



# TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY

## Operating Procedures: Series A 2-16 PhD Candidacy Examination (Proposal Defence) and Series A 2-17 PhD Comprehensive Examination

### Policy Hyperlink:

Series A 2-16 PhD Candidacy Examination (Proposal Defence)

Series A 2-17 PhD Comprehensive Examination

### Policy Administrator:

Associate Provost, Graduate Studies

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### Procedures Created/Revised:

September 13, 2023

## Procedures

### Comprehensive Examination

Students complete a comprehensive exam to demonstrate their knowledge of the nursing discipline, research methodology, and their substantive area. The supervisory committee meets to confirm the student's readiness for the examination. The comprehensive examination is normally written after completing all required core courses and is completed by the end of the second year (24 months) in the program. .

### Conditions of Examination

*Students have two choices:*

- a) Take-home: Three papers (2500–3000 words each) over a one-week period (involves a choice of four questions). Questions are provided to the student on the first morning of the exam period.
- b) In-person: Three papers (1500–2000 words each) in three 2-hour sessions on the same day, or two consecutive days. On campus, supervised, and open book.<sup>1</sup> Questions are provided to the student 30 minutes prior to the timed exam.

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<sup>1</sup> The understanding of 'open book' includes: 1) the student will use a blank computer, not their own, 2) students may bring hard or digital copies of books and published articles, 3) there will be no access to the internet or to their previous written work. To give students the opportunity for thoughtful reflection and to consider their approach to answering the questions, students will be given the questions 30 minutes prior to the start of the timed exam. Students bring a blank memory stick and hand it to the invigilator/supervisor before the exam. At the end of each

The student's Comprehensive Examination Committee (comprised of their Supervisory Committee and another member from the School or Faculty) sets the exam questions and evaluates the papers. The Supervisor submits a form to the Office of Graduate Studies to record the composition of the committee and the results of the exam.

The questions should examine on a field of study, rather than narrowly on a focused topic or research area. The aim is to ensure that PhD students have:

- a) the appropriate academic foundation and breadth of knowledge in the field of study to be successful in the transition to their dissertation;
- b) the capacity to engage in scholarly communication (oral and written) necessary for success; and
- c) developed a novel research topic.

The questions address disciplinary knowledge, the student's substantive area, and selected dissertation methodology.

### **Examination Preparation:**

Together with their Supervisory Committee, students prepare an annotated bibliography of a broad range of readings (20–30 readings per paper) that build on their course work and related to their substantive and methodological areas. Students meet with examiners well before the examination and discuss the expectations, including subject areas to be included in the exam, and the date for when the reading list (annotated bibliography) is to be submitted (minimum of two weeks prior to the exam period).

### **Comprehensive Exam Assessment:** Student has developed:

- strong analytical, problem-solving, and critical thinking abilities
- required breadth and in-depth knowledge of the discipline
- ability to communicate knowledge of the discipline
- ability to question and challenge colonial practices and thought in knowledge production, theory, and practice as appropriate to the topics being examined
- required academic background for the proposed doctoral research
- potential ability to conduct independent and original research

### **Decisions:**

- Unconditional Pass
- Conditional Pass– could require completing a course or re-writing the exam or a portion thereof.
- Failure – with opportunity to re-write the exam, or withdrawal from the program

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exam, the student is given the memory stick and they will save their answers. The memory stick is returned to the invigilator or supervisor who submits the response by email to the supervisor or designate.

Student must pass all components of the exam (i.e., each of the papers).

Written decision is provided within one week. The assessment and reasons for the decision reached by the examination committee must be documented and provided to the student in sufficient detail to allow the student to understand the decision, including identifying strengths and weaknesses.

**Adjournment:** One adjournment (postponement) may be allowed and one re-take.

**Accommodations:** Any requested accommodations are reviewed on an individual basis, with consultation with the Centre for Accessible Learning.

After successful completion of the comprehensive exam, students progress to NURS 900 (dissertation proposal).

### **Candidacy Exam Procedure (Proposal Defence)**

Doctoral candidacy must be achieved within 30 months of entering the program. Extensions may be granted under exceptional circumstances and with the permission of the Vice Provost of Research and Graduate Studies.

