

RSI DOCTORAL STUDENT SEMINAR SERIES

SEMINAR #1: COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS & THESIS PREPARATION

If you are a PhD student in RSI and have questions about comprehensive exams or thesis preparation, please join us for a co-led discussion by upper year PhD students and the graduate coordinator.



WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 2017, 3:00 – 4:30 P.M., Rm. 140



Rehabilitation Sciences Institute
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

SO WHAT'S THE PROCESS?: DEMYSTIFYING THE PHD THESIS & COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

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and the
Doctoral Curriculum Student Committee

OVERALL PURPOSE

- To provide an overview of the process and timelines for RSI doctoral students regarding:
 - Comprehensive Exams
 - PhD thesis
- To provide a forum to discuss student questions or concerns related to PhD Thesis and Comprehensive Exams





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COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

- Two examination elements:
 - A written submission
 - A comprehensive oral exam of the written submission



COMPREHENSIVE EXAM — FORMAT

1. A systematic review/synthesis

- If directly related to the student`s PhD or part of the PhD
 - Can be included in the thesis as a fourth paper
 - Note: this is a change from previous RSI policy
- If not related to the student`s thesis
 - Students can publish 3 papers plus the review as a separate paper not to be included in their thesis, but as part of their PhD

2. A grant proposal

- The proposal must be unrelated to the student`s thesis



COMPREHENSIVE EXAM — COMMITTEE

- Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC) must include three examiners (RSI-affiliated faculty)
 - Only one examiner can be a PAC member
 - Your supervisor (mentor) is non-voting, but attends examination
 - Supervisor can support you to prepare paper and for oral exam
- Examiners are chosen by the student, supervisor (and potentially committee)
 - Examiners should be chosen, in part, based on research expertise of faculty (e.g., ability to provide appropriate critique of methodological and content)



COMPREHENSIVE EXAM — TIMELINE

- After all required course work is completed
- Begin preparing comps paper within 18 months of registration to the PhD program
- Students must successfully complete both the written and oral components of the comps within 36 months of registration in order to continue



COMPREHENSIVE EXAM — PROCESS

- Graduate Coordinator must approve topic and CEC
- Email or meet with grad coordinator to discuss
 - Topic, topic of thesis, format, and committee members
- Complete written submission
 - Some supervisors expect a comprehensive exam proposal
 - Length determined by target journal/grant competition guidelines
 - This process usually takes 4 – 12 months
- Form a CEC
 - Formally ask faculty to join CEC
 - Ensure availability re: examination dates/meetings
- Prepare for oral defense
 - Four weeks after CEC meeting (see next slide)
 - CEC provides 3 – 6 questions for student
- If exam is unsuccessful, can have one more attempt



COMPREHENSIVE EXAM — EXAMINER MEETING

- Once paper is complete, it is sent to CEC (and cc Loida)
- Within 3 weeks of receiving the paper, the CEC meets to review
- Student is expected to coordinate a meeting time for examiners
 - Useful to also set examination date with examiners at this time
- Date and time of meeting must be arranged through Loida, Loida secures chair and meeting room once date is confirmed
- RSI is required to find a chair (non-voting)



COMPREHENSIVE EXAM — DAY OF EXAM

- Loida will book conference room for the exam
- Arrive 15 minutes before to set up powerpoint
- Once committee arrives, student leaves while CEC prepares for exam
- Student re-enters and CEC take turns asking questions
- Questions can be those that were provided, or others
- 1-2 hours in total
- Student leaves again and CEC deliberates about result and completes paperwork
- Student re-enters and receives result; signs approval form and returns it to Loida



TIPS & QUESTIONS FROM STUDENTS

- Librarian support
 - RACER, Erika can help with search strategy
- Use of tools for systematic/scoping reviews COVIDENCE, ResearchGate tool
- Rationale behind grant proposal option - less time consuming
- Can use a second reviewer for your review (better for publication). Can be another student, your supervisor, or any one else fit for the job.
- For your COPMS you can only have 1 consultant and that is your mentor
- Formally, COMPS should be defended after finishing your required courses, but it is not always the case.
- Supervisors can choose to edit you comps paper before submitting it to the CEC, or not. It is up to them/you.
- Practice defense questions out loud! Get feedback from others on your answers.
- Can attend defense with supporting materials (e.g. powerpoint)
- Meet with supervisor after first CEC meeting to hear possible defense questions
- If you choose to publish your COMPS paper – CEC are not automatically authors on the paper,. Add them only if they contributed significantly.
- If finished coursework, you are considered a PhD Candidate and not a doctoral student.





