

Proposed Revision to Graduate Studies Regulations on Comprehensive Examinations

Background and Rationale

The autonomy of programs in setting their comprehensive examinations is appropriate in light of the central role that field and disciplinary expertise play in determining the subject matter and format of examinations. However, concerns will arise intermittently related to procedure. Situations in which neither students nor faculty members may be fully aware of the structure of their examinations or the process of evaluation may increase psychological stress and increase the likelihood of ad hoc deviations from approved procedures.

Purpose

This regulation outlines the requirements for program-level guidelines regarding graduate milestone examinations (comprehensive examinations, qualifying examinations, research evaluations or their equivalent). The content, structure and administration of these exams may differ across programs, but their purpose is to determine if a student is suitably prepared to continue on to research for their thesis or dissertation.

The aim of this regulation is to provide a framework that will clarify what information must be communicated to a student and committee members, and the expectation that programs establish a timeline for the sharing of information to relevant parties.

Scope and Application

This regulation applies to all graduate programs (master's and doctoral) that include graduate milestone examinations as part of their degree requirements.

This regulation does not affect, nor should it be taken to influence, the administration of other examinations in the graduate program, such as language exams or those exams that are exclusively part of the assessment for a course.

Six areas are defined and outlined in the proposed revision. This information must be communicated to students in writing, and available for easy consultation in advance of the examination. Failure to provide adequate

information to students about the format and delivery of their examination(s) as well as other relevant policies may impede a student’s academic progress, may negatively impact a student’s well-being, and may call into question the integrity of the examination process itself.

Implementation Schedule

The revised regulation shall take effect for all applicable graduate programs 18 months following Senate approval. To ensure compliance with the revised regulation, graduate programs will be required to review their existing program requirements in light of the revised regulation and submit revised program documentation for review and recommendation for approval to their local program governance body and/or relevant anchor Faculty Council, where appropriate. Programs shall submit revised program requirements 15 months following Senate approval, at the latest, in order to meet the implementation date.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies will institute a digital platform for the sharing of program documentation, to be easily retrieved by both the program and Faculty moving forward to ensure consistency.

Existing Copy (Change From):	Proposed Copy (Change To):
<p>Comprehensive Examinations</p> <p>Individual graduate programs may require students to undertake comprehensive examinations. The specific requirements and evaluation procedures are determined by individual graduate programs, with the approval of the Faculty of Graduate Studies’ Council.</p>	<p>Graduate Milestone Examinations</p> <p>Individual graduate programs may require students to undertake graduate milestone examinations (comprehensive examinations, qualifying examinations, research evaluations or their equivalent). Thesis or dissertation proposal requirements are separate from graduate milestone examinations, unless an aspect(s) of this requirement constitutes any or all of a program’s milestone examinations.</p> <p>The specific requirements and evaluation procedures are determined and approved by individual graduate programs, in accordance with program procedures. Requirements and procedures outlined in the Academic Calendar are approved by the relevant anchor Faculty Council and by Senate. Approved program requirements and</p>

procedures must be filed with the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Areas of information that must be outlined in program examination guidelines include:

1. Timing and Scheduling
2. Format and Structure
3. Accessibility and Accommodations
4. Assessment Criteria and Feedback
5. Outcomes of the Examination(s)
6. Procedures for Updating Graduate Milestone Examinations

Applicable information must be communicated to students in writing, and available for easy consultation in advance of the examination(s).

1. Timing and Scheduling

All program-level examination procedures must outline (or indicate where such information is available) the timing of the examination(s) in relation to other program milestones, such as the completion of coursework or the approval of a dissertation proposal.

The scheduling of the examination(s) – the relevant date, time and (where applicable) location – will take place and be communicated to students and all faculty members involved in the examination process no later than 20 business days prior to the examination(s) date. In the event that an examination must be rescheduled, students and all faculty members involved must be informed no later than 5 business days prior to the examination(s) date, apart from exceptional cases.

2. Format and Structure

All program-level examination procedures must specify the format, including relevant procedures, of the examination(s). The format may vary across programs and

degrees but must be consistent in format for all students in a program.

Programs may employ multiple formats in a single set of exams.

Along with information about the format of the exam, students must be provided instructions on the duration of the examination(s) and use of aids and supports.

3. Accessibility and Accommodations

All programs should seek to design graduate milestone examinations in a manner that is accessible to all students.

Students requiring accommodations are encouraged to contact the appropriate accessibility office at the university well in advance of the examination(s). In cases where a graduate program has local accommodation processes outlined as part of their graduate milestone examination procedures, this process must be outlined in the program procedures and indicate how students may request an accommodation.

Graduate Program Directors and faculty members should not adapt the format or scheduling of the examination(s) 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.

All accommodations must be made in consultation with the student and must follow applicable policies related to access to information and privacy.

4. Assessment Criteria and Feedback

The process of assessment must be communicated to students no later than 20

business days prior to the examination(s) date. This information must include:

- Where appropriate, the process by which the examination questions are set
- The structure of evaluation including, in the case of evaluation by committee, the process by which the committee's deliberation informs the final assessment
- In the case of multi-part examinations, the weighting of examination components and whether or not the evaluation of each of the examinations is separate or integrated into a single decision
- The evaluation criteria, which may include a grading scheme for the examination(s)

A written rationale for the final assessment should be prepared by the faculty members responsible for evaluation. The assessment must be shared with the student in a manner that will allow them to understand the decision.

5. Outcomes of the Examination(s)

Prior to the examination(s), students must be given a list of all potential outcomes and be informed about how and when the outcome of their examination(s) will be communicated to them.

The list of outcomes should include definitions of:

- Any outcome where the student is successful
- Any outcome where conditions, revisions or re-examinations are required
- Any outcome where the student is deemed to be unsuccessful. Unsuccessful outcomes should be limited to those circumstances in

	<p>which students have no further opportunities to revise or repeat the examination(s)</p> <p>All outcomes should be clearly aligned with the assessment criteria outlined in program requirements.</p> <p>When conditions, revisions or re-examinations are requested, the program documentation should indicate the scheduling time limits, as well as the minimum and maximum number of times an examination can be revised or repeated. Any alteration from the process of assessment (e.g., the choice of new examiners) for conditions, revisions or re-examinations must also be outlined in the requirements.</p> <p>In the event of conditions or revisions not being met or a re-examination is required, students may be placed on academic probation for a period of time, as per a program's procedures.</p> <p>In the event of an unsuccessful outcome(s) where no further revisions or re-examination are permitted, a student may be required to withdraw from the program in line with program and Faculty of Graduate Studies procedures.</p> <p>Following the examination(s), programs must communicate in writing if the examination(s) has been passed. In the event of conditions, revisions, re-examination or an unsuccessful outcome, students must be provided a written outline of the grounds for this decision.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">6. Procedures for Updating Graduate Milestone Examinations</p> <p>High-level information about the purpose of examinations, their timing in the degree structure, their format and the role examinations play in academic progression</p>
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	<p>should be included in the Academic Calendar.</p> <p>More detailed information, as required by this framework, can be documented in a program-level document, available on the program website and/or through the program office.</p> <p>Program procedures must outline the process for revising the examinations. These must be in line with program-level governance norms.</p> <p>Changes to the Academic Calendar must be approved by the relevant anchor Faculty Council and by Senate.</p> <p>Programs are responsible for ensuring consistency between information in the Academic Calendar and program-level documentation.</p> <p>All programs are strongly encouraged to incorporate regular reviews (every five years) of their examination requirements and procedures.</p>
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