

## **EXM 880: Comprehensive Examination (2 credits)**

Masters students complete this comprehensive examination as a required element of their academic program, prior to undertaking the thesis. The examination includes both written and oral components and is confined to the program of studies completed by the student.

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### **The Written Component**

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#### **Written Examination Style**

The format of the written component of the final examination is open book style, with selected essay type questions presented to students by email. The primary mentor gathers questions from the assigned faculty reviewers and selects representative questions. Three to five questions are normally selected from each faculty reviewer and transmitted to the student with a set of written instructions.

The essay questions are designed to require the students to respond to the subject matter in a creative manner, addressing real world problems and situations, through professional reflection, decision making, and problem solving. Questions require students to draw upon the theories, principles and practices, which set the foundation for their programs of study. The essay questions are rigorous and meaningful, appropriate to the student's degree level, requiring mature responses, and are confined to the major (and minor) subject matter of student's program. Students are advised to support their answers with recent and effective citations and references to the academic literature.

Students are instructed in writing to submit their answers by email, in complete and concise written form, and within the allotted timeframe. Students are also advised to support their answers with recent and effective citations and references to the scholarly literature.

#### **Conduct of Written Examination**

The primary mentor provides leadership for the review committee, distributing the essay questions to the student by email with a set of clear instructions. It is recommended that two weeks be allowed for the preparation of the student's written responses. The students are expected to return the written answers by email with copies to each of the faculty reviewers within the time allowed.

Written responses are expected to follow an approved style of essay writing with complete citations and referencing throughout. Students who simply reiterate the work of others will not do well on the final examination, as responses are expected to reflect creative applications of the

core materials of the program. Students who demonstrate effectiveness at integrating references from the literature with expertise at applying theories, principles and practices to "real world" professional problems and situations will do much better.

### **Scoring the Written Component**

The faculty reviewers will prepare commentary on the student's written responses, and send these to the primary mentor by email within two weeks of receipt. In scoring the examination, reviewers assess the student's ability to address the subject matter at the higher levels of cognition whereby they critically analyze, appraise, argue, critique, create, debate, defend, differentiate, discriminate, evaluate, judge, justify, predict, and critically reflect, while integrating contemporary theory and research with the practical considerations of the professional arena.

Each faculty reviewer scores the written examination and provides a recommended letter grade. The primary mentor, drawing consensus from the commentary of the review committee (and other advisors) determines the final grade. Late written responses from students may be given grades of "F" or otherwise impact the examination grade. At the graduate level, a grade of "B" or better is required to qualify to undertake the oral component of the comprehensive examination. At the undergraduate level, a grade of "C" or better is required to proceed to the oral component.

The primary mentor should inform all parties of the decision by email within one week of receipt of the reviewers' recommendations. The Center Director (or the Vice President for Academic Affairs, in the absence of the Center Director) will provide mediation services, so a final decision can be reached in the case of opposing opinions among the reviewers.

### **Addressing Failure of Written Component**

Should a student fail to achieve a sufficiently high grade to merit movement to the oral component of the comprehensive examination, the primary mentor will provide a statement of conditions necessary for continuation to the oral component. The statement of conditions might require completion of additional coursework within the major competency areas of the program, scholarly readings or other assignments in order to qualify for continuation. Following completion of the additional course modules or assignments, the student may petition the primary mentor to undertake the oral component of the comprehensive examination.

### **The Oral Component**

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### **Conduct of the Oral Component**

Once the student receives a sufficiently high grade to merit movement to the oral component of the comprehensive examination, the student and primary mentor negotiate a timeframe for the telephone conference call. It is the student's responsibility to arrange a suitable time when all

faculty reviewers will be available for the oral component and schedule the conference call with the telephone conference company. The student is also responsible to send a reminder message by email to all reviewers approximately three days prior to the telephone conference and solicit an acknowledgment by return email.

Students are expected to undertake last minute notification by telephone, if necessary. At the scheduled time the primary mentor will direct the proceedings of the conference. Each faculty reviewer may ask overarching questions and pursue follow-up inquiries to gain maximum understanding of the student's responses. The oral component of the comprehensive examination normally will not exceed one hour in duration. It is required that the conference call be tape-recorded by the telephone conference company (or one of the participants). The conference is to be conducted entirely at the student's expense.

### **Scoring the Oral Component**

At the completion of the oral examination, the student will depart the conference, allowing the review committee members a brief time for follow-up discussion before closing. Immediately following the oral examination, each member of the review committee will prepare and submit written commentary on the students' performance, including a recommended letter grade.

As with the written component of the examination, the primary mentor and review committee observe for evidence of advanced academic competencies and reflection, expert judgment, and decision-making abilities within the core competencies of the program. Reviewers also evaluate the abilities of the students in the areas of writing, referencing, inquiry, concept formation, development and analysis, and critical thinking.

Scores and comments are to be sent to the primary mentor by email within one week following the oral conference. The primary mentor will determine the final grade, drawing consensus from the commentary of the review committee. A grade of "B" or better is required for a graduate student to achieve Candidacy. A grade of "C" or better is necessary for the undergraduate to pass the final examination and thereby earn the degree.

The primary mentor should inform all parties of the decision in writing by email within one week of receipt of the review committee recommendations. The University President will provide mediation services, so a final decision can be reached in the case of opposing opinions on the committee.

### **Addressing Failure of the Oral Component**

Should a student fail to pass the oral component of the final examination, the primary mentor would prepare an action plan including assignment of additional required coursework (or alternative assignments) within the core competency areas of the program. Following successful completion of the additional coursework, the student may petition the primary mentor for re-examination. Re-examination follows the same procedures as prescribed for the initial examination.

For undergraduate students, successful re-examination is the final stage in the degree process. For graduate students, successful re-examination will result in the awarding of "candidacy" and the authorization to progress on with the proposal stage for the final project.