

Introduction

The Doctoral Proposal/ Comprehensive Examination (DP/CE) in Culture, Language and Teaching is a critical milestone of doctoral student progress in the program. The DC/PE is designed to enact doctoral student training, comprehension of fields, and academic development. The DP/CE is a pedagogical as well as evaluative exercise, one designed to support the student through close reading as well as examine their comprehension of fields, methods and critical frameworks. The DP/CE consists of an extended essay demonstrating knowledge of fields that supports the development of the dissertation proposal.

The dissertation proposal offers students the opportunity to engage in an academic inquiry that focuses the conceptual work of their PhD program within the field of Language, Culture, and Teaching. The proposal draws from the students' course work, their reading in the literature relevant to or touching on their dissertation topic, and their discussions with their supervisor and supervisory committee. The oral defense of the doctoral dissertation proposal serves as the examination of comprehensive knowledge demonstrated by the candidate

Doctoral Study Committee Formation

The DP/CE and dissertation committee consist of the same members as the Supervisory committee (normally a supervisor and two committee members). Thus, the selecting of the Doctoral Study Committee is critical to student progression through milestones and success. The Graduate Admission Committee assigns a doctoral advisor upon entry with the view that this advisor eventually assumes the supervisor role. However, students may consider and approach other faculty during the first term window should they find it in their best academic interest. All students should consolidate a supervisor by PHD 1 Winter term. With their supervisor, students are expected to form their doctoral study committee responsible to support them through the DP/CE and dissertation research process. All members of the doctoral study committee must be appointed to the Graduate Program in Education and FGS. Member appointed to the program can be identified on the [Graduate Program of Education Website](#). It is also possible for faculty at other universities to be appointed as Adjunct members of FGS, although they may not serve as Supervisors. Please note that only Full Members of the Graduate Program in Culture, Language and Teaching are eligible to serve as dissertation supervisors. More information can be found in the [FGS appointment policy](#).

In consultation with their supervisor, students are responsible for approaching [Graduate Program Members](#) to ask if they are willing to serve on the committee. It is also the student's responsibility to schedule times work with committee members to prepare for the DP/CE. It is advisable that all members of the committee advise on readings and approaches for the student in constructing their DP/CE essay and proposal. All members of the Doctoral Study

Committee must approve in writing the final DP/CE document submission prior to oral examination.

Role of the supervisory committee

The supervisory committee guides the student throughout the dissertation /comprehensive process and is the key arbitrator for the proposal/comprehensive prior to the oral examination.

- Each member of the committee is expected to meet with the student to discuss the proposal prior to the oral examination.
- The supervisory committee must agree that the dissertation proposal/comprehensive is appropriate to the dissertation topic and is ready to be examined. Following the dissertation proposal/comprehensive exam each member must sign a form attesting to the approval of the proposal (TD1) which will accompany the dissertation proposal.
- Once approved, the proposal is submitted to the graduate program office for graduate program director approval, then on to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for final approval
- If the research involves human participants, the student must also fill out the TD2 and TD3 forms and TD4 form (if appropriate). The Faculty of Graduate Studies will then forward the appropriate forms to York University's Human Participants Research Sub-Committee (HPRC) for approval.

Timelines

With their supervisor, students are expected to form their dissertation committee (composed of one supervisor and two committee members) by the end of PHD 1 and submit forms no later than the end of term 4 (Fall of PHD 2). Students are expected to begin the DC/PE after finishing course work requirements (normally after fall of PHD 2) and finish by no later than the end of term 7 (Fall PHD 3). As indicated in the [Graduate Handbook Website](#): "A Comprehensive Examination is set at the completion of all required course work, and typically held within six months of -- and no more than one year from -- the end of the student's course work."

The written components of the DC/PE are defended in an oral examination by the end of term eight (Winter PHD). Students who have not finished their comps at this time will be deemed to be making insufficient progress towards their degree and may be withdrawn from the program (except in the cases of disability, documented illness, bereavement and other unforeseen circumstance)

DC/PE process

A. Choose areas of scholarship and/or research and compose reading list (bibliography)

At the beginning of PHD2, students are advised to create a reading list from course work and independent study to support them with the writing of their DP/CE document. The student will identify a research question and area of research and work closely with the supervisor and/or committee members to build reading lists. Students are advised to conduct extensive research into their field of study using library, archives and scholarly reserves. After selecting relevant texts, students should organize these into debates in the field, theoretical frameworks and methodological considerations as outlined in the essay proposal.

