

WATERLOO - LAURIER GRADUATE PROGRAM IN GEOGRAPHY

PHD COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

REQUIREMENTS AND PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

1. Nature of the Examination

The Comprehensive Examination will be held in public. The aim of the Comprehensive Examination is to confirm that the Student has adequate knowledge in the chosen field of study and has identified a major research issue to be pursued in the Thesis research. The Examination includes both a written and an oral component. Normally the Examination involves the Student writing answers to a question or questions over a period of three weeks. The answer(s) will not exceed 10,000 words, excluding the bibliography, abstract, figures and tables. In the oral component of the Examination, which normally lasts no longer than three hours, the Student defends the written document. The topics to be covered and the format of the Examination are determined by the Student's Comprehensive Examination Committee, in consultation with the Student. With the approval of the Waterloo-Laurier Graduate Program in Geography Committee, alternative formats for the Comprehensive Examination process may be permitted, provided they meet the objectives of the Comprehensive Examination.

a. The Comprehensive Examination Committee

The Comprehensive Examination Committee normally will consist of the Student's Advisor and three additional Examiners, one of whom will be from outside the Waterloo-Laurier Graduate Program in Geography (at UW this person must be on campus). The evaluation committee must consist of at least two members of the Waterloo-Laurier Graduate Program in Geography. At least one member of the committee must be from the Geography Department at UW or WLU. Advisors and examiners from Wilfrid Laurier University must have Graduate Faculty Status. The Committee will be determined through consultation among the Student, the Student's Advisor and the Graduate Officer (i.e., Associate Chair Graduate Studies at UW; Graduate Coordinator at WLU).

b. Duties of the Comprehensive Examination Committee

In consultation with the Student, the Comprehensive Examination Committee will determine the chosen field of study for the Comprehensive Examination. The advisor and student will normally convene a meeting of the Comprehensive Examination Committee no later than the end of the second term of registration to determine the chosen field of study and the overall scope, content and format of the Comprehensive Examination. If

this is not possible, the student should meet individually with members of the committee prior to the setting of the question. The Committee, on the initiative of the Advisor, will write and approve the question or questions to be given to the Student for the written part of the examination.

It is the responsibility of the Advisor to give the question or questions to the Graduate Program Office for preparation of the Comprehensive Examination announcement. The announcement is given to the Student and the members of the Comprehensive Examination Committee. The announcement is also displayed on the Graduate Notice Boards at both universities.

For three working days after the Student has received the Comprehensive Examination question, the Student may consult and seek clarification of the question with members of the Comprehensive Examination Committee.

After completing the written answer to the Comprehensive Examination question, the Student must give 5 copies of the answer paper (electronic copies PDF are acceptable if approved by the committee members) to the Graduate Program Office for distribution to the members of the Comprehensive Examination Committee. Note that one paper copy is required to be retained in the Graduate Program Office where it may be consulted.

It is the responsibility of the Comprehensive Examination Committee to read and evaluate the answer to the written question or questions, and to attend on the day and time of the oral component of the examination to examine the Student. The Comprehensive Examination Committee must render a decision on the capabilities of the Student to continue studies at the graduate level and undertake the PhD Thesis research.

c. Date of the Comprehensive Examination

The Comprehensive Examination will normally be completed by the end of the fourth term of registration in the doctoral program. This assumes continuous registration once admitted into the program; an equivalent time-frame, based on terms of registration, should be calculated by a part-time PhD Student. The dates for the written and oral components of the Examination will be established by the Student in consultation with the Advisor, the other members of the Comprehensive Examination Committee and (submitted to) the Graduate Officer (for approval). Students must register for the Comprehensive in the term in which they begin the Comprehensive examination process.

The written component normally takes three weeks. The Student should select an appropriate time-frame to write the Examination, a period when other commitments are at a minimum.

