

# Proposed Revision to Graduate Studies Regulations on Comprehensive Examinations

To: Graduate Students, Faculty and Staff Members

From: Academic Planning and Policy Committee, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Date: March 2021

Status: Draft for Consultation

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## Background

The autonomy of programs in setting their comprehensive examinations is appropriate in light of the central role that field and disciplinary expertise play in determining the subject matter and format of examinations. However, concerns will arise intermittently related to procedure. Situations in which neither students nor faculty members may be fully aware of the structure of their examinations or the process of evaluation may increase psychological stress and increase the likelihood of ad hoc deviations from approved procedures.

## Purpose

This regulation outlines the requirements for program-level guidelines regarding graduate milestone examinations (comprehensive examinations, qualifying examinations, research evaluations or their equivalent). The content, structure and administration of these exams may differ across programs, but their purpose is to determine if a student is suitably prepared to continue on to research for their dissertation.

The aim of this regulation is to provide a framework that will clarify what information must be communicated to a student and committee members, and the expectation that programs establish a timeline for the sharing of information to relevant parties.

## Scope and Application

This regulation applies to all graduate programs (master’s and doctoral) that include graduate milestone examinations as part of their degree requirements.

This regulation does not affect, nor should it be taken to influence, the administration of other examinations in the graduate program, such as language exams or those exams that are exclusively part of the assessment for a course.

Five areas are defined and outlined in the proposed revision. This information must be communicated to students in writing, and available for easy consultation in advance of the examination. Failure to provide adequate information to students about the format and delivery of their examination(s) as well as other relevant policies may impede a student’s academic progress, may negatively impact a student’s well-being, and may call into question the integrity of the examination process itself.

<b>Existing Copy (Change From):</b>	<b>Proposed Copy (Change To):</b>
<p><b>Comprehensive Examinations</b></p> <p>Individual graduate programs may require students to undertake comprehensive examinations. The specific requirements and evaluation procedures are determined by individual graduate programs, with the approval of the Faculty of Graduate Studies’ Council.</p>	<p><b>Graduate Milestone Examinations</b></p> <p>Individual graduate programs may require students to undertake graduate milestone examinations (comprehensive examinations, qualifying examinations, research evaluations or their equivalent). The specific requirements and evaluation procedures are determined by individual graduate programs, with the approval of the relevant anchor Faculty Council, in consultation with the Faculty of Graduate Studies’ Council.</p> <p>Areas of information that must be outlined in program examination guidelines include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Timing and Scheduling</li> <li>2. Format and Structure</li> <li>3. Accessibility and Accommodations</li> <li>4. Assessment Criteria and Feedback</li> <li>5. Outcomes of the Examination(s)</li> </ol> <p>Applicable information must be communicated to students in writing, and available for easy consultation in advance of the examination(s).</p>

## **1. Timing and Scheduling**

All program-level examination procedures must outline (or indicate where such information is available) the timing of the examination(s) in relation to other program milestones, such as the completion of coursework or the approval of a dissertation proposal.

The scheduling of the examination(s) – the relevant date, time and (where applicable) location – will take place and be communicated to students and all faculty members involved in the examination process no later than 20 business days prior to the examination(s) date.

## **2. Format and Structure**

All program-level examination procedures must specify the format of the examination(s). The format may vary across programs and degrees but must be consistent in format for all students in a program. Some common formats include:

- On-campus written exam
- Take-home written exam
- Research proposal
- Research paper
- Course syllabus and supporting explanation
- Oral exam

Programs may combine formats. Other formats may be considered with appropriate justification but may not be adopted on an ad hoc basis.

Along with information about the format of the exam, students must be provided instructions on the duration of the examination(s) and use of aids and supports.

### **3. Accessibility and Accommodations**

Students requiring accommodations are encouraged to contact the appropriate accessibility office at the university well in advance of the examination(s). Graduate Program Directors and faculty members should not adapt the format or scheduling of the examination(s) outside of consultations with the applicable accessibility advisor. All accommodations must be made in consultation with the student and must follow applicable policies related to access to information and privacy.

### **4. Assessment Criteria and Feedback**

The process of assessment must be communicated to students no later than 20 business days prior to the examination(s) date. This information must include:

- The process by which the examination questions are set
- The structure of evaluation including, in the case of evaluation by committee, the process by which the committee's deliberation informs the final assessment
- In the case of multi-part examinations, the weighting of examination components and whether or not the evaluation of each of the examinations is separate or integrated into a single decision
- The grading scheme for the examination(s)

A written rationale for the final assessment should be prepared by the faculty members responsible for evaluation. The assessment must be shared with the student in a manner that will allow them to understand the decision.

## **5. Outcomes of the Examination(s)**

Prior to the examination(s), students must be informed about how the outcome of the examination(s) will be communicated as well as the potential outcomes:

- Passed: Requirements for the examination(s) have been successfully completed.
- Passed with Conditions: Requirements for the examination(s) have been successfully completed pending conditions. The nature of the conditions should be agreed to by the examining committee in the case of evaluation by committee.
- Unsuccessful Outcome: Requirements for the examination(s) have not been successfully completed.
  - In the event of an Unsuccessful Outcome on a re-examination, requirements for the Graduate Milestone Examination have not been successfully completed, thereby requiring withdrawal from the program.

Following the examination(s), programs must communicate in writing if the examination(s) has been passed. In the event of a pass with conditions or an unsuccessful outcome, students must be provided, in writing, an outline of the process for re-examination as well as the grounds and applicable process for appealing a decision.

Programs must set in advance as part of their program procedures the number of times students can repeat or revise the examination(s).