B. Develop Extended Essay and Dissertation Proposal

Using the reading and research question as a guide, students will compose an extended essay that informs the writing of the dissertation proposal. The form for this essay can vary but it should make the case for why and how the research is being conducted. The form of the proposal will also differ according to disciplinary convention. Students may use proposal forms that are appropriate to humanities, psychology, social sciences and interdisciplinary methods and modes.

The dissertation proposal is expected to show evidence of:

1. Clarity in defining the nature of the scope and problems of the proposed dissertation
2. Clarity in the justification for taking up the selected problem
3. Placement of the selected topic in relation to a field of thought
4. A bibliography of works cited and a secondary bibliography of works to be consulted
5. A comment on the theoretical fields to be drawn upon for the dissertation
6. A discussion of the methodology or mode of inquiry to be used to carry out scholarship and/or research design (as appropriate)

Text-based proposals are expected to be typewritten, double spaced, and formatted consistently. They must contain an abstract and, preferably, a table of contents. Proposals that draw from other technologies must be accompanied by a text-based document. Typically, the proposal will include some mode of expression of the following:

- Cover page (supervisory committee membership)
- Title page (working title)
- Abstract/summary of the project.
- Keywords
- Description of the problem and its significance to academic scholarship.
- Theoretical framework discussing the theories engaged to frame the study.
- Description of the research design, mode of inquiry and/or methodology as appropriate.
- Suggested timeline for and feasibility of the work.
- Working bibliography of literature and/or technologies reviewed and to be reviewed.
- Appendices (Usually ethics related)

The essay can preface the proposal or synthesized into aspects of the proposal (theoretical framework, literature review, methodology, for example). In every case the student should demonstrate the depth and breadth of knowledge garnered from close and careful reading of texts.

C. Complete and submit written document for feedback

The written DP/CE document is critical to the student's demonstration of comprehensive knowledge of the fields in which the dissertation scholarship and/or research is situated. Students are encouraged to work closely with their supervisor and committee members in the development of an examinable draft. The committee is expected to provide revisions and/or feedback for the draft before deeming it examinable. The DP/CE should be **thirty-five (min) to fifty pages max** (excluding references and/or bibliography), as students are expected to consolidate their knowledge into a concise and focused proposal.

D. Evaluation of DP/CE

The purpose of the oral examination of the DP/CE is to ensure that, in the opinion of the supervisory committee, the student is prepared to proceed with their proposed dissertation scholarship and/or research. The oral examination, as an educational event, can be expected to generate new insights and opportunities that may be advanced within the dissertation research. The examination is a two-part process consisting an examination of the written document and an oral defense of said document.

i. Evaluation of the Dissertation Proposal

The written portion of the proposal is evaluated by the Supervisory Committee in terms of its readiness to go forward as the basis of an Oral Examination. The proposal must show depth and breadth of comprehension knowledge in an extended essay that can be separate or part of the proposal.

Committee members will review the proposal in accordance to the following categories of evaluation.

- Candidate can proceed to Oral Examination
- Revisions required before proceeding to Oral Examination

In the case of the latter, revisions must be specified. Once the revisions are completed to the satisfaction of the Supervisory Committee, the candidate proceeds to the Oral Examination

ii. Oral defense of the dissertation proposal

Once rendered examinable in writing by committee members, the candidate proceeds to oral defense. Defenses should be scheduled four weeks in advance with forms submitted to the Graduate Program Office. The Supervisor will serve as the Chair of the oral examination. Ideally, all committee members are required to attend to the defense, although the defense can proceed with two members present. The Chair discusses with committee members the approximate duration of the exam, the duration of the opening statement by the candidate (if any), and the general procedures governing questioning. The Chair determines when questioning has been exhausted.