The date for the oral component of the Examination should be set by the advisor when the dates for the written part are determined. Normally the oral component will be held no earlier than two weeks and no later than four weeks after the written answers are submitted to the Comprehensive Examining Committee. All members of the committee must be present during the examination, either in person or via telephone or internet link. If this is not possible it is the responsibility of

the Advisor to find an alternative to attend the exam and read the questions from the absent member. The alternate must be knowledgeable and has the same authority to provide input on the decision as any other committee member who is present

d. The Chair of the Comprehensive Examination

The Chair of the Comprehensive Examination is to be determined by the Graduate Program Office. The Chair of the Comprehensive Examination cannot be the Student's Advisor, is not a member of the Comprehensive Examination Committee, is not involved in discussion of the content or the format of the Comprehensive Examination, and does not have a vote in the Comprehensive Examination decision.

It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that the conduct of the Comprehensive Examination conforms to the guidelines presented in this document, and that all requirements of the Examination are met. In case there is an appeal by the Student of the Comprehensive Examination decision, the Graduate Officer shall not serve as Chair of the Comprehensive Examination.

After the Examination, the Chair of the Comprehensive Examination will indicate the decision of the Examiners on the PhD Comprehensive Examination Report Form; will ensure that any conditions related to the decision are clearly written on the Report Form; and will deliver the Report Form to the Graduate Officer of the appropriate department without delay. The Graduate Officer will copy the Report Form and submit the original to the Program Administrator (UW)/Graduate Studies Office (WLU). The Graduate Officer will then ensure that any written conditions have been subsequently implemented before successful completion of the Comprehensive Examination is reported to the Assistant to the Associate Dean (UW)/Graduate Studies Office (WLU).

2. Decisions in the PhD Comprehensive Examination

When the Chair has determined that the Examiners have asked all their questions, the Student will leave the room and then the Chair will:

- i) ask the Examiners in turn to indicate verbally their evaluation of the written and oral parts of the examination; and
- ii) call upon each Examiner to vote as to whether or not the Student has adequate knowledge in the chosen field of study and has identified a major research issue to be pursued in the Thesis research, as demonstrated in the written and oral parts of the examination.

Evaluating both the written and oral components of the examination, the members of the Comprehensive Examination Committee will vote with regard to one of the following four decisions:

Accepted

No further formal work required.

Accepted; minor changes recommended

The Comprehensive Examining Committee will pass on suggestions as to areas in which work is recommended to eliminate minor weaknesses. Minor changes are to be completed by a time specified and then reviewed by the Advisor, but the student is deemed to have passed the exam regardless of the outcome of this review.

Decision deferred; major changes required

Significant weaknesses noted. The student must fulfill clearly specified conditions within a designated time period of not more than four months. All members of the student's Comprehensive Advisory Committee will determine whether the conditions have been met. These conditions will be written in the examination report. All examiners shall sign the examination report. If the conditions are fully met, the student shall be considered to have passed the exam. If the conditions are not met, it will be deemed to have been unsuccessful and the student will be required to withdraw from the program. If the conditions have been met only partially, the student will be required to repeat the comprehensive examination. The committee shall clearly state why the candidate must repeat the exam, shall recommend steps which should be taken by the student to strengthen his or her case, and shall specify a time period within which the repeat examination must take place. All examiners shall sign the examination report. A new question will be set for a repeated comprehensive examination. The examining committee on a repeat examination may be, but will not necessarily be, the same as the initial examining committee. Only one repetition of the comprehensive exam is permitted.

Fail, required to withdraw

Major weaknesses noted. The Student is asked to withdraw from the Program. No repeat of the comprehensive examination is allowed.

If different votes are recorded, the Comprehensive Examination Committee must try to reach a consensus through discussion; this is normally achieved.

After the discussion, if all but one of the Examiners agree on a decision, the decision shall be that of the majority. When the one dissenting vote is that of the Examiner from outside the Waterloo-Laurier Graduate Program in Geography, the Chair of the Comprehensive Examination must report the occurrence to the Program Director.

