

# PhD Program in Health York University

## Guidelines on Comprehensive Examinations

### **OBJECTIVES**

The comprehensive examination is a pedagogical exercise that requires candidates, upon completion of course work requirements, to engage in written and oral focused academic inquiry on a topic or problem of interest. The comprehensive examination offers students the opportunity to engage in academic inquiry that extends the bounds of coursework and moves toward the conceptual work of the dissertation.

The combination of the written and oral work will test the students' grasp of the central themes and debates, and the key theoretical and methodological issues. It will reflect the diversity of perspectives in the field and its trans-disciplinary nature. Successful completion of this requirement demonstrates that the candidate has the level of knowledge in his/her area of specialization needed to begin work on the dissertation.

### **WHEN TO START**

**For students entering the PhD program with a Masters degree**, the comprehensive exams will take place in the 2nd term of the 2nd year of study (i.e. the 5<sup>th</sup> term).

**For direct-entry PhD students**, the comprehensive exams will take place in the 3<sup>rd</sup> term of the 2nd year of study (i.e. the 6<sup>th</sup> term).

In exceptional circumstances, they may be taken in the 3rd year. In either case, students are usually expected to initiate their comprehensive research upon completion of course work requirements.

### **DESCRIPTION**

The comprehensive examination consists of **2 written assignments**, providing a concise literature review of primary sources and demonstrating command of the literature, and a subsequent **oral examination**.

The 2 assignments are expected to be completed in about 8 months under the supervision of 2 different faculty who are members of the Graduate Program in Health, with one faculty member designated for each assignment supervision. Students can choose to undertake these assignments in any order. However, they are recommended to complete these assignments sequentially as opposed to concurrently.

Students are required to notify the Graduate Program of their 2 comprehensive supervisors and gain approval from the Graduate Program Director prior to writing the assignments. (Refer to P.3 for the Notification of Comprehensive Supervisors form.)

The (usual) **1<sup>st</sup> assignment** is an essay of 20-25 pages exclusive of references that broadly covers the scope of the field of Health Policy and Equity or Health System Management and Information. Students are expected to meet with their comprehensive supervisor periodically at a frequency to be decided between the two parties. During the meetings, the student will identify the themes and literatures that capture the key debates pertaining to the field from various perspectives, and will develop the reading list in consultation with their supervisor. The literatures to be chosen must be primary sources, as opposed to secondary analysis.

The **2<sup>nd</sup> assignment** is an essay of 20-25 pages exclusive of references that covers a broad context specific area of study related to the thesis. (The context specific area that is chosen should be wider than a question to be investigated in a thesis.) An appendix of an additional 5-10 pages must also be submitted. This appendix should explore the various methodologies that could be used to address research questions in this particular context specific area, examine the debates around these methodologies and then justify the choice of the methodology(ies) ultimately chosen. The process used to determine the chosen topic and literature to be read is similar to those outlined for the 1<sup>st</sup> assignment as above. Students are to submit the topic for this assignment to the Graduate Program Director before starting the assignment. (Refer to P.3 for the Notification of Comprehensive Supervisors form.)

During the subsequent **oral examination**, students are required to demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of scholarly theoretical and empirical work that has been done in the areas that were the focus of the assignments. The oral examination committee includes the 2 faculty members who supervised the 2 assignments as well as the Graduate Program Director. The oral component will consist of an examination of approximately 2 hours wherein the examiners will question the student regarding his/her knowledge in the area of the assignments.

The oral examination is assessed using one of the following categories: **pass**, **pass with conditions**, or **unsatisfactory**.

Students who receive a rating of **“pass with conditions”** on the examination must fulfill all of the conditions satisfactorily within 1 month of the examination date. Failure to meet the conditions satisfactorily and promptly will result in expulsion from the program.

Students who receive a rating of **“unsatisfactory”** on the examination are permitted to re-sit the examination once within 3 months of the date of the 1st examination. A second failure will result in expulsion from the program.

Successful completion of the oral examination qualifies students to begin their dissertation.

PhD Program in Health  
York University

Notification of Comprehensive Paper Supervisors

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

**COMPREHENSIVE PAPER #1**

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Please sign or attach e-mail acknowledging the agreement of being a committee member.)*

Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

**COMPREHENSIVE PAPER #2**

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Please sign or attach e-mail acknowledging the agreement of being a committee member.)*

Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Program Director's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Approved

**Students are required to submit this notification form to the Graduate Program Office and gain approval from the Graduate Program Director prior to writing the 2 comprehensive papers.**