

Guidelines for the Comprehensive Examination Process for PhD in Nursing Students

Doctoral students at University of British Columbia, Okanagan are required to advance to Candidacy **within 36 months** of the date of initial registration, as indicated in the policy contained in the Academic Calendar:

(<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/okanagan/index.cfm?tree=18,285,984,1168>).

The requirements for a doctoral student to be admitted to candidacy are:

- All required coursework is successfully completed.
- The comprehensive examination(s) is/have been passed.
- The dissertation proposal has been approved by the Supervisory committee.

This document is concerned with the **comprehensive examination** portion of advancement to candidacy. As the entire Advancement to Candidacy process must be completed within 36 months of the date of initial registration, doctoral students in the Nursing Graduate Studies (NGS) program are strongly **recommended** to complete their comprehensive examinations **within 24 months** of the date of initial registration.

1. Purpose of the Examination

The PhD in Nursing comprehensive examination is intended to integrate the Nursing doctoral coursework with the student's comprehensive knowledge of their chosen field(s) of study. The purpose of the exam is to test the student's ability to communicate that integration with thorough understanding. The student is expected to demonstrate mastery of the required courses including concepts, theories, methods, controversies, and recent advancements in nursing as well as to demonstrate critical insights concerning how knowledge in their area(s) of study is being (and can be) advanced. The comprehensive examination and dissertation proposal defense are the means by which academic mastery can be demonstrated and by which the committee judges the ability of the student to pursue advanced research at a doctoral level. It is therefore intended to be an academically useful tool and to be of the highest academic standard.

2. Purpose of the Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

This document is publicly available and serves to facilitate informed discussion prior to initiation of the comprehensive examination process. The purpose of this document is to help ensure that there is:

- Consistency in the design and delivery of the comprehensive examination within the NRSNG PhD program,
- Absence (and perceived absence) of bias, and
- Fairness for all participants in the examination process.

Successful completion of the examination assures both the student and the faculty that there is sufficient preparation and skill to participate in informed discourse with colleagues in the scholarly community. A formal and rigorous procedure creates a meaningful benchmark in the learning process. Specific comprehensive examination formats in the Nursing program must,

therefore, conform to the guidelines set out herein, including minimum and maximum lengths of the written component, the timing of the components, etc. Supervisory committees are, accordingly, expected to make clear to the student a set of specific timelines for each stage of the comprehensive process, from initial planning, to study and preparation, to fulfillment of each component or requirement.

Clarifying such expectations will assist students and their Supervisors in tracking the student's progress through the comprehensive examination process and in ensuring an equitable process for all NRSRG PhD students.

3. Guidelines for the NRSRG Doctoral Comprehensive Examination

The remainder of this document outlines current best practices and required procedures for the comprehensive examination.

3.1 Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC)

The Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC) is established by the Primary Supervisor. The examination committee consists of a minimum of four (4) members: (1) the student's Primary Supervisor, (2) one additional faculty member within the School of Nursing (which may or may not be part of the student's Supervisory Committee), (3) one additional faculty member and (4) one neutral chair. Supervisors are encouraged to contact the FHSD Research-based Graduate Program Assistant (fhsg.graduateprogram@ubc.ca) for assistance in finding a neutral chair. The neutral chair is responsible for ensuring that the exam review meeting is conducted in a fair and impartial manner according to the guidelines outlined within this document, and provides a written summary of the CEC's discussion to the student, but has no further responsibilities in the process.

With consent from the student, additional School of Nursing faculty outside of the examination committee may request to observe the process for their own learning purposes.

Once established, the examination committee in each instance has the responsibility to set, conduct, and adjudicate the comprehensive examination in a manner that is consistent with Nursing program norms, the policies established by the UBCO College of Graduate Studies (CoGS), and the overall standards of academic excellence at the University of British Columbia.

3.2 Examination Timing

Planning for the comprehensive exam is the joint responsibility of the Student and the Student's Primary Supervisor. Students are encouraged to meet with their Supervisor well before the beginning of the examination period (at least four (4) months prior) to discuss expectations regarding the examination format, structure, and content that is suitable to the areas of knowledge that will serve as the most important intellectual framework(s) for the subsequent dissertation research that the student will undertake. When determining the timeline of the Comprehensive Exams, Students and Supervisors must be mindful that the recommended time to complete Comprehensive Exams is within 24 months of the program start, and Advancement to Candidacy must be achieved in the first 36 months of study.