The candidate is invited to speak for 5-15 minutes at the start of the exam to present their understandings of key texts, debates and articulations of their work. The committee members prepare questions that probe, critique, or request elaboration and/or clarification on various issues raised in the student's written articulation of the DP/CE. The committee asks prepared questions in two rounds. The first round engages the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings (readings comprising extended essay) of the proposal. The second round addresses the substance and feasibility of the proposed dissertation scholarship and/or research. The oral examination is normally 2 hours long. Students must demonstrate comprehensive knowledge within the designated areas of the examination and covered by the extended essay. This should include:

- **Responding to questions on the readings:** definitions, concepts and constructs discussed in the essay portion of the text
- **Responding to questions on the proposal:** research objectives, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology and ethical concerns
- Responding to questions on the relation between the readings and their proposed research project
- Responding to questions around the articulation and feasibility of the proposed research

The purpose of the oral examination is both to ensure that the student can demonstrate and articulate this comprehensive knowledge separately from the DC/PE document, and to generate a productive conversation on the feasibility, significance, and design of the research proposal.

Once the questioning ceases, the Chair of the Examination Committee asks the candidate to leave the room so that the Committee can discuss the candidate's examination performance. The Chair of the Examination Committee reads the categories (see below) governing the examination and leads a discussion of the candidate's performance. Once the Committee has agreed upon the category into which the candidate's written and oral performance falls, the Chair completes the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination Report and then invites the candidate back into the examination room where the results of the exam are reported by the Chair.

E. Outcomes of Examination

The outcome of the DP/CE is the same as indicated by FGS for the doctoral dissertation: **pass, pass with specific revisions, pass with major revisions; fail**. The assessment is based on a holistic evaluation of extended essay, proposal and oral examination. The assessment includes written and oral feedback on the written text, evaluation of oral defense, and consideration of the students' responses in relation to questions and/or gaps in the written document.

Students' oral responses to questions, probing, and feedback of committee members are critical to assessing the written document and their comprehensive review of the fields. Upon

successful completion of the defense, the faculty supervisor will include a written comment providing a rationale for the grade to be signed by the committee following the exam.

Should the student fail the comps, the student will have two terms to resubmit the comp materials and retake the oral examination. In the event of conditions, revisions, reexamination, or an unsuccessful outcome, students must be provided a written outline of the grounds for this decision. In these cases, the student must meet with the supervisory committee and GPD to clearly outline the assessment criteria for successful resubmission. Any alteration from the process of assessment (e.g., the choice of new examiners, oral examination format) for revisions and/or re-examinations must also be outlined. Should the student fail a second time, they will be required to withdraw from the program in line with program and Faculty of Graduate Studies procedures.

The Committee notifies the candidate orally of the result of the Examination at the end of the oral examination. The Examination report must be submitted immediately to the Graduate Program Office. The Graduate Program Assistant files the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination Report in the office. The candidate is required to submit 1 copy of the approved Dissertation Proposal (plus the appropriate cover page (TD1) and forms for ethics if using human participants) to the Graduate Program Office which will be forwarded to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for their approval.

F. Filing examination results

The Supervisor/Chair of the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination must submit the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination Report with the Graduate Program Office immediately following the conclusion of the exam.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Although there are set components of the DP/CE, these are not standard and can be negotiated in committee such that the process is accessible and accommodating to students. Students requiring accommodations are encouraged to communicate this early on to their supervisors and contact the appropriate accessibility office at the university and in advance of the comps process and oral examination. Graduate Program Directors and faculty members should not adapt the format or scheduling of the examination outside of consultations with the applicable accessibility advisor and/or in compliance with specified program procedures. In cases where accommodations not specified in advance are identified *in process*, ethical guidelines in the program will be adhered to in determining next steps. (See Graduate Handbook). All accommodations must be made in consultation with the student and must follow applicable policies related to access to information and privacy.

Changes to Policy and Procedure

The above policy is based on decades-long past practice established in the Faculty of Education in alignment with FGS policy. Part of this policy incorporate with a view to updating guidelines

in the graduate student handbook. There is room for flexibility in and between committees within the guidelines presented here, but these should be clearly articulated, agreed to by all the student and committee members before embarking on the DP/CE process. It is highly recommended that the Graduate Program Director is made aware of any radical deviation from the guidelines presented here prior to examination. These practices are subject to change and/or modernizing by graduate executive after consultation with colleagues and students. Future changes should be brought to graduate executive to be vetted and approved in alignment with the governance document of the Faculty of Education.

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