*To be admitted to candidacy, the student must have:*

- a) Completed all required coursework
- b) Passed the comprehensive exam
- c) An approved candidacy exam committee, comprised of the student's supervisory committee, one additional appointee from the School/Faculty, and a candidacy examination chair appointed by Office of Graduate Studies.

**“Candidacy Examination”** means an oral presentation by a doctoral student for the purpose of evaluating the student's written research proposal, knowledge of the research field and their readiness to proceed with PhD dissertation research. The candidacy exam (also referred to as the proposal defence) is an opportunity for the student to formally share their proposed dissertation project with the supervisory committee and a SON appointee, and to learn from the experts who gather to serve as examiners in this process. The exam should ensure that the student has selected an appropriate research question for the dissertation and that a sound research plan has been developed to complete the project. It is anticipated that the proposed project will enable the student to make an original, substantive contribution to knowledge in the field. This process provides a final opportunity to refine the research proposal before progressing to implementation of the research project.

The exam consists of a written research proposal and oral examination. The oral examination date is set three weeks after the supervisory committee deems the written proposal is ready for examination. The proposal must include an abstract and a detailed research plan, including appendices as appropriate. The presentation and length of the proposal will vary depending on the project, but will normally include:

- Review of relevant literature;

- Theoretical and conceptual framing as appropriate to the research method;
- Relevance and anticipated contribution to knowledge in the field;
- Research question(s);
- Rationale and significance of the question;
- Proposed research methods;
- Ethical considerations of proposed research;
- References and appendices.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor(s) to ensure that proper arrangements are made for the student's examination, and that the exam is held in accordance with the Office of Graduate Studies and the School/Faculty regulations. The supervisor informs committee members of meetings and details of the examination.

It is the responsibility of the student to provide the final draft of the research proposal to the supervisor at least three weeks in advance of the scheduled date of the oral candidacy examination. The supervisor is responsible to circulate the research proposal to all examining committee members and to ensure that all examiners have received the proposal in a timely manner.

The candidacy examination is scheduled for two hours, including the student presentation (up to 20 minutes), approximately one hour of direct examination, and time for post-exam deliberations. The student presentation will be public (open to students, faculty members and guests), with the subsequent questions by the examiners in camera. Rounds of questions (normally two to three) are normally offered beginning with the examiner(s) most external to the committee, the supervisory committee members, and then the supervisor. After the questions have concluded, the chair asks the student if they have any comments they would like to add. The student is then asked to leave the room while the examining committee deliberates on the outcome of the examination.

During the deliberation, the examiners are asked to give their opinions on the quality of the written work and the oral responses to questions in the same order as questioning occurred. Evaluation criteria to be considered by the committee are outlined below. The student must pass the exam as a whole. The defense will be judged on a pass-fail basis, according to the majority decision of the committee.

**Candidacy Exam Assessment:** Student demonstrates oral and written competence in the following areas:

- Strong analytical, problem-solving, and critical thinking abilities
- Relationships among the subject matter of the proposed research and development of knowledge relevant to the practice discipline in the relevant field, and other disciplines;
- Knowledge and skills specific to the proposed research methodology;
- A range of potential research approaches relevant to the proposed research focus;
- Potential to pursue and complete original research at an advanced level;
- Ability to respond to questions about the feasibility of the proposed dissertation project;
- Ability to openly engage in scholarly discussion and debate.

**Decisions:**

- Unconditional Pass
- Conditional Pass – could require completing a course or re-writing a paper.
- Failure – with opportunity to repeat the examination
- Failure – with a recommendation to terminate the doctoral program or change of category to a master's program.

The results of the Candidacy Exam and the Candidacy Exam Committee signatures is submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.

**Adjournment:** One adjournment may be allowed and one re-take.

**Accommodations:** Any requested accommodations are reviewed on an individual basis, with consultation with the Centre for Accessible Learning.

After successful completion of the candidacy exam, the student can proceed with applications for ethics, administrative approvals, and access to research sites, and undertake the proposed research.