

POLICY/PROCEDURE – Department of Biomolecular Sciences

Graduate Comprehensive Exam

FORMAT

The department conducts an oral comprehensive exam by committee. The committee must consist of at least 2 faculty members with the preferred minimum being 3*. Initially the student will schedule two dates for the exam, with the second date within 10 days from the first date. If the student's responses/performance, on the exam during the first session, meet the committee's expectations and the committee is comfortable with issuing a PASS for the student, then the second date is cancelled. If, however the performance was unsatisfactory, the student is *informed of this fact* and is provided with feedback to assist them in meeting the expectations of the committee at the second date of the oral comprehensive. Satisfactory performance on the second date results in the student being issued a PASS for the comprehensive exam, and no further action is required. If, however the student's performance has not met the committee's expectation, the student is *informed of this fact* and given the opportunity of a third and final attempt to pass the comprehensive. This third and final attempt will be a written exam based on similar material as the oral components. The written exam must be scheduled no later than 30 days following the date of the second oral component. In the event that the student does not perform satisfactorily on the written component, a FAIL will be issued for the exam, and the student will need to reapply to take the comprehensive exam following the established guidelines as outlined by the School of Graduate Studies. Alternatively, the student may opt to not take the written component and accept a FAIL for the comprehensive exam. A student is limited to a total of 3 attempts to pass the comprehensive exam (one attempt is defined as the two oral and one written component as described above).

PROCEDURE

1. Student submits Comprehensive Exam application to the Dean of Graduate Studies.
2. Student selects faculty members to serve as the Comprehensive Exam Committee.
3. Two dates for the oral components of the exam are scheduled (maximum of 10 days apart).
4. Student sits for the oral component and the committee determines if the second date is required. If no, a PASS is issued for the exam.
5. In the event that the written component is required, the committee completes the *Request to Take a Written Comprehensive Exam* form. Both the committee chair/advisor and the student must sign the form.
6. Student and Committee schedule a date for the written exam which must be no later than 30 days from the second oral component.
7. Student completes written component. If satisfactory, a PASS is issued. If not, then a FAIL is issued.
8. Student may repeat this procedure a total of three times (see relevant captions below).

WRITTEN EXAM

A student must pass all components of the written exam as judged by the committee. The committee must be unanimous in its decision to issue a FAIL. In the event that the decision is not unanimous, two additional readers will review and score the *entire* written exam with no prior knowledge of the committee's judgment. The five scores (3 committee members and 2 readers) will determine the final outcome of the written exam.

NOTES:

*the preferred committee size is 3 faculty. However in extenuating circumstances, such as during summer or winter sessions when 3 faculty may not be available to administer one or both oral portions of the exam then 2 faculty will be acceptable. 5 readers are required (committee and additional readers) in the event of a student, with a committee of 2 faculty, must complete the written component of the exam.

DEPARTMENTAL FORMAT OF EXAM (Approved January 2011)

- Department agrees to a uniform format to the comprehensive exam. The comprehensive exam will be scheduled for two days. The format of the exam will consist of three parts that align with the current Learning Outcomes from our Departmental Assessment Report.
 - i. Part 1 of the exam will include a question(s) that align with Learning Outcome 1. Essentially this is a question that tests the students understanding of the major concepts in Biomolecular Science
 - ii. Part II of the exam will include a journal article for discussion. This aligns with Learning Outcome 2, essentially testing the student's ability to evaluate/comprehend/critique primary sources of scientific literature.
 - iii. Part III of the exam will include questions that align with Learning Outcome 3, which will involve experimental design and the ability to develop a research question.

UNIVERSITY COMPREHENSIVE EXAM GUIDELINES (from the Handbook posted on the Grad Studies webpage <http://www.ccsu.edu/grad/>). Where these differ from the information above, in general the department guidelines will apply. If any conflicting suggestions or requirements affect you, contact the BMS Chair or your grad advisor for clarification.

Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

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(http://www.ccsu.edu/grad/resources/files/Comprehensive_Exam_Handbook.doc)

1) What are the requirements for attempting the comprehensive exam?

- a) *The comprehensive exam may be attempted after the student has completed 75% of their planned program requirements. Exceptions to this criterion may be granted with the recommendation of the student's advisor and permission of the Dean of Graduate Studies.*
- b) *Students are required to have a minimum 3.00 grade point average at the time of application.*
- c) *Students meeting the above criteria must complete the Application of Master's Comprehensive Exam form, which is available in department offices that offer graduate programs, the Graduate*

Studies office(102 Barnard), or on the School of Graduate Studies website www.ccsu.edu/grad. The application form must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies no later than October 1st for fall semester exams, and no later than February 15th for spring semester exams.

- d) A continuing registration fee (CREG) of \$40 is assessed for students who are taking the exam and are not registered for any academic courses for that term. Payment must be received by the above deadlines. If you apply after the deadline, the fee must be paid at the time of registration.*
- e) Each graduate program department will notify students concerning the time and place of the exam and will inform students of the results.*

2) When is the comprehensive exam offered?

- a) Comprehensive exams are offered each fall and spring semester and, at the discretion of the academic program, during the summer. Students should consult their advisors and/or department chairs concerning the availability of a summer session comprehensive exam. Students who wish to take the Comprehensive Exam in the summer must receive special permission from the department and the Dean of the Graduate School.*

3) What kind of guidelines are available for the exam?

Programs shall provide students with written guidelines for preparation for the exam. Materials in the guidelines might include reading lists, sample exam questions, lists of the various content domains the exam will cover, and information on the format and grading of the exam. Students should consult their advisor or department chairperson or graduate coordinator (if applicable) for their program's current guidelines.

4) Who evaluates the exam?

Each department's exam evaluation process involves at least two qualified faculty members. Individual exam questions may be evaluated by a single faculty member. If a program has a single faculty member evaluate an exam question, the question will be evaluated by a second faculty member if the first faculty member gives the question a failing grade. The two faculty members will try to reach consensus regarding the student's performance; if necessary, they may bring in a third qualified faculty member for consultation.

5) Is there an appeals process after notice of failure on the exam has been received?

A student who believes their failure on the comprehensive exam was due to a procedural error or palpable injustice may file a written appeal with the program's department chair. This written appeal must specify the nature of the perceived injustice, and be submitted within two weeks of the student receiving notice on their performance on the exam. The student will receive a written response from the department chair regarding the outcome of the appeal. If, after this process, the student wishes to appeal the decision further, they may file a written appeal within two weeks of receiving the department's response to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies. This appeal must include the written response from the program's department chair. The student and department chair will receive a written response from the Dean regarding the outcome of the appeal. Within two weeks of receiving the Dean's decision, the student or the department may make a final written appeal to the Standing Appeals Committee of the Graduate Studies Committee. This final appeal must include the original appeal and prior responses from the program's department chair and the Dean. The Graduate Studies Appeals Committee will meet to evaluate the appeal and will render its decision in writing by notifying the student, the Dean, and the department chair.

6) Can the exam be attempted more than once? What is the maximum number of times a student may attempt the exam?

A student has a maximum of three (3) attempts to pass all sections of the Comprehensive Examination. If a student receives a failing grade on their first attempt of the comprehensive exam, they may take the exam a second time as scheduled by the department. The department may require the student to enroll in additional coursework or to make other special preparations for reexamination. If the student again receives a failing grade on the comprehensive exam, they must receive permission from the program's department chair and the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies to take the exam a third time; again the department may require the student to enroll in additional coursework or to make other special preparations. If the student receives a failing grade on this third attempt on the comprehensive exam, they will be dismissed from the graduate program, unless they are granted permission to choose another capstone option by the program's department chair.

7) Will my Comprehensive Examination results appear on my transcript?

Final results of the Comprehensive Examination will be posted on student transcripts as Pass/Fail.