

## Guidelines for the Comprehensive Examination Process for Doctoral Students in the Nursing Graduate Studies (NGS) Program

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.

The process for approval of the dissertation proposal occurs within the context of an oral candidacy examination, which assesses the student's ability to carry out the research component of the PhD program. This examination must be successfully completed within 36 months of admission.

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. The granting of an extension is not automatic students may be required to withdraw from the program.

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

A comprehensive examination is intended to test the student's comprehensive knowledge of the integration of nursing and their chosen field(s) of study, and of the student's ability to communicate that knowledge with thorough understanding. The student is expected to demonstrate mastery of the 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 is the primary 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 will be available to every doctoral student to facilitate informed discussion prior to initiation of the comprehensive examination process. The purpose of this document is to help ensure that there is:

1. consistency in the design and delivery of the comprehensive examination within the NGS program,

2. absence (and perceived absence) of bias, and
3. fairness for all participants in the examination process.

The comprehensive examination process proposed for each student must be consistent with the nature of the nursing degree and the requirements of CoGS. The comprehensive examination provides an opportunity for focus and synthesis of learning obtained through course work, self-study, and identification of substantive areas of interest in the program. 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 NGS 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 NGS students.

### **3. Guidelines for the NGS Doctoral Comprehensive Examination**

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

#### **3.1 Examination Committee**

The examination committee consists of five (5) members: the three (3) PhD in Nursing course instructors (NRS 580, 554 and 581), the student's primary supervisor, and one (1) of the student's supervisory committee members, who may or may not be a faculty member in the School of Nursing. If there is an overlap in roles (e.g., supervisory member and instructor) then the committee can be reduced to four (4) members; however, additional members for the committee may need to be added to ensure this minimum (e.g., overlaps in roles for two or more members). ADD: If a course instructor is not available (i.e., an adjunct taught the course, retirement, leaves, etc.) they may be replaced on the committee with a SON faculty member familiar with the course content. 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 NGS program norms, the policies established by CoGS, and the overall standards of academic excellence at the University of British Columbia.

#### **3.2 Examination Timing**

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.

It is important for the supervisor and the examination committee to specify for the student the precise timing of the comprehensive examination, including the earliest and latest dates by which the comprehensive examination is to be completed. Given the importance of the examination and

the consequences of failure, students must be informed of the specific dates of their examination so that they have adequate time to prepare.

### **3.3 Examination Preparatory Period**

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. 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.

Also, in consultation with the supervisor, the student will develop four questions arising from the bibliography together with the core course readings. At least one question will deal with methodological issues, one with broader professional or disciplinary issues in nursing, one with theoretical issues, and one with issues in the student's identified substantive area. The questions and annotated bibliography must be submitted at least two weeks in advance of the time frame set aside by the supervisor and student to complete the exam. Based on the annotated bibliography and the four questions submitted by the student, the Comprehensive Examination Committee will finalize two questions for this examination. The examination questions should be finalized within two weeks of submission of the proposed questions and annotated bibliography so that the student can write in the pre-arranged time frame.

### **3.4 Examination Requirements**

The comprehensive examination comprises two questions that are answered in a two-week take-home examination consisting of two papers. (1) A paper focused on the student's substantive topic area. (2) A paper focused on substantive issues of the discipline (philosophic, methodological). The examination committee will construct these questions based upon the questions proposed by the student/supervisor but may choose to adapt or modify the proposed questions to address core knowledge required of the discipline. Students will draw on the literature from the annotated bibliography in answering these questions, but their papers should not be restricted to this literature. Each paper is 2500-3000 words in length and is written in APA or other accepted style.

### **3.5 Exam Administration Procedures**

The preparation of the comprehensive examination is the responsibility of the comprehensive examination committee. The two questions provided by the comprehensive exam committee will be emailed to the student no later than 9 am on the date negotiated with the student. The student will submit (via e-mail) the completed papers in a word document (with questions attached) to the examination committee members **and** the graduate coordinator on the exam completion date (no later than 9 am).

### **3.6 Criteria for evaluation**

The criteria for evaluation are set out in Appendix A of this document. The overall aim is to assess whether the student has demonstrated adequate preparation for undertaking doctoral level research consistent with the standards of the University of British Columbia?

Students must achieve a pass for both papers to successfully pass their comprehensive examination. Failure of one paper will result in the student being required to be re-examined on the failed component.

### **3.7 Adjudication**

Examining committee members will meet to discuss their assessment of each paper (i.e. P/F), as well as their strengths and weaknesses, no later than 2 weeks after student submission.

The possible outcomes for the comprehensive examination are as follows:

#### **Unconditional Pass**

The student passes without conditions. All committee members are unanimous in their judgement.

#### **Conditional Pass**

One or more committee members have assigned an F to one or more of the papers. If the student is given a conditional pass, the student passes with specific conditions imposed, which usually require additional work to demonstrate proficiency in areas of deficiency. Additional requirements must be specified with great clarity (i.e., the precise scope, expected standards, and time to completion). Normally, these requirements would be completed in three (3) months:

- The student may, for example, be required to successfully write a paper in an area in which the committee finds the student needs additional knowledge.
- 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:
  - i. The student is allowed one additional opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to perform to doctoral standards (If the student is allowed to repeat the examination, the student is to be informed immediately after the examination).
  - ii. 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.
  - iii. 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.
  - iv. To the extent possible, the original membership of the examination committee will remain unchanged for the re-examination.
  - v. Failing a comprehensive examination a second time will lead to dismissal from the program.

### 3.8 Feedback to Student

The assessment and reasons for the decision reached by the Comprehensive Examination Committee are to be documented and provided to the student by way of a verbal communique and written report made available to the student within one (1) week of the marking having taken place. The substance of the report is to be written by the supervisor in collaboration with examination committee members. 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.

### 3.9 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/>

### 4.0 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).

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Evaluation Criteria

The examinations are adjudicated on a pass/fail basis (in some instances the committee may reserve judgment and require that the student write a second examination). The written papers (each 2500- 3000 words) will be 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)
- 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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1. Bibliography according to the appropriate citation style (APA).
2. 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.
3. Verification or critique of the authority or qualifications of the author.
4. Comments on the worth, effectiveness, and utility of the work in terms of both the topic being researched and/or your work.
5. 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.
6. 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.

## APPENDIX C: COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS TIMELINE

