

Kent School Guidelines for the Comprehensive Examination

Upon successful completion of the comprehensive exam students enter candidacy and proceed with their dissertations. The purpose of the comprehensive exam is to demonstrate knowledge of the substantive issues, key research questions, theory, policy, empirical evidence, and implications related to a specific area of interest to the student. For some students the exam is an extension of the work that they have conducted during the previous four quarters in the doctoral program. For other students the first year may have been an exploration of areas that they have determined is not a good match for their exam and future career. In both cases, knowledge gained and summarized for papers from coursework are typically useful in defining the scope and content of this exam both in content and/or in the development of doctoral level skills in writing, research, and inquiry. Ultimately, the comprehensive examination provides an opportunity for the student to demonstrate that they are prepared to pursue work on their dissertation.

The comprehensive exam consists of the following phases: preparation, written, oral, and evaluation phase.

Preparation Phase

Preparation for the written phase of the comprehensive examination will occur during Proseminar, during the spring semester of the second year. The purpose of Proseminar is to help students understand the comprehensive examination expectations and to frame their examination topic by developing a concept paper with the guidance of the Proseminar instructor and their comprehensive examination chair. Comprehensive examination topics can be a specific substantive area, social problem, or area of interest – hereafter referred to as “the topic”.

The concept paper is a draft of the comprehensive examination that includes approximately 1 page on each the following areas (not including references) related to the topic. The purpose of the concept paper is to ensure that the student understands the expectations for each section of the exam and the topic is clearly framed and appropriately scaled.

- Significance. Describe the significance of the topic including, (1) the prevalence and nature of the topic, (2) implications if the topic is not addressed, and (3) limitations and social justice and/or equity implications of current conceptualizations.
- Research Review. Synthesize the available empirical research related to your topic and identify gaps in the knowledge and needs to advance the field and address critical issues of social justice and/or equity.
- Theoretical analysis. Describe, compare, and contrast two theories and how they relate to, or inform the causes and potential solutions for, addressing the topic.
- Policy. Describe and critique one relevant state or federal policy impacting the topic.
- Research Plan. Design a study to advance the knowledge base related your topic. Specifically, describe the research plan, including research questions, design and timeline, measures, recruitment and screening procedures, intervention and data collection procedures, process and outcome measures, data analysis procedures, and study limitations. The research plan should also include (a) a brief analysis of an ethical issue related to the research topic and/or proposed design and how it may be mitigated

and (b) a statement describing which aspects of your plan address social justice and/or equity issues.

At the conclusion of the Preparation Phase (i.e., outside the context of the Proseminar), the student will distribute the concept paper to their committee chair and solicit feedback for improvement. Also during the preparation phase, the doctoral office will confirm student eligibility by reviewing their transcripts and their curriculum monitoring form to ensure all course requirements have been met and grades recorded. Finally, students will secure the Comprehensive Exam Committee Signature Form signed by the student and faculty members agreeing to be on the student's comprehensive exam committee.

After the student starts the comprehensive exam, the established/agreed upon dates and time allowances for completing the comprehensive exams may only be modified by the committee in consultation with the doctoral program director if extraordinary circumstances arise that are out of the committee's or student's control and prevent/interfere with the student and the committee being able to meet the established time allowances for completing the comprehensive exam.

Written Phase

Students may begin the written phase of their comprehensive exams only after the required coursework is complete, the Comprehensive Exam Committee Form is signed, and the committee members provide feedback on the concept paper. Students may use all materials and resources from their doctoral coursework and substantive area of research but may not receive any other help from the committee or from others after the preparation phase while completing the written exam and preparing for the oral portion other than the feedback received from the chair and committee. The comprehensive exam committee is responsible for guiding students' comprehensive exam preparations, providing feedback and grading during the Evaluation Phase.

The exam should address the same areas as the concept paper, and be 40-50 pages in length, including title page, figures, and tables; appendices and references are not applied to the page limit. Approximate length of each section is as follows: Significance 5 pages, Research Review 10 pages, Theory 10 pages, Policy 5-10 pages, and Research Plan 10-15 pages. The exam is due four weeks after the concept paper is approved by the committee.

The written portion of the exam is submitted to the chair who in turn distributes it to all committee members at the same time with instructions on the deadline for providing feedback to the chair on whether the student has passed or failed the written portion of the exam. Committee members should also submit any additional questions or concerns for which the student needs to be prepared responses during the oral portion of the exam. Committee members will have approximately two weeks to send their feedback to the Chair who then summarizes and assists the student in prioritizing the suggestions, particularly if there are any discrepancies among committee members.

Criteria for grading exams include:

1. The quantity and quality of the substantive content (significance, theoretical analysis, policy, research and applied research).
2. The ability to think critically about the topic.

3. Preparedness for independent and systematic scholarship.
4. The ability to articulate content from the written exam.
5. The ability to answer questions posed by committee members.

If the written exam is deemed *Passed* by two of the three exam committee members, students shall have approximately two weeks⁴ to prepare for the oral exam during which students respond to committee members' submitted comments/questions as well as any additional questions posed during the exam itself.

If the written exam is determined to be *Incomplete* by two of the three exam committee members, one full or partial rewrite may be recommended by the committee and undertaken by the student in the time allowed by the committee for the revision/addition.

If the rewrite is deemed to be *Passed* by two of the three exam committee members, the student may proceed to the oral exam. Chairs will not convene oral exams until students have passed the written exam according to two of the three exam committee members.

If the rewrite is still deemed unworthy of a *Passing* grade by two of the three exam committee members, the exam is deemed *Failed* and the student is dismissed from the program.

Oral Phase

During the oral examination, the student will address questions or concerns the committee members provided in their written feedback.

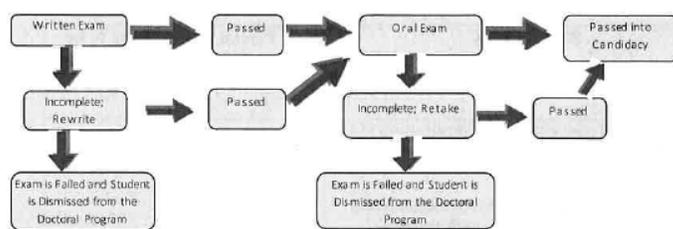
If the oral exam is deemed *Passed* by the three exam committee members, the Comprehensive Examination is deemed *Passed* and the student is admitted into Candidacy.

If the oral exam is evaluated as *Incomplete* by two of the three exam committee members, the student may retake all or part of it once within the time frame assigned by the Committee.

If the retake of the oral exam is deemed *Passed* by two of the three exam committee members, the student is advanced into Candidacy.

If the retake of the oral exam is still not acceptable to any two of the three exam committee members, the student is deemed to have *Failed* the comprehensive exam and is dismissed from the program.

Comprehensive Exam Flow Chart



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