
Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam Guidelines



SPRING, 2021

Department of Public Administration & Policy
submitted by
Drs. Kristie Roberts-Lewis & Vanessa Greenslade

Introduction

Prior to admission to candidacy for the doctoral degree, Ph.D. students will be required to pass a written/oral Doctoral Comprehensive Examination. This examination will assess student's comprehensive knowledge of the field of public policy and correlating minor subjects of study, both in breadth across the general field of study and in depth within the area of specialization.

Qualifications to Take the Exam

Students who have successfully completed all the required coursework and who possess a minimum GPA of 3.0. Students will submit a copy of the Request to Sit for the Comprehensive Exam form; a copy of their unofficial transcript and the Dissertation Study Plan form.

Request to Take the Exam

A student must formally request to take comprehensive examination one semester prior to the completion of all core coursework and are enrolled in their last semester of coursework taking no more than one elective course. The student initiates the request by completing the Request to Sit for the Comprehensive Exam form found on the Nelson Mandela College's website under the Document & Forms link. Upon completion of the form it is submitted via the course's Moodle along with an unofficial copy of their transcript, proof of attendance at the comprehensive preparation session and plan of study.

The Comprehensive Committee

A committee will be convened to develop, implement, proctor and grade the Comprehensive Exam (the committee should be comprised of the Ph.D. Director/College Dean and three faculty members. The Program Director / Dean will be named the instructor of record for the exam. All documents shall be submitted to the instructor of record. The instructor of record will name two non-committee faculty members to review the requests to sit for the exam. After review, the committee shall present the credentials of those applicants certified to sit for the exam. A rubric will be utilized by the committee to assess and ensure that the process is objective. The committee will convene to discuss, develop and vet the questions. All committee members must score each section of the exam and turn it in to the instructor of record. .

Comprehensive Exam Preparation

Students registering for the exam must attend the comprehensive exam preparation session. The sessions will be focused on preparing students for the Comprehensive Exam and sponsored by the Chair and Faculty members.

The Comprehensive Preparation Training Sessions will be hosted twice a semester for students and provide an overview of the comprehensive exam, expectations (including the use of APA formatting guidelines) and best practices and strategies for successfully navigating the exam.

During the course, students will be given a required reading list for each cognate area (that will be developed by the student's committee) once they have completed the required paperwork and become eligible to take the exam. However, it is expected that students will also utilize themes, concepts, theories, methods, and strategies advanced in the program's curriculum.

Comprehensive Examination Schedule and Components

Comprehensive Examinations are offered in Mid October and Mid March. The examination will be comprised of both written and oral components. The initial exam is written; however, if students does not successfully pass a section the student will be given an opportunity to defend their responses orally. The written aspect of the comprehensive examination includes three components:

- SET#1 contains PPOL 714 Foundation of Public Policy, PPOL 706 Program Evaluation and Design and PPOL 708 Program Implementation.
- SET#2 comprises PPOL 710 Microeconomics for Public Policy and PPOL 712 Macroeconomics for Public Policy.
- SET#3 is composed of PPOL 700 Quantitative Methods I, PPOL 702 Quantitative Methods II, and PPOL 704 Research Methods.

Students will have one week to provide a comprehensive written response to each of the sections. Once the exam has been completed, students will submit their exam responses in Moodle.

Evaluation of Comprehensive Examination

A Comprehensive Exam committee of three professors will both proctor and assess the comprehensive exams. Students will be assessed by faculty on the breadth and depth of their knowledge of the key theoretical traditions, methods, and literature of the field, going significantly beyond the individual course curriculum. Exam answers will be scored as either

- exceeds expectations (pass with distinction),
- meets expectations (pass), or
- below expectations (fail).

Each exam response must receive a minimum grade of meets expectations by consensus of the committee or from at least two graders to pass. If a student does not pass any part of the comprehensive exam, he/she will have one opportunity to defend the exam submission orally and if the student passes the oral exam, they will successfully meet the requirements for the comprehensive exam. However, if students are not successful in either the written or oral exam, they will have only one opportunity to repeat the written exam the next semester or no later than one year after the first attempt. Oral exams will be administered and scheduled by the Comprehensive Exam Committee. A student who fails the comprehensive examination may take it again in the following year with the approval of the Comprehensive Committee. A second failure will result in dismissal from this doctoral program. If a student fails the exam a second time, he/she will not be allowed to advance to candidacy and can elect to receive a second master's degree in Public Administration with a Public Policy concentration.

The Comprehensive Exam committee will have one week from the date of receiving the Comprehensive Exam to review and provide a rubric of their findings. Students will be notified of their results via email from the instructor of record.