3.3 Examination Requirements

In consultation with the supervisor, the student will prepare an annotated bibliography of 20 - 30 publications that constitute key readings in the student's declared substantive area and key readings from the student's coursework (provided by the course instructor; no more than 5

readings per course) that are particularly relevant to that substantive area. Students may elect to include a brief “preamble” to introduce the substantive area. While there are no strict deadlines, this process is normally completed in a four-to-six-week period. The annotated bibliography needs to be approved by the supervisor before it is submitted to the examining committee for review, but it is not evaluated as part of the exam. Guidelines for the format of the annotated bibliography is provided in Appendix B. In consultation with the Supervisor, the Student will develop four to six (4-6) potential examination questions, based upon the content within the annotated bibliography. Questions address methodological, professional and/or disciplinary issues in nursing (as derived from doctoral course materials), and/or as they relate to the student’s identified substantive area; each topic must integrate disciplinary nursing knowledge. The Student and CEC set the date for the written exam deadline.

The 4-6 potential questions must be submitted to the CEC at least four weeks in advance of the written exam deadline. The CEC will then finalize three questions for this examination, and communicate these questions to the Student three weeks before the exam deadline. The members of the CEC will have no further discussions with the student about the exam until after the written exam is submitted. The Student will select two of the three provided questions to answer in paper format, completing both papers by the exam deadline. Each paper must be 2500-3000 words in length and written in APA or other accepted style. Both papers must be submitted by the Student to the CEC (copying the FHSD Research-based Graduate Program Assistant, fhsd.graduateprogram@ubc.ca) by the 11:59 pm on the agreed-upon written exam deadline.

3.4 Criteria for evaluation

The members of the CEC will each independently evaluate the written comprehensive exam papers in accordance with Appendix A, and then meet to discuss their assessment of each paper (i.e. P/F), as well as their strengths and weaknesses, no later than 3 weeks after Student submission. The neutral chair will compile a summary of assessments and feedback from the Committee and submit to the Student within 1 week of the meeting. The document must include sufficient detail to allow the Student to understand the decision, including identification of strengths and weaknesses, as well as any recommendations arising out of the comprehensive examination process.

The possible outcomes for the comprehensive examination are as follows:

- **Unconditional Pass**

The Student passes without conditions. All CEC members are unanimous in their judgement.

- **Conditional Pass**

One or more CEC members have assigned an ‘F’ to one or more of the papers. In this case, Students are required to complete additional work (such as an additional paper in the area of weakness as determined by the CEC) to demonstrate proficiency. Additional requirements must be specified with great clarity (i.e., the precise scope, expected standards, and time to completion). These additional requirements are to be completed within three (3) months. If the student does not complete the conditions to the satisfaction of a majority of the members of the examination committee within the specified time frame, the examination is failed, and the steps outlined in following section (see section entitled Failure) commence.

- **Failure**

If a student fails the comprehensive examination the examination committee must decide

between two options:

1. Dismissal from the program (effective immediately).
2. Opportunity for re-examination
 - a. The student is allowed one additional opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to perform to doctoral standards.
 - b. The conditions for repeating the examination are to be clearly defined, including the format, time frame, potential dates, and nature of the re-examination process, and the consequences of a second failure. All examination committee members must agree — preferably by consensus, but, if need be, by majority vote— to these conditions before a second re-examination process can begin.
 - c. The re-examination should be completed within four to six (4-6) months, **and** prior to the 36-month CoGS deadline for advancement to candidacy.
 - d. To the extent possible, the original membership of the examination committee will remain unchanged for the re-examination.
 - e. Failing a comprehensive examination a second time will lead to dismissal from the program.

3.7 Reporting to COGS

The graduate coordinator is responsible for submitting to CoGS the final report regarding the outcome and any/all conditions that are imposed on the student with regard to further advancement through the program. The CoGS Comprehensive Examination Report can be found here: <https://gradstudies.ok.ubc.ca/resources/forms/doctoral-comprehensive-examination-report/>

3.8 Academic Misconduct

[UBC Policy 85](#) on Scholarly Integrity applies to all comprehensive work. Plagiarism and fabrication or falsification of research data will be considered academic misconduct.

If academic misconduct is suspected, including plagiarism or fabrication/falsification of data, the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies must be informed **immediately**. Concerns should be brought forward directly to the Dean of CoGS, without consultation with others. The examination must be suspended until such time as the Dean or his/her designate determines whether academic misconduct has occurred and what penalties will be applied. Depending on the Dean/designate's determination, the examination may proceed as scheduled, be rescheduled, or be cancelled. If academic misconduct is suspected the examination must be suspended and the College of Graduate Studies must be contacted immediately (250-807-8180).

