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Academic Affairs Manual

Policies and Procedures for Comprehensive Exams in Graduate Programs

Published Policies and Procedures

To ensure that students are informed of their responsibilities and the program requirements, each graduate program shall have written policies and procedures that are consistent with the University-wide procedures and policies and are published in the University Catalog. Program coordinators should make available to students a complete summary of all policies and procedures affecting comprehensive exams.

Each program shall articulate clearly policies regarding scoring of the comprehensive exams and, if applicable, rubrics for individual components of the examination.

Each program shall publish in the University Catalog its policy regarding retaking a failed exam. The policy must state clearly the number of times a student may retake a failed exam, whether students may switch from an exam to a project or thesis, and whether a student must retake the entire exam or, if appropriate, certain designated sections of the exam.

Content of the Examination

All comprehensive exams must do the following:

- ❖ Assess the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area
- ❖ Give evidence of critical and independent thinking
- ❖ Demonstrate mastery of the subject matter
- ❖ Demonstrate writing skills commensurate with the granting of the master's degree

The results of the comprehensive examination must provide evidence of the following:

- ❖ Independent thinking
- ❖ Appropriate organization
- ❖ Critical analysis
- ❖ Accuracy of documentation
- ❖ Advanced writing skills

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Given the above criteria, all comprehensive exams must include an essay portion which comprises no less than 50% of the examination grade.

Where comprehensive exams are divided into separate components, such as by course or topic, each program shall inform students in writing as to how each section will be graded and what the retake policy will be for the exam.

Eligibility to Take the Comprehensive Exam

In order to be eligible to take the comprehensive exam, a student must have met all requirements for Advancement to Candidacy as specified in the University Catalog and must be in good academic standing, which is defined as a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 for all post-baccalaureate work, whether part of the degree program or not.

For 30-36 unit master's degrees, all course work must either be completed or concurrent in the semester the exam is taken. Students completing course work in the summer session are not eligible to take the comprehensive exam in the prior spring semester.

For master's degrees that require more than 36 units, students may take the exam one semester prior to completion of the program provided that 85% of the course work has been completed. Each program will establish uniform requirements for eligibility to take the exam and shall make these requirements available to students in writing. A copy of the requirements shall be sent to the Office of the Dean for Graduate Studies & Research.

A student's eligibility to take the comprehensive examination must be verified by the Program Coordinator.

Administration of the Exam

All comprehensive exams must be proctored. When proctoring is deemed not feasible, as in the case of some distance learning programs, either the thesis or the project shall be the culminating experience.

Comprehensive exams should be administered at the completion of all course work except as noted above for degree programs that exceed 36 units. (See section on eligibility.)

Students who fail the exam and must retake it will take the exam at a regularly scheduled session (e.g., the following semester).

Students who retake the exam shall take the exam in the current format.

Comprehensive exams must be administered during the six weeks preceding the last day of scheduled final exams in the fall or spring semesters.

Length of the Exam

The written portion of the comprehensive exam shall be no less than four (4) hours in duration. Additionally, an oral defense should be part of the culminating experience.

Scoring of the Exam

Each exam will be scored by no fewer than two (2) readers. The identity of the student will be unknown to the readers, and readers' identities will not be revealed to students. If two readers read the exam and disagree on the pass/fail score or grade, a third reader shall read the exam under the same conditions prescribed for the original reading.

Retention of Records

Each program shall keep copies of each scored exam in accordance with the University retention policy (PM 93-07).

Each program shall submit a copy of the most recent comprehensive exam to the Dean for Graduate Studies & Research.

Each semester, each program shall provide a list of students who have taken the exam and their pass/fail scores to the Dean for Graduate Studies & Research.

Failure to Pass Exam

Students who fail to pass the comprehensive examination cannot challenge their results through the Student Grade Appeals Process. (See PM 96-02).