

Ph. D. Comprehensive Examination Policy
September 8, 2016

Joint Program in Survey Methodology
Michigan Program in Survey Methodology

Purpose of the Examination

The Comprehensive Examination (CE) is designed to assess whether a student has sufficient knowledge and creativity to develop and complete a dissertation.

Expectations

The CE is designed to establish that the Ph.D. student

- 1) has a thorough knowledge of the relevant literature
- 2) is capable of identifying methodological problems that are worthy of investigation
- 3) can formulate research questions and hypotheses centered on those problems
- 4) demonstrates the knowledge of research design and statistical analysis methods (experimental, quasi-experimental, observational) required to design and interpret research studies that are capable of addressing the research aims
- 5) defend the proposed research design orally
- 6) has a plan for what the next steps might be conditional on the outcomes of the proposed investigation

A Ph.D. student should be able to demonstrate capacity to do all of 1) to 6) in writing and in an oral defense.

The CE oral defense is the final milestone to be achieved before a student advances to candidacy. The defense is a meeting of the student and a designated CE committee in which the student gives a brief introduction to the topic and responds to questions raised by CE committee members.

The CE defense examines a written paper *proposing* a novel research idea written by the student. The student **must deliver the paper to the CE committee members at least 10 days before the examination.** The paper is typically the result of a student's investigation of a particular topic developed during the Doctoral Seminar. Students may choose another topic than the one developed in the Seminar, but experience has shown that the most successful papers are those developed in the Doctoral Seminar.

The normal progression of the CE process is for a student to settle on a topic at the latest by January or February of the second year in the Ph.D program, typically the beginning of the fourth term of participation in the Doctoral Seminar. By the end of April and the end of the Doctoral Seminar students should have completed a draft paper that Seminar instructor(s) have examined and provided feedback on to the student.

Students then prepare a final paper to be discussed with the CE committee members in an oral defense to be held no later than the end of May of their second year. Of course, it is acceptable, but not required, for a student to schedule their oral defense earlier in the term. If a student passes the exam, they will be advanced to Candidacy the following fall semester. If a student receives a Conditional Pass, conditions will be set that normally can be completed by the end of the summer to allow the student to advance to Candidacy in the fall semester.

A student failing the exam will be removed from the program. However, the student can petition the Candidacy committee¹ within one month of the oral defense to re-take the CE. If the petition is granted, the student can be, upon successfully passing the second CE, readmitted to the program in the semester the second CE is held. A student being reinstated to the program may be responsible for paying tuition until the second CE is completed and that student advances to Candidacy. Students can be advanced to Candidacy only in fall or winter semesters at Michigan, the fall or spring semester at Maryland. The CE exam may not be retaken more than once.

Exceptions to this policy require extraordinary circumstances and can be permitted only by the Candidacy committee, in consultation with the Director of the student's Program.

Examination Paper Format and Coverage

The written research paper will consist of at least three sections: a review of relevant literature on a topic selected by the student, a description of a proposal for research that would fill a gap in that literature, and a consideration of how the proposal could be implemented. Papers are expected to be 20-30 pages, with double spaced, 12 point font and one inch margins, not including tables, references, figures, and abstract (although an abstract is not a required component).

The paper should address one or more specific problems that would be appropriate for a dissertation. The problem should be one that can feasibly be addressed given the resources typically available for dissertation research. Methods of data collection, generation, or analysis should be proposed to investigate the problem.

Students are strongly encouraged to use the Comprehensive Exam as the basis for their dissertation proposal. The student may select a different topic for dissertation research but this is generally discouraged.

Examination Process

During preparation of the paper, a student is allowed to consult with Doctoral Seminar instructors, an academic or (if one has been chosen) dissertation advisor, or the CE committee about content and format. The faculty advice can include 1) whether the topic

¹ A faculty committee which oversees the administration of the Qualifying and Comprehensive Exams

is suitable as a an examination paper, 2) alerting the student to relevant bodies of literature they may not be aware of, and 3) whether the proposed research is well designed.

Advice does not include detailed feedback on theory or design nor editorial assistance to correct grammar, format, or organization.

The Candidacy committee, in consultation with the student, will form the student's CE committee. The CE committee will consist of four faculty members. Doctoral Seminar instructors and the student's dissertation advisor² are excluded from membership. A student will discuss CE committee membership in February or March, at the latest, with the Candidacy committee. The Candidacy committee will designate one member of the CE committee as chair. Once the CE committee is formed, the student is responsible for scheduling the exam with committee members, arranging a conference room (and video connection, if needed) and notifying the CE committee members about these arrangements. Program administrative staff may help to arrange conference room use. The student exam paper will be submitted to the CE committee and Candidacy committee no later than 10 days before the scheduled exam date. The oral defense typically lasts no more than two hours. The defense may include a brief student presentation (usually no more than 20 minutes) to provide a framework for the discussion. The defense will consist primarily of faculty questions and student responses moderated by the chair. Questions focus on the content of the paper and presentation, but can also include wider queries about issues related to the research proposal and potential solutions.

Candidacy

Student performance on the CE will be graded as Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail.

Pass indicates that the examination committee believes the student has demonstrated competence in designing and conducting research of the sort required for a dissertation.

Conditional Pass indicates that in the judgment of the examination committee the examination was not satisfactory, but there is a reasonable expectation that the student will pass a second exam following revision of the paper. The CE committee will communicate to the student how and by when the original paper should be revised. The student must keep the CE committee apprised of their progress while preparing for the second exam.

²At this stage in a student's program, they would not formally have a "chair" or "advisor" for their dissertation committee but may have been working with a faculty member on research ideas that have now been incorporated into their comprehensive exam paper. This faculty member should be excluded.

A failing outcome indicates that the student has not demonstrated the competence needed to design and conduct research of the sort required for a dissertation. The student may petition the director of their program to retake the exam. The director will consult relevant faculty including the Candidacy committee and render a decision. If the petition is denied, the student will not be able to continue in the program. If the petition is approved, the student must earn an unmodified Pass (not a Conditional Pass) on their second exam in order to remain in the program. The CE exam may not be retaken more than once.

The student will receive the results of their exam in writing from the program director. Once a student has passed, the Program will recommend to the respective Graduate School that the student be advanced to Candidacy.