School of Social Work) of the student's readiness.

- The Comprehensive Exam is conducted by the Comprehensive Examination Committee consisting of two members from the Supervisory Committee, two members appointed by the Associate Dean Graduate Studies and Research, and the Associate Dean Graduate Studies and Research who acts as chair.
- The student will present plans for the written portion of the comprehensive examination to the Comprehensive Examination Committee in a “pre-comp meeting” and will receive feedback and recommendations. The student and Committee agree to the start date and end date of the 13-week writing period; the Comprehensive Examination will begin no less than 7 days and no more than 21 days after the pre-comp meeting.

General Expectations:

- The body of the Comprehensive Examination paper will be no less than 50 pages and not more than 75 pages.
- The student has 13 weeks to submit the paper for examination.

Specific Expectations:

- Contextualize your substantive area using theories that inform social work and develop a research design relevant to this substantive area.
- Demonstrate a contextualized and in-depth understanding of the *philosophical and theoretical frameworks* informing your substantive area, including *major critiques* from competing *theoretical, philosophical and historical understandings*.
- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of relevant *methodological considerations* and a *justification* for the choices made within the research design.
- *With these as context and guiding elements, Identify* an area of empirical research that may be undertaken and include:
 - Introduction of the substantive area and a *formulation* of the *research question*;
 - Literature review that is *consistent with the question*, and which presents a *critical evaluation* of the *theoretical and research literature* and *synthesizes this literature* into your *own theoretical framework*;
 - Research design for answering the research question, including a *critical analysis* of the *chosen methodology* as well as the *methods of data collection, data analysis* and *ethical considerations*.

Submitting the Written Comprehensive Examination

- The Written Comprehensive Examination is sent by digital means (email) no later than the date it is due. At the same time six hard copies of the exam shall be sent by Express Post (2nd Day delivery) to the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies and Research, School of Social Work.
- Receipt will be confirmed. The date and time of the oral examination will be set/confirmed, ideally at the pre-comp meeting.

Process after Submitting the Written Comprehensive Examination

- The student must orally defend their written comprehensive exam. The date of the oral defense is normally tentatively set at the pre-comp meeting.
- Following the oral defence, the Examination Committee shall meet in camera to arrive at its conclusions. Evaluation of the candidate will be based on the following criteria:
- Demonstration of knowledge of social work theory, research, and issues relevant to the topic of inquiry in both the written and oral presentation.
- Coherency of oral presentation and written paper (i.e. conceptualization, cogent argumentation, sufficient referencing of statements, clear writing style).

Possible outcomes are:

- 'pass' is awarded to candidates who demonstrate an acceptable knowledge of their chosen area and requires a simple majority vote.
- 're-examination' selects those students with an understanding of their research area that lacks sufficient depth and scope as indicated by a simple majority of the Comprehensive Examination Committee. Only one such re-examination is possible and students in this category are not eligible for the award of 'pass with distinction'. A re-examination must be conducted not less than one month and not more than six months after the first examination. The decision of the voting members of the Committee following this re-examination is 'pass' or 'fail,' decided by simple majority. Failure leads to immediate termination of the student's program. There is no option for further re-examination.
- 'fail' is deemed, by unanimous vote of the Comprehensive Examination Committee, when the Committee believes the student is unable to demonstrate an adequate understanding of their research area. The candidate's program is terminated. A simple majority vote will default to the award of 're-examination'.

Questions about the Comprehensive Exam shall be directed to the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies and Research (School of Social Work) and/or to the students Supervisory Committee. Note that the Comprehensive Examination Committee overlaps with the Supervisory Committee, but it does not take the place of the Supervisory Committee. The Comprehensive Examination Committee's evaluates that student's readiness to develop a dissertation proposal and to pursue the dissertation, however it does not review or approve the student's dissertation proposal. The dissertation proposal falls under the domain of the Supervisory Committee and is not undertaken until after the student completes and passes the comprehensive exam.

(July 21, 2021)