

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam in Clinical Psychology

(Revised and adopted by the clinical faculty 2/16/2022)

The Comprehensive Exam is an opportunity for a student to develop expertise in an area of clinical psychological science. It also serves as a demonstration of a student's written and oral ability to review, integrate, and evaluate a large body of empirical research; to propose testable hypotheses that stem from that research; and to design a study to test those hypotheses, including appropriate statistical analyses. The purpose of this process is to determine that a student is prepared for a career as a doctoral-level clinical psychologist, wherein these skills constitute essential competencies.

In our Clinical Psychology doctoral program, the comprehensive exam to advance to Ph.D. candidacy consists of (1) a written examination (i.e., a written dissertation proposal document that is deemed satisfactory by the 5-person dissertation committee) and (2) an oral examination (i.e., a committee decision of "pass" at the dissertation proposal meeting).

Please see the Department of Psychological Science's "Dissertation Proposal Guidelines" for specific instructions to prepare for (1) and (2).

In accordance with Graduate College rules, should the candidate fail the examination, only one re-examination is permitted; and the comprehensive examination must be passed by the candidate at least 6 months before the final dissertation is submitted to the Graduate College.

Failure of the comprehensive examination is defined as the following scenarios, with one re-examination allowed at each step (written and oral exam components). Pass/fail is defined by consensus agreement by the committee members.

(1) Upon submitting the proposal to the committee, the committee deems that the proposal is not satisfactory and a meeting should not occur, commensurate with #5 in the Department's Dissertation Proposal Guidelines. This would mean the written exam was failed; the student has one more chance to submit a satisfactory document to the committee.

(2) Based on the Department's Dissertation Proposal Guidelines (#9) regarding committee deliberations after a proposal meeting:

c. "Re-write aspects of the proposal and re-submit to committee members." (This would mean the written part of the exam was, in part, failed, but could be turned to a pass with revisions deemed satisfactory by the committee).

d. "Re-write aspects of the proposal and hold another proposal meeting." (This would mean the written part of the exam, in part, was failed, but could be turned to a pass with revisions deemed satisfactory by the committee, and the changes were deemed substantial enough to warrant holding another oral exam, deferring the pass/fail decision on the oral exam until another meeting occurs).

e. "Hold another proposal meeting." (This would mean the oral exam was failed; the student has one more chance to hold another meeting deemed successful by the committee).

f. "Start on a new proposal." (This would mean the written and oral exam were both failed on the first attempt. In practice, the expectation is that this would be detected by the committee in advance of holding an oral exam, and the committee would inform the student not to proceed with a meeting. See (1), above. After rewriting the proposal, if the written product is deemed

satisfactory (passed oral exam on second attempt), the student would still need to hold another proposal meeting on the revised proposal and pass the oral exam on the second attempt to pass the comp).

Documented Completion of Comprehensive Exam

If a student receives a Pass, they must complete the “Proof of Successful Completion of Comprehensive Exam” form from the Graduate College. Form available at:

<https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/compexammemo.pdf>

Department of Psychological Science Dissertation Proposal Guidelines

Approved by the Faculty: February 8, 2017; Revised March 9, 2018

Preamble: The purpose of a dissertation is the opportunity for a graduate student to demonstrate her/his/their ability to independently conceptualize, design, and analyze a meaningful piece of research. A knowledge of the relevant literature and theory, the ability to integrate the proposed study into the existing literature and theory, the ability to develop research hypotheses, and an ability to recognize the limitations, strengths, and implications of the study also are critical parts of the dissertation proposal.

1. A dissertation proposal should be the work of a graduate student with the guidance of a faculty mentor. It should include a *comprehensive* literature review leading to specific research hypotheses and a detailed method section. Because the length of the literature review can vary by topic, the scope of the literature review, including its length, should be determined through consultation with the student’s advisor and dissertation committee as early in the process as possible. The Department of Psychological Science does not accept dissertation proposals (or dissertations) in manuscript/journal article format, even if appended with a full literature review.
2. The proposal should be in the best shape possible prior to submission to the committee. The role of committee members is to evaluate the proposal and the candidate, not to design the study, help write the proposal, or help design data analytic approaches.
3. The candidate should know her/his/their data analytic plan and be able to justify it.
4. The oral defense of the dissertation proposal is the task of the candidate, not the primary faculty mentor.
5. The dissertation proposal should be submitted to the committee two weeks before the proposal meeting unless all committee members agree to waive the two week period. Serious concerns about the readiness of the written proposal for a committee meeting must be shared, via email, with the committee at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled meeting. The meeting may be rescheduled at the discretion of the committee chair.
6. The dissertation proposal meeting should be scheduled for a 2-hour block, but may end early.

7. The candidate should then present an oral overview of the proposal that should last approximately 15 minutes. A brief literature review, rationale for and hypotheses of the study, methods, data analytic strategies, and preliminary data if available should be presented.
8. The great majority of the proposal meeting should focus on committee member questions for the candidate.
9. A final meeting among committee members without the candidate present should occur to make one of the following decisions:
 - a. Proceed with the dissertation study;
 - b. Proceed with the dissertation study with a list of changes to the proposal;
 - c. Re-write aspects of the proposal and re-submit to committee members.
 - d. Re-write aspects of the proposal and hold another proposal meeting;
 - e. Hold another proposal meeting;
 - f. Start on a new proposal.