If two Examiners cannot reconcile their votes with the other members of the Comprehensive Examination Committee, the case must be referred to the Program Director who will, following appropriate consultation, ascertain what is needed to reach a consensus, and the Student shall be advised that a decision is pending. The Director will make a recommendation to the Associate Dean (UW)/Graduate Studies Office (WLU).

Any appeal by the Student concerning a negative evaluation should be taken to the appropriate appeals committee of the university in which the Student is registered.

3. Absence of a Member of the Comprehensive Examination Committee

If, after the date for the oral component of the Comprehensive Examination has been set, an Examiner cannot be present for a legitimate reason, it is the responsibility of the Examiner to inform the Graduate Officer and the Advisor of the situation. The Examiner who will be absent must prepare and submit to the Graduate Officer a series of written questions to be addressed to the Student at the oral examination. An evaluation of the written answer, according to the decision criteria (above), must also be given. It is the responsibility of the Advisor to find an alternative to attend the exam and read the questions from the absent member. The alternate must be knowledgeable and has the same authority to provide input on the decision as any other committee member who is present.

If a member of the Comprehensive Examining Committee does not appear at the oral component of the examination, the oral examination must be delayed until that person is present. The Chair should use departmental facilities to attempt to contact the absent Examiner and ascertain the probable time of arrival of the missing Examiner. If the absence involves re-scheduling the examination to another day, the Chair of the Comprehensive Examination Committee must inform the Program Director, the Graduate Officer, and also the Associate Dean (UW)/Dean of Graduate Studies (WLU) in the appropriate university as to why the Examination has been rescheduled.

4. Academic Integrity Concerns

If, after the date for the oral component of the Comprehensive Examination has been set but the Examination has not yet begun, any member of the examining committee has significant concerns regarding academic integrity violations in the written document, the member will contact the Chair of the Comprehensive Examination Committee as soon as possible. The Chair in turn will contact the Program Director, the Graduate Officer, and the Associate Dean (UW)/Dean of Graduate Studies (WLU) in the appropriate university to reschedule the examination until a clear decision has been made on possible academic integrity violations.

5. Time-Lines, Actions and Responsibilities for the PhD Comprehensive Examination Before the Comprehensive Examination

The results of these actions are recorded on the Ph.D. Student Reporting Form.

- a. The Student must complete all course requirements as set by the Student's Ph.D. Committee.

Responsibility: Student

- b. The Advisor and the Student should identify potential members for the Comprehensive Examination Committee. The four members of the Committee should meet the requirements outlined in Section 1 of this document. The names should be submitted to the Graduate Officer for approval.

Responsibility: Advisor, Student and Graduate Officer

- c. The Advisor and the Student should convene a meeting of the Comprehensive Examination Committee to discuss the chosen field of study and the overall scope and general content and format of the Comprehensive Examination.
Responsibility: Advisor and Student
- d. Identify the date and time the Comprehensive Examination question to be given to the student. (The Graduate Officer and Program Administrator will be given three working days notice before the student collects the question).
Responsibility: Advisor, Student and Graduate Officer
- e. Identification of the Chair for the Comprehensive Examination Committee; booking of the room for the oral examination.
Responsibility: Graduate Program Office
- f. Preparation of the Comprehensive Examination question; submission of the question to the Graduate Officer. The Supervisor will confirm that all members of the committee will participate in the exam or an alternative will be appointed by the Supervisor.
Responsibility: Advisor, Comprehensive Examination Committee and Graduate Officer
- g. Preparation and distribution of the Comprehensive Examination announcement.
Responsibility: Graduate Program Office

Written Examination

- a. **Day 1**
The Student collects the question(s) from the Graduate Program Office.
Responsibility: Student
- b. **Days 1-3**
For three working days after the Student has received the Comprehensive Examination question, the Student may consult and seek clarification of the question with members of the Comprehensive Examination Committee.
Responsibility: Student and Comprehensive Examination Committee
- c. **Day 21**
The Student submits five copies of the answer to the Comprehensive Examination question to the Graduate Program Office.
Responsibility: Student
- d. **Day 22**
The Graduate Program Office distributes the copies of the Comprehensive Examination answer paper to the Examiners. Note that one copy of the paper is retained in the Graduate Program Office where it may be consulted.
Responsibility: Graduate Program Office

e. **Days 22-35**

The Comprehensive Examination paper is read and evaluated by the Comprehensive Examining Committee.

