

Purpose

The purpose of the Comprehensive Examination is to ensure that the student understands and can meet the standards of evidence and scholarship in his/her chosen field(s) of research, and is able to articulate the interdisciplinary nature of his/her work from a broad sustainability perspective. The examination allows the student's Graduate Advisory Committee to evaluate the student's potential for interdisciplinary research in environment and sustainability by testing the student's foundational knowledge in the field(s) of study in which the research is situated, and the student's ability to reconcile work across fields.

Scope

The scope of the Comprehensive Examination is to be broader than the specific topic of the student's thesis dissertation. While the Comprehensive Exam will address the student's understanding of the literature in his/her field(s) of study and the areas in which the thesis topic is structured (e.g. theories, methods, past and current debates, anticipated future trajectories), it will do so in an interdisciplinary manner with emphasis on the student's ability to demonstrate scholarly breadth and contextual understanding in the broad area of environment and sustainability. The Comprehensive Exam is not designed to query the specifics of the student's proposed research and should not be used to do so.

Timing

Within the first year of studies a program of studies and a progress report must be submitted to the Graduate Chair and the College of Graduate Studies and Research. The program of studies will identify the general dissertation topic area, membership of the Graduate Advisory Committee, and timing and format of the Comprehensive Exam. The progress report will document the student's progress in course work, thesis proposal development, and identify other program requirements and student accomplishments.

The Comprehensive Exam must ideally be completed before the end of the second year of the student's program of study, after any requirements for a Qualifying Exam have been met, and after all required coursework is completed. The dissertation proposal must also be completed before the end of the second year of the student's program of study. There is no requirement that the dissertation proposal be completed before or after the Comprehensive Exam.

Comprehensive Exam Topics and Reading List

The topics or general areas of the Comprehensive Exam are to be determined by the Advisory Committee, in consultation with the student, a minimum of three months prior to the anticipated date of the exam. The Comprehensive Exam will address three broad topics related to the student's research area, one of which will be 'sustainability' (see Written Exam Format).

The Advisory Committee, in consultation with the student, will develop a Reading List including, at a minimum, 15 critically important papers or books in each of the three areas. The reading list is to serve as a guide to the student, directing him/her to the body of literature most relevant to the topics or general areas to be addressed by the Comprehensive Examination.

The Advisory Committee must provide this Reading List to the student at least three months prior to the anticipated date of the comprehensive examination. Once the Reading List is assigned, the committee can add no new readings. However, the student should treat the reading list as a guide base only and be prepared to read more extensively in each of the three areas.

Exam Format

The Comprehensive Exam will have both a written and an oral component.

Written Exam

The Advisory Committee, in discussion with the student, will set the format of the written portion of the Comprehensive Exam. There are two options for the written exam:

- i. *A series of three take-home papers with the deadlines for each paper to be set by the committee, though not to span more than three months.*

The take-home papers are to adopt the form of a critical literature review, with each paper addressing one of the three broad areas identified on the Reading List.

Consistent with the interdisciplinary nature of the School of Environment and Sustainability, at least one of the three exam papers must focus on the topic area of sustainability. The purpose is to test the student's appreciation for the range of perspectives on sustainability and their interdisciplinary aspects as they relate to his/her research area.

It is at the discretion of the Advisory Committee to assign a broad question, or set of questions, as a guide to each paper, or to allow more flexibility in the specific question(s) the student chooses to address in each of the critical literature reviews.

The length of each paper is flexible and to be determined by the Advisory Committee. As a guideline, each paper should be the length of a standard peer review journal paper – typically 5,000 to 8,500 words. This length is meant to be illustrative only, and is not to be taken as a definitive test of sufficiency. The content and format of the papers will not be judged relative to journal paper standards; however, it is expected that the content will meet the requirements of the comprehensive exam.

- ii. *An 'in situ' exam wherein the student has one day to write each of three exam papers.*

Under this format the student will have 24 hours to write each of three exams. Each exam may consist of a single question, or multiple questions, to be determined at the discretion of the Advisory Committee. The student will not know the specific exam questions in advance of the exam, but will know of the general area being questioned.

Consistent with the interdisciplinary nature of the School of Environment and Sustainability, at least one of the three papers must focus on the topic area of sustainability. The purpose is to test the student's appreciation for the range of perspectives on sustainability and their interdisciplinary aspects as they relate to his/her research area.

The length of each exam paper will vary according to the number of questions, but must be reasonable based on the time allotted to complete the exam.

Oral Exam

The oral exam will take place within two weeks of completion of the last written exam. During the oral exam the student is expected to be able to discuss key areas or fields of research that are related to his/her own field(s) of study, by answering questions posed by the examination committee based on, or supplementing, the written part of the exam.

However, the scope of the oral exam should not be restricted to the student's responses on the written exam, but should explore also the student's ability to demonstrate a breadth of understanding in each of the three broad areas included on the student's Reading List.

The Chair of the Advisory Committee may participate in the oral exam by asking questions, but will vote on the exam results only in the case of a tie.

Results

The Advisory Committee will determine by consensus or majority vote (if consensus cannot be reached) whether the written and oral components of the exam are:

- i. passed without condition;
- ii. passed with condition (e.g. conditions may include a requirement to re-do a written portion of

- the exam, or complete additional coursework);
- iii. failed with requirement for reexamination and, as identified by the committee, completion of additional work; or
 - iv. failed with recommendation to discontinue.

A student failing a Comprehensive Examination is permitted a second examination with permission of the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research. A second failure automatically disqualifies the student from further work for that particular Ph.D. degree. A second examination will normally take place within 2 – 3 months of the first examination.

The marked written portion of the exam will be filed in the student's file. It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee to inform the Graduate Secretary, the Graduate Chair, and the College of Graduate Studies and Research of the outcome of the Comprehensive Examination as soon as possible after the exam. The decision of the Graduate Advisory Committee must be communicated to the student immediately following the oral exam.