

George Mason University
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION
PhD in Communication
Overview – Comprehensive Exams Policy

Program Advisor and Plans of Work

By the 9th week of the first semester (November 1st in Fall semester), secure a program advisor and submit a plan of work to the program director (internal department form). *Note:* This plan of work and choice of advisor can be amended as many times as needed over the course of a student's program. The plan of work is reviewed and approved by the program director, with the graduate studies committee serving in an advisory role.

Comprehensive Exams – Selecting Chair and Committee

By the 2nd week of the last semester of coursework, secure a comprehensive examining committee *chair* (internal departmental form).

By the 7th week of the last semester of coursework, in consultation with comprehensive examining committee chair, secure a comprehensive examining committee (approved by committee chair and program director – internal departmental form). The examination committee must contain three members of the Communication graduate faculty. One additional member from outside the department may also sit on the committee, if needed, but this is only optional.

CHSS does not require that we inform them of the composition of the comprehensive exam committee. So as not to cause confusion at CHSS if the exam and dissertation committee are different, all documents listing the comprehensive exam committee should be kept INTERNAL.

Comprehensive Exams – Scheduling

Students can take their comprehensive exams during one of three “windows” during the academic year. The student's examination committee must approve the window the student selects, and the oral defense must be scheduled for a date *within* the window. Students may not sit for their comprehensive exams outside of these windows.

Window 1: May 15 – June 15

Window 2: August 1 – August 31

Window 3: January 2 – January 31

Comprehensive Exams – Administration

The committee chair must personally administer the exam, or secure a graduate faculty member to serve as substitute proctor. All student essays are to be completed electronically (i.e., no handwritten answers). For closed book portions of the exam, the student must use a computer provided by the Department. All examining committee members are to receive copies of the entire exam, but are only asked to review the questions they had written.

After the student completes the 2-day, in-house exam (see below for more details), the examining committee must provide written evaluation and notice of results, including any requirements for re-writes, within one week. After the student completes the one-week, take-home exam, the examining committee must provide written evaluation and notice of results, including any requirements for re-

writes, within one week. If the committee requires any re-writes on either exam, students have one week to complete re-writes after receiving the results. An oral defense of all exams and re-writes must be completed no more than 28 days after the completion of the in-house exam. The student may be asked to rewrite all or part of the exam *one time*. An oral examination attended by all members of the committee is required for all students. After the oral examination is successfully completed, the committee signs the departmental *Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination Results* form.

Here is a description of the timeline for completing comprehensive exams:

- The 2 day, in-house exam begins the timeline.
- 1 week (from 2nd day of in-house exam) -- take-home exam due to committee and in-house results due back to student.
- 1 week later -- rewrites from in-house exam due to committee (if necessary) and take-home results due back to student.
- 1 week later -- take home re-writes due to committee (if necessary) OR deadline for oral defense (if no re-writes were required).
- 1 week later -- final deadline for completion of orals.

After the oral examination is successfully completed, the committee signs the departmental Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination Results form. *Immediately upon completion of comprehensive exams (written and oral), the program director sends a memo to the CHSS Graduate Coordinator indicating that the student has successfully completed the comprehensive examination.*

Comprehensive Exams – Format

The doctoral comprehensive exam consists of 3 modules in the form of 8 hours of closed book exam writing time over two consecutive days, plus 3 questions in “take-home” form to be completed in one week’s time.

1. SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY AND BREADTH OF THE FIELD (THEORY)

Closed book exam, 4 hours

The number and structure of questions for this module are designed by the examining committee. The committee chair, in consultation with the committee and the student, determines who from the committee will write questions for this module, how many questions there are to be, and how much writing time will be allotted to each. Once this has been determined, the student should confer with each questioner how to best prepare.

2. METHODOLOGY

Closed book exam, 4 hours

Each student must be examined over both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, with no less than one focused hour dedicated to either. Beyond that, the exact balance of these areas and the number and structure of questions for this module are designed by the examining committee. The committee chair, in consultation with the committee and the student, determines who from the committee will write questions for this module, how many questions there are to be, and how much writing time will be allotted to each. Once this has been determined, the student should confer with each questioner how to best prepare.

3. SPECIALIZATION

3 questions, take home, one week deadline

Immediately upon completing the second day of closed book exams, the student is to be given his/her 3 take-home specialization questions. *The student's essays are due exactly one week (7 calendar days) to the hour from which they were received by the student.* The student must provide the essays in electronic form. The structure of questions for this module is designed by the examining committee. The committee chair, in consultation with the committee and the student, determines who from the committee will write questions for this module. Once this has been determined, the student should confer with each questioner how to best prepare.

Note: more detailed rules with regard to planning and administering comprehensive exams can be found in the policy hand-out entitled "Exam Procedures." See the program director for a copy.

After the Exams – Dissertation Proposal (Comm 998)

The student may only enroll in Comm 998 (proposal hours) if comprehensive exams are completed and defended (in an oral defense) *prior* to the add/drop deadline of the semester in which they wish to take Comm 998. For example, if a student wishes to take Comm 998 in the Fall semester, he or she must have successfully defended his/her exams *prior* to the Fall semester add/drop deadline. Furthermore, in order to enroll in 998, the student must have secured a dissertation advisor, who may or may not be the comprehensive examining committee chair. The dissertation advisor must inform the department scheduling coordinator of the need for a 998 in the advisor's name.