Responsibility: Comprehensive Examination Committee

f. **Days 36-50**

The oral component of the comprehensive Examination will normally take place during the two to four week period after the Student has completed the Comprehensive Examination paper.

Responsibility: Student and Comprehensive Examination Committee

Oral Examination

a. At least one day prior to the oral examination, the Assistant to the Associate Dean (UW) / Graduate Program Assistant (WLU) places the PhD Comprehensive Examination Report Form and examination guidelines in the mail slot of the Chair of the Comprehensive Examination.

Responsibility: Assistant to the Associate Dean (UW) / Graduate Program Assistant (WLU)

b. The Chair will ensure that the oral examination conforms to the following guidelines:

- The Chair introduces the Student and the members of the Comprehensive Examining Committee.
- The Chair will remind the Candidate of procedures regarding the order of questions and the limit on the number of questions.
- The chair invites the Student to give a 15-20 minute overview of the main observations and conclusions that were presented in the written paper. The Student may use overheads, slides or other visual aids to clarify the presentation.
- If necessary, the Chair should indicate when 20 minutes have elapsed. The Student should then draw the presentation to a conclusion. If the Student continues beyond the 20 minutes, this should be viewed in a negative manner when assessing the oral examination.
- The Chair then invites questions from the Comprehensive Examination Committee. Questioning normally starts with the External member of the Committee, continues with the other Committee members and concludes with the Advisor. Each person asks a series of questions related to the paper submitted by the Student. Other questions may be asked to confirm that the Student has adequate knowledge in the chosen field of study and has identified a major research issue to be pursued in the Thesis research. In the first round, each individual would normally question the Student for no more than 15 minutes.
- After the first round of questions, there is chance for the members of the Committee to ask additional questions or points of clarification if they wish to. The second round of questions is normally shorter than the first.
- The Chair then determines if there are any further questions for the Student from the Comprehensive Examination Committee to aid them in reaching a decision on the examination result.

- When the Comprehensive Examination Committee completes its questions, the Chair will then invite questions from the audience.
- When all questioning is complete, the Chair asks the Student and the audience to withdraw while the Committee undertakes its deliberations.
- Following the guidelines listed in Section 2 - Decisions in the PhD Comprehensive Examination (above), the Committee reaches its collective decision on the combined written and oral components of the examination.
- When the decisions have been made, the Chair asks the Student to return to the examination room and advises the Student of these decisions. Members of the Committee sign the appropriate forms.
- If the decision on the Comprehensive Examination is not in the first category "Accepted", the Chair with the assistance of the Advisor and the Examiners informs the Student what additional work or steps are to be undertaken.
- The Chair ensures that any conditions related to the decision are clearly written on the Report Form and delivers the Report Form to the Graduate Officer. This concludes the oral examination.

Notification of the Comprehensive Examination Result

- a. The Graduate Officer will copy the Report Form and submit the original to the Program Administrator (UW)/Graduate Studies Office (WLU).

Responsibility: Graduate Officer

- b. The Graduate Officer ensures that any written conditions have been subsequently implemented before successful completion of the Comprehensive Examination is reported to the Program Administrator (UW)/Graduate Studies Office (WLU).

Responsibility: Graduate Officer

- c. (UW) The Program Administrator informs the Assistant to the Associate Dean who informs the University Graduate Office of the completion of the Comprehensive Examination which is then placed on the Student record.

Responsibility: Program Administrator/ Assistant to the Associate Dean

(WLU) The Graduate Officer informs the Graduate Studies Office of the completion of the Comprehensive Examination which is then placed on the Student record.

Responsibility: Graduate Officer

Decision flow chart for the PhD Comprehensive Examination (see Section 2):

