PhD Comprehensive Examination Procedures

Please note: The Student, the Supervisor and the Supervisory Committee (SC) are responsible for completing the steps as outlined in this checklist; the timeline is suggested.

I. Prior to the Comprehensive Examination:
   A. The Student is enrolled in HSCI 983-6 Comprehensive Examination and Thesis Proposal.
   B. Normally the comprehensive examination (exam) will be completed by the end of the Student’s fourth term in the program (i.e. the end of the Student’s first semester of their second year).
   C. The SC, in collaboration with the Student, will choose a research question or topic that will encompass the Student’s proposed research topic. The comprehensive paper may include a critical review of the literature relevant to the research question, discussion of the theoretical frameworks used to understand or frame the research question, or an in-depth analysis of the specific content area.
   D. The Student, in collaboration with the Supervisor and SC, will determine the timeline for the Student to submit the comprehensive exam paper to the SC for their review.
   E. The SC will prepare written questions or comments on the Student’s paper to which the Student must respond in writing. The SC’s questions and comments posed in response to the Student’s paper will address the broad field encompassing the Student’s proposed research, such as methodologies used and interdisciplinary aspects of the research. Normally the Student will have one week to ten days to submit the written responses to the questions to the SC.
   F. The Student will contact the SC and schedule a meeting (reserve a room) for the comprehensive exam. All SC members will be involved in all steps of the comprehensive exam, and be present in person (or via phone or other media if not possible) at the oral exam.
   G. The MSc/PhD Graduate Program Assistant will provide the Supervisor with the PhD Comprehensive Examination Confirmation of Acceptability form for completion by the SC at the conclusion of the exam.
   H. The comprehensive examination and thesis proposal defence may be combined in one meeting, depending on the judgment of the Student’s SC. In the case of a combined meeting, then the comprehensive exam will occur first. If the Student does not successfully pass the comprehensive exam, the thesis proposal defence will not proceed and the comprehensive exam meeting is terminated. The comprehensive exam and thesis proposal should reflect original work and will typically include:
      1. A literature review relevant to the Student’s proposed topic or area of research,
      2. Describe methodology relevant to the principal research question(s).
   I. To ensure consistency of standards across the Faculty of Health Sciences the MSc/PhD Graduate Studies Committee will oversee the comprehensive exam and thesis proposal defence processes. This may include attending the Student’s comprehensive exam at the invitation of the Student and SC.
II. **At the exam meeting:**
   
   A. The Student must orally defend both the paper and written responses to the questions posed by the SC. When the SC is satisfied that there are no further questions, then the Student is invited to step out of the room and the SC makes a decision on one of the following outcomes of the exam:
   
   1. **Satisfactory** The Supervisory Committee has read and responded to the student’s comprehensive exam paper and written responses to exam questions. We agree that the student has satisfactorily met the requirements of this Committee and should move forward with his/her research leading to a PhD thesis.
   
   2. **Satisfactory with Conditions** (attach specific conditions that must be met for a satisfactory assessment). The Supervisory Committee has read and responded to the student’s comprehensive exam paper and written responses. We agree the Student will have satisfactorily met the requirements of this committee and should move forward with his/her PhD thesis proposal and defence once specific conditions (attached) are addressed to the satisfaction of the Supervisor; the Supervisor will withhold signature until such time that the conditions are fully addressed.
   
   3. **Unsatisfactory** (attach specific conditions for satisfactory assessment). The Supervisory Committee has read and responded to the student’s comprehensive exam paper and written responses to exam questions. We agree that the student has not satisfactorily met the requirements of this Committee and is not adequately prepared to move forward with his/her PhD thesis research. A new comprehensive exam is required.
   
   B. If the Student fails a portion of the exam and must re-write and re-defend, they may only do so once; if they do not successfully pass on the second try they will be withdrawn from the program in accordance with Graduate General Regulation 1.8.3.

III. **After the exam meeting:**
   
   A. The Student is invited to return to the room when the Supervisor will notify the Student formally with the completion of the PhD Comprehensive Examination Confirmation of Acceptability form. The form has the signatures of the Supervisor and SC confirming that the Student has successfully completed the comprehensive exam.
   
   B. The Supervisor (or designate) will submit the completed PhD Comprehensive Examination Confirmation of Acceptability form to the MSc/PhD Graduate Program Assistant (mscphtd_assistant@sfu.ca).
   
   C. The original completed form will be kept confidential and reside in the Student’s paper file.
   
   D. If the comprehensive exam and thesis proposal are a separate entity, the Student will receive an IP (in progress) grade for HSCI 983-6. The grade of S (Satisfactory) will be assigned for HSCI 983-6 when the thesis proposal is defended successfully.
   
   E. The Student will enroll in HSCI 990-12 PhD Thesis in the semester following the successful completion of the comprehensive exam and thesis proposal defence. The Student will continue to enroll in HSCI 990 in subsequent semesters until the completion of the PhD program.