



## The Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination – Standard Policy

*for students entering as first year students Fall 2016 and thereafter*

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*All Graduate School (TGS) graduate programs and students are required to adhere to this standard policy developed and approved by PhD program directors in conjunction with TGS administration. This represents the minimum standards and basic process for all TGS PhD programs. Individual programs may set (according to process) more stringent or additional requirements. Faculty and students are advised to check with their program director for additional approved program specific requirements, information and guidelines not specified in this standard policy.*

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### **I. The purpose of the Comprehensive Examination is:**

- to demonstrate the student's understanding and comprehension of general **and** discipline-specific material and independent, critical thinking ability
- to cover the scope of the student's dissertation topic, but it must not be limited to the research proposal
- to include aspects related to the broader discipline and general area of expertise as defined by the graduate program

### **The Ph.D. Comprehensive examination questions are designed to test the student's:**

- knowledge and ability to correlate the basic material learned during the first part of his/her graduate curriculum with research approaches, application, analyses and interpretation
- understanding of his/her specialized field of study
- ability to apply basic information to an understanding of the literature

Each program must ensure that the examination is designed and conducted in a manner that not only demonstrates a mastery of the student's dissertation topic but also demonstrates the student's understanding and comprehension of general and discipline-specific material as well as the student's independent and critical thinking ability.

**II. The Comprehensive Exam Standard format consists of an oral and a written component.**

The comprehensive exam will consist of a one-half day (four (4) hours), written essay-question exam plus a two-hour oral exam

Each program’s currently approved format (see table below) is filed in The Graduate School and made available by the graduate program to each student in their program.

Format	Programs
a) A one-half day (4 hours), written essay- question plus a two-hour oral exam	Applied Health Science Biochemistry & Cancer Biology Cellular Biology & Anatomy Genomic Medicine Molecular Medicine Neuroscience Oral Biology Nursing Pharmacology Physiology – <i>see Physiology specific program information for description and listing of expected Physiology Competencies</i> Vascular Biology
b) Exception: Written exam given over two half-days	Biostatistics

**III. The Comprehensive Exam must be taken within four semesters of completion of the program’s core course requirements and no later than the end of the seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) semester of full time, year-round study. Programs may set more stringent (earlier) deadlines for their programs, in which case the more stringent deadline applies.**

Failure to successfully pass the comprehensive exam by the end of the comprehensive exam deadline indicates unsatisfactory progress towards the degree and will result in a semester grade of “U” in the programs designated pre-candidacy research course (e.g.: Investigation of a Problem course (XXXX9210) for Biomedical Science and Applied Health Science PhD students, NURS9250 for Nursing PhD students and the Readings and Research course (STAT8890) for Biostatistics PhD students).

The “U” grade will convert to an “S” if the student successfully passes both parts of the examination by the end of the semester following the comprehensive exam deadline AND if the only reason the “U” grade was assigned was failure to take or pass the comprehensive exam as scheduled.

Comprehensive Exam Deadline	Programs
<p>No later than the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> semester of full time (year-round) enrollment</p> <p><i>* part-time nursing students (taking less than 9 credit hours per semester while taking their core courses) must take the comprehensive exam(s) within four semesters of completion of the program's core course requirements and no later than the end of their ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) semester of enrollment</i></p> <p><b>**MD-PhD students – 4<sup>th</sup> semester of PhD enrollment (2<sup>nd</sup> Fall Semester)</b></p>	<p>Applied Health Sciences            Biochemistry &amp; Cancer Biology            Cellular Biology &amp; Anatomy            Genomic Medicine            Molecular Medicine            Neuroscience            Oral Biology            Pharmacology            Physiology            Vascular Biology            *Nursing</p> <p><b>**MD/PhD</b></p>
<p><i>For students entering as first year students <b>prior to Fall 2019</b> - No later than the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Spring (6<sup>th</sup> semester) of full time enrollment</i></p> <p><i>For students entering as first year students <b>Fall 2019 and thereafter</b> - No later than the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fall (5<sup>th</sup> semester) of full time enrollment</i></p>	<p>Biostatistics</p>

An extension of one semester beyond the comprehensive exam deadline may be granted by the Dean of The Graduate School, but only in rare and extenuating circumstances. All requests for such an extension must be submitted in writing to the Dean no later than the beginning of the semester of the regularly scheduled comprehensive exam deadline. Requests must provide rationale for the student's inability to take the exam in the expected timeframe.

**If** the rationale for the delay meets the criterion for conferring an "I" grade, an extension can be granted and an "I" grade will be entered for the current semester course grade (e.g. seventh semester XXXX9210 (Biomedical Science PhD students) and NURS9250 (Nursing PhD students). For Biostatistics PhD students meeting the "I" grade criteria, an "I" grade would be entered at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Spring (6<sup>th</sup> semester) for STAT8890 (for students who started the program prior to Fall 2019) and at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fall (5<sup>th</sup> semester) for STAT8890 (for students starting the program Fall 2019 and thereafter). The "I" grade will convert to an "S" if the student successfully passes both parts of the

examination per requirements for removal of the “I” grade and by the pre-determined deadline for removal of the “I” grade. The “I” grade will convert to “U” if the examination is not passed by the pre-determined, approved deadline. Typically, the deadline will be the end of the following semester (e.g. 8th semester for Applied Health Sciences, Biomedical Science and Nursing PhD students; 7th semester of full time enrollment (= 4th year fall) for Biostatistics PhD students who started the program prior to Fall 2019 or 6th semester of full-time enrollment (=3rd year spring) for Biostatistics PhD students who started after Fall 2019) but may be later in rare situations

If the reason the student cannot complete and pass the comprehensive exam by the deadline does not meet the stipulations for assignment of an “I” grade, the request for extension will be denied and the student will receive a grade of “U”.

