

Passed at SES Meeting March 29, 2023

PhD Comprehensive Exam Policy

Purpose and Objectives

The overall purpose and objectives of the ENSC PhD Comprehensive examination are to ensure that PhD candidates have:

- adequate and sufficient knowledge in their chosen area of research and an ability to contextualize this within the broader interdisciplinary field of environmental studies;
- the ability to express themselves clearly and concisely in both written and oral formats;
- the ability to seek out primary and secondary sources of information to support an argument;
- the ability to think critically, understanding the history and meaning of the concept, and skills associated with critical thinking to defend, logically and clearly, his/her reasoning;
- an understanding of the principles of academic enquiry, including the ability to efficiently and effectively gather relevant information;
- a sound background in the broad aspects of environmental sustainability

Additionally, the examination is also intended to identify areas of weakness that should be remedied by the student.

Process and Timing

Normally the PhD comprehensive examination will take place after all coursework is completed, no later than the end of the fifth term (typically winter term of second year). Approval for comprehensive exams occurring after the sixth term of study must be sought from the Graduate Committee in advance.

The examination will incorporate: (i) submission of a PhD research proposal; (ii) a written response, the format of which is determined by the committee; and (iii) an oral examination.

The Comprehensive Examination Committee shall consist of a Chair (normally the Graduate Coordinator), the student's supervisor(s), and two examiners. One of the examiners must be core faculty if the supervisor(s) is not, and one of the examiners may be cross-appointed or external to the School. If the supervisor is a core member, then the other two examiners can be cross-appointed or external to the School. The student's Supervisory Committee could, in part, make up the Comprehensive Examination Committee.

At least two working days prior to the scheduled oral examination, the Chair will confirm with all members of the examination committee that the written performance on the proposal **and**

The oral exam will be approximately two hours in duration and should not exceed three hours. The procedure for the exam is similar to a thesis defense. The candidate is initially asked to withdraw from the room, the Chair reviews the student's performance on the proposal and essay, and each examiner is asked to comment briefly. The student then returns to the room for the examination. He/she has the opportunity to provide a 15-minute presentation on the research proposal prior to the start of questioning.

Questioning will typically occur in two rounds with potential follow-up, both with equal weighting and time allotment such that both the proposal and essay are equally weighted (e.g. the first round devoted to the proposal and the second round devoted to the essay). Questions in each round are permitted to extend beyond the specifics of the proposal or the essay, but within the broader topic of each, where relevant.

Following the questions the candidate will be asked to leave the room and the examining committee will discuss his/her performance and arrive at a decision (see "Outcomes" below). A consensus-building approach should be used, with the Chair acting to guide discussion. If no consensus can be attained, then a vote should be held (the Chair does not vote). After deliberation the candidate is invited back into the room and informed of the committee's decision.

Outcomes

The committee shall judge the candidate's performance on the exam as either "Pass" or "Repeat". In the case of "Pass" the Chair of the committee, in consultation with the committee, should submit written notification to the student within 5 working days of the exam. The committee may determine that the student requires some additional work in a particular area, but that this is not substantial enough to warrant a "Repeat". In these cases, the written notification should identify areas where the committee feels improvement is needed and suggest possible actions for this. This could range from a suggestion for additional coursework, to a set of prescribed readings, to serving as