PHD THESIS

PHD THESIS — TIMELINE

- **Year I & II**
 - Course Work
 - Comprehensive Examination
 - Preparation of research proposal should begin within 12 months
 - Formation of Supervisory Committee who approves proposal
 - Submission of proposal to REB [not mandatory to hand in a written proposal on top of REB proposal]

- **Year III**
 - Doctoral Research
 - Writing of Thesis

- **Year IV**
 - Writing of Thesis (outcomes of Doctoral Research)
 - Thesis Defense



PHD THESIS — CONTENT

- A body of work roughly equivalent to three peer-reviewed research papers, with an appropriate scholarly introduction and discussion
- Original contribution to knowledge
- The candidate should have demonstrated an appropriate level of scholarship in his/her chosen field



PHD THESIS — FORMAT

- **Manuscript format** – “Sandwich”- Example:
 - Chapter 1- Detailed review of literature
 - Chapter 2- Paper 1
 - Chapter 3- Paper 2
 - Chapter 4- Paper 3
 - Chapter 5- Discussion - pulling it all together
 - Chapter 6 – Conclusion
 - References [at the end of the manuscript, not after each paper]
- **Non-manuscript format** - Example
 - Chapter 1- Detailed review of Literature
 - Chapter 2- Methods
 - Chapter 3- Results
 - Chapter 4- Discussion
 - Chapter 5- Conclusion



PHD THESIS — MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

Pros	Cons
Papers published as you go	Repetitive as may repeat some of the methods in each chapter and repeat some content in first and last chapter
Write as you go	Some research harder to divide into three clear packages
Divided into clear chunks early	Requires copyright from journal
Work is peer reviewed so less likely to be negatively viewed at the end	Requires additional preparation and revision work along the way

PHD THESIS – NON-MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

Pros	Cons
More traditional way of writing a thesis	Often leads to less publications
More amenable for certain research types	Work not published before defense so more open to criticism
Doesn't require copyright from journal	
Less revision work required	



THESIS — RESEARCH ETHICS

- REB approval usually occurs after student has a completed thesis proposal (approved by committee)
 - May submit once for entire thesis or potentially separate approvals for each manuscript
- Submission is usually to health sciences REB – monthly submission dates, except for August
- Must have approval from university, institution/community partners, and obtain Tricouncil certificate



NEARING THE END — THESIS DEFENSE

- Once PAC agrees you are ready –sign final PAC form and send to Loida.
- You must complete the form with examiners names on it (internal and external examiner) and 3 dates agreed upon – and send to Loida.
- SGS requires PhD thesis at least **8 weeks in advance** – NO COMPROMISE [10 weeks in the summer]
- It is your supervisor's responsibility to contact examiners and secure potential date and to coordinate with RSI admin
- SGS finds the Chair for defense



NEARING THE END — THESIS DEFENSE

- SGS/RSI send the thesis to examiners - You must send it to your committee
- Student/Supervisor to liaise with RSI admin (Loida) to book a room for thesis defense (and practice defense if you choose)
- It is your supervisor and your responsibility to arrange a Practice defense
- Refer to manual!
 - Critical information on forms, final PAC, submitting thesis, producing thesis



THESIS PROCESS —

SOME TIPS

- Consider creating a timeline / GANTT chart
 - Most things take much longer than you think, but at least it will provide you with a guide
- Use the English Language and Writing Centre - Workshops
 - Thesis proposal writing
 - Grant writing
- Can see dissertation example on TSpace or hard copies in RSI.
- Ask to review senior student's proposals or theses to help guide your thinking
- When submitting final thesis to supervisor – mandatory 2 week turnaround for feedback. If this is being significantly delayed – contact Dina.
- Conduct several mock defenses, on top of the RSI one (with friends, colleagues) .
- Send the thesis to the internal examiner yourself, just in case. You CANNOT contact external examiner yourself.



QUESTIONS?

Student Q&A



THANK YOU

