



PhD Comprehensives Examination Policy Rehabilitation Sciences Institute (RSI)

Overview

The purpose of the PhD comprehensives (comps) is to evaluate the student's breadth and depth of knowledge of the field of rehabilitation science. Preparation for the comps will encourage the student to develop the foundational knowledge in rehabilitation science that is the context of their chosen thesis work.

The comps will be conducted by a comps examination committee (CEC) struck specifically for each student. The comps comprise two elements: 1) a written submission and 2) a comprehensive oral exam. Ordinarily, the comps will be conducted after all required course work is completed. This will normally occur during the second year of study and must occur by the end of the third year of study. It may occur earlier at the supervisor's request.

It is recommended that the comps be completed within 18-36 months of registration in the PhD program (see Appendix A), students must successfully complete both the written and oral components of the comps within 36 months of registration in order to continue in the doctoral program.

Comps Written Submission

The written comps submission can take one of two possible forms (to be decided jointly by the student and supervisor):

- 1) Grant format** focussed on an area distinct from, and not related to the student's doctoral thesis: In order to standardize the format, the research proposal will be based on the Canadian Institutes of Health Research project scheme grant or another federal funding agency. Note that it is important that the proposal clearly outlines the research question to be evaluated. The proposal should include a contemporary background review relevant to the proposed work and also highlight the potential significance and implications of the proposed work. As well the applicant will need to provide an outline of the proposed methodology that will be used to address the research questions. The grant submission must follow all the funding agency requirements regarding, length, margins, font style, font size, etc.
- 2) Systematic review format** focussed on issues related to the student's doctoral thesis. The review article must be suitable for submission to a relevant peer-reviewed journal and is intended to provide a contemporary review and interpretation of the literature. The journal and associated format is to be predetermined by the student and supervisor. The review article is not intended to be a collection of summaries of studies focussed on a general theme, rather, the work should present a systematic and comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the literature in an area of study, and serve to advance or challenge the specific body of work.

There are no specific recommendations for length since individual journals will have specific requirements.

Originality: The written comps submission is to be an original submission (e.g. not prepared for another course or represent work largely associated with a previous publication or grant of the student or supervisor) and must reflect, primarily, the work of the student while not a criterion for passing, it is expected that the student will eventually submit the work to a funding agency or journal, as appropriate, subsequent to successful evaluation by the examination committee. It is anticipated that the student and supervisor may be co-authors of the work at the time of actual submission to a granting agency or journal, as appropriate.

Procedure: The written component of the comps should be submitted to all members of the examination committee and RSI within 12-15 months of enrolment into the program. The examination committee will review the written document within 3 weeks and provide summary assessment and sample questions for the student's oral examination. The examination committee and chair will convene, without the student present, to summarize the assessment of the written document and to decide on sample questions to be provided to the student in their preparation for the oral examination. If the written component is not successful, there will be one opportunity for remediation. Feedback will be given to the student in writing if unsuccessful. The comprehensive process must be complete within 24 months. Refer to suggested timeline.

Oral examination:

The oral examination will be a question and response format (maximum of 2 hours). While the questions will cover materials that arise from the written submission they will also cover matters not specifically addressed in that submission. For example, examiners may address matters related to the broader context of the student's research program. In order to assist the student's preparation, the student will be provided with 3 -6 sample questions 4 weeks prior to the examination that represent the types of questions that will be asked.

Note this is not an examination of the specific content of the written submission and as such there will be NO formal presentation for this examination. However, the student is encouraged to bring materials to the examination that could assist in their response to questions, specifically the sample questions provided in advance of the examination.

Prior to the start of the oral examination, the examining committee will convene (without the student present) to plan the format of the oral examination. Following the completion of the oral examination, the committee will vote on the oral examination results. If the student's performance is deemed unsuccessful then specific details to be addressed will be identified and summarized for the student. Following the meeting the supervisor will provide the specific list of revisions or topics to be re-examined that had been identified by the examination committee to the student and determine a time for re-examination. The same committee will be reconvened no later than 3 months later (and prior to 36 months of the student's enrolment in the program) to carry out the re-examination.

Committee structure:

- 1) **Chair**, appointed by the graduate coordinator, runs the examination proceedings ("keeping the peace"). The chair does not vote and is not required to review the written comps submission.
- 2) **Primary Thesis Supervisor** (RSI appointment) Non-voting

- 3) **Three additional examiners** (selected in consensus with supervisor, student and RSI graduate coordinator) one of whom can be a Supervisory Committee member, all of whom have an SGS appointment or equivalent from a recognized University.

Time lines*

Within 6-12 months of enrolment

Members of the Supervisory Committee determined.

Within 12-18 months of enrolment

A comprehensive examination committee must be struck and approved
(Form - Comprehensive examination committee)

Written component of the comprehensive examination completed and submitted to the examination committee.

Examination committee provides summary assessment of the written document and sample questions for the oral examination. If unsuccessful the student can resubmit once.

Within 18-24 months of enrolment

Upon approval of the examination committee (written document considered acceptable with only minor corrections required) the student may continue on to the oral examination.

Oral component of the comprehensive examination completed.

**Individual timelines will be created with the graduate coordinator and supervisor for current students.*

If unsuccessful on the oral examination then:

1 week after assessment/examination

Student receives written feedback and additional questions to be the focus of a second oral examination.

Within 3 months of the initial examination (before 36 months of enrolment)

Final oral examination is conducted

Evaluation

Written Submission:

PASS (no additional action)

FAIL (major revisions required – resubmission of document to examination committee prior to the oral examination. The examining committee will notify the student in writing of the required changes). The examine committee will reconvene to review changes and determine its acceptability. If acceptable, the student will proceed to the oral examination.

Oral examination:

PASS (no additional action)

FAIL (2nd oral examination required, to be held within 3 months of the initial examination. If the failure in the oral examination resulted primarily from weakness in a specific area, the second examination may be designated to cover only that area of weakness. The chair of the examining committee will notify the student in writing of the scope of the next examination.

In the event that the student is unsuccessful on the 2nd examination (either the written or oral component), the examination committee will forward a letter to the Director of RSI indicating that they do not recommend the student's continuing candidacy in the doctoral program. In the event that the student is unsuccessful and wishes to appeal the decision, the student should follow School of Graduate Studies Guidelines for academic appeals (details can be found online at: <http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/current/calendar/regulations10.asp - appeals>). The student will be notified at the meeting of pass or fail.