3.9 Unique Circumstances

- 1) If, for some reason, the student has not completed these three requirements for advancement to candidacy within this 36-month time frame, but wishes to continue in their program, the Supervisor must complete the Request for Extension to Time Allowed for Advancement to Candidacy form found on the College of Graduate Studies website (<https://gradstudies.ok.ubc.ca/resources/forms/request-for-extension-to-time-allowed-for-advancement-to-candidacy-form/>). The granting of an extension is not automatic; students may instead be required to withdraw from the program.

- 2) Students facing unexpected circumstances that affect their ability to complete their comprehensive exams must follow the UBCO policy on academic concessions:
<https://okanagan.calendar.ubc.ca/campus-wide-policies-and-regulations/academic-concession/policy>
- 3) Students registered with the Disability Resource Centre (<https://students.ok.ubc.ca/academic-success/disability-resources/>) will have appropriate accommodations for their Comprehensive Exams

APPENDIX A: Evaluation Criteria

Each individual paper (2500-3000 words) submitted is adjudicated on a pass/fail basis. The papers are reviewed by the examination committee to determine whether the student has:

- Addressed the examination questions
- Demonstrated logical development of arguments and defence of positions
- Showed evidence of critical and analytical thinking
- Demonstrated substantive knowledge of the declared field(s) and of selected doctoral course materials
- Integrated knowledge about disciplinary controversies and issues in nursing
- Developed arguments and explicit stances that are derived from a theoretical, methodological, or historical perspective of the nursing discipline
- Accurately represented cited sources and authors
- Demonstrated competence in communication (parsimony, clarity, and accuracy of language use)

APPENDIX B: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

An annotated bibliography includes descriptions and explanations of your listed sources beyond the basic citation information you usually provide in a reference list.

Why do an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography provides specific information about each source you have used. As a researcher, you have become an expert on your topic and have the ability both to explain the content and to assess the usefulness of your sources. The annotated bibliography allows you to tell readers what sources are important under particular situations and their strengths and limitations. You want to give your audience enough information to understand what the references are about and to make an informed decision about useful sources.

What does an annotated bibliography do?

A good annotated bibliography

- Encourages you to think critically about the content of the works you are using, their place within a field of study, and their relation to your work.
- Proves you have read and understand your sources.
- Establishes your work as a valid source and you as a competent researcher.
- Situates your study and topic in a continuing professional conversation.

Critical/evaluative annotation

For the purpose of the comprehensive examination, students will be developing critical/evaluative annotations, which have these defining features:

- They sum up the content of the source.
- They give an overview of the arguments and proofs/evidence addressed in the work and note
- The resulting conclusion.
- When appropriate, they describe the author's methodology or approach to material. For instance, you might mention if the source is an ethnography or if the author employs a particular kind of theory.
- Evaluate the source or author critically (biases, lack of evidence etc.).
- Show how the work may or may not be useful for a particular field of study or audience.
- Explain how researching this material can inform your planned work.

What elements might critical/evaluative annotations include?

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Bibliography according to the appropriate citation style (APA).

1. Explanation of main points and/or purpose of the work—basically, its thesis—which shows among other things that you have read and thoroughly understand the source.
2. Verification or critique of the authority or qualifications of the author.
3. Comments on the worth, effectiveness, and utility of the work in terms of both the topic being researched and/or your work.
4. The point of view or perspective from which the work was written. For instance, you may note whether the author seemed to have particular biases or was trying to reach a particular audience.
5. Relevant links to other work done in the area, like related sources, possibly including a comparison with some of those already on your list. You may want to establish connections to other aspects of the same argument or opposing views.

Comprehensive Exam Checklist

Task	Timeline	Responsibility	Date Completed
Identify exam writing window	Within 24 months of registration. No later than 30 months.	Student and Supervisor	
Establish Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC)	6 weeks <i>minimum</i> prior to desired exam start date	Supervisor	
Propose 4-6 exam questions to the CEC, submit annotated bibliography to CEC	At least 4 weeks before desired exam start date	Student and Supervisor	
Set exam deadline date; CEC selects 3 questions and emails to student	3 weeks prior to start of exam period	CEC and Student	
CEC meets to prepare 3 questions based on proposed exam questions and annotated bibliography	2 weeks prior to start of exam period	CEC	
Select 2 questions to write 2500-3000 word papers on, submit to CEC, Grad Assistant by 11:59pm on completion date	Exam completion date	Student	
Independently assess, then meet to discuss papers	within 3 weeks of the exam completion date	CEC	
Provide student with written feedback and assessment	within 1 week of their assessment meeting	Neutral chair	
Notify program coordinator of outcomes	within 1 week of student receiving written feedback and assessment of CEC	Supervisor	
Graduate Program Coordinator submits written report to COGS	ASAP after receiving notification from Supervisor	Graduate Program Coordinator	