**IV. The Graduate Program Director is responsible for oversight of the graduate program’s Comprehensive Examinations.**

The program may elect to establish a Comprehensive Examination Committee of faculty members, which will be charged with creation and administration of that program’s Comprehensive Examinations.

The majority of the graduate program’s Comprehensive Examination Committee members must be graduate faculty who are formally affiliated with that graduate program. A program may elect to designate each student’s Advisory Committee as his/her specific Examination Committee.

Committee Format	Programs
a) Comprehensive Examination <b>Committee of Faculty Members</b>	Genomic Medicine – written exam; (PhD, MD/PhD)  Nursing  Vascular Biology; (PhD, MD/PhD) - <i>Written Examination Committee = 14 core members of the VBC Faculty (All 14 members submit a question for the written exam, the program director selects 12 questions to include on the written examination and the student chooses 8 questions to answer. The exam is graded by the originators of the 8 questions that the student selects to answer.)</i>  <i>Oral Examination Committee = 7 VBC Faculty members (3 from the Vascular Biology Graduate Education Committee, the student’s major advisor, the VBC Director, one faculty member selected by the student and one faculty member selected by the Graduate Program Director in consultation with the student’s major advisor)</i>  Biostatistics – <i>Comprehensive Exam Committee (3 members of Biostatistics Faculty)</i>

<p><b>b) Student's Advisory Committee</b></p>	<p>Applied Health Sciences</p> <p><i>*Biochemistry &amp; Cancer Biology; (PhD, MD/PhD) – If a majority of the (Students Advisory Committee) SAC has primary affiliation in BMB, then they can serve as the (Comprehensive Exam Committee) CEC, which requires a minimum of 4 members including the major advisor. If the SAC has too few BMB faculty members, then the SAC and the CEC Chair should identify additional BMB faculty to ensure that the majority of the CBC have primary appointments in BMB.</i></p> <p>Cellular Biology &amp; Anatomy; (PhD, MD/PhD)  Genomic Medicine; Oral Exam (PhD, MD/PhD)  Molecular Medicine; (PhD, MD/PhD)  Neuroscience; (PhD, MD/PhD)  Oral Biology  Pharmacology; (PhD, MD/PhD)  Physiology; (PhD, MD/PhD)</p>
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The Graduate Program Director will serve as chair of the program's Comprehensive Exam Committee, or another faculty member may be appointed as chair. Appointment of a faculty member other than the Program Director as Examination Committee chair must be approved by the Dean. The student's Major Advisor is not eligible to serve as the Comprehensive Examination Committee chair. The Comprehensive Examination Committee chair must be an individual with no real or perceived conflict of interest regarding the student's performance and the outcome of the examination. The Examination Committee chair serves as liaison to the Dean's Office and sees that all procedures of the examination are conducted within the policies and guidelines of The Graduate School. The Examination Committee defines the examination's scope for the student and prepares the examination. The Comprehensive Examination Committee will work with the student's Major Advisor to create that student's Comprehensive Exam.

Information regarding the format and scheduling of the Comprehensive Exam is submitted (using the Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam Pre-Approval Form) through the Examination Committee chair to the Dean of The Graduate School for approval, along with a description of the grading procedures and grade required for passing. The Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam Pre-Approval Form can be found at <https://www.augusta.edu/gradstudies/faculty/index.php>

The exam will be graded according to the program's procedures, which are explained and provided in writing to the student by the Examination Committee chair before the examination is administered.

The results of the examination are submitted by the Examination Committee chair to the Dean on the Comprehensive Examination Results Form which can found at <https://www.augusta.edu/gradstudies/faculty/index.php>

It is the responsibility of the Examination Committee and the Graduate Program Director, to determine whether or not the student has passed the examination.

Grading Scale	Programs
<p><b>Grading Scale:</b> A – F (A= 5 points, B= 4points, C= 3 points, D= 2 points and F= 1 point)</p> <p><b>WRITTEN EXAM:</b> Essay exam – No multiple choice questions. Each written exam question will be given a grade A-F. Grades will be converted to numerical value and averaged for final score. If multiple faculty members grade questions, the average score for each question will be used for the overall average score. A 3.5 is required for passing.</p> <p><b>ORAL EXAM:</b> Each faculty member will provide a score of A-F either based on answers to their questions or overall (programs decide – and document for standard practice). Programs can decide if there will be a discussion among faculty prior to score submission. Faculty submit scores anonymously to the Exam Committee Chair. Chair will convert scores to numerical value and average for final score. An average score of 3.5 is required for passing. No further discussion to adjust or change scores is permitted once scores have been submitted to the Chair.</p>	<p>Applied Health Science  Biochemistry &amp; Cancer Biology  Cellular Biology &amp; Anatomy  Genomic Medicine  Molecular Medicine  Neuroscience  Nursing  Oral Biology  Pharmacology  Physiology  Vascular Biology  MD/PhD</p>
<p><b>Written exam only:</b> 0-100 scale with a minimum passing score of 75</p>	<p>Biostatistics</p>

*For exams with both a written and oral component: students will be notified of the results of their written exam within one week of taking the exam. If they have failed, please follow directions below. If they have passed, then they will continue on to the oral exam. Best practice advises that the oral exam will occur within two (2) weeks of the notification of written exam outcome. Both the written and oral exams must be completed no later than the end of the semester.*

*In the event of failure, a student will be afforded one opportunity to retake each section (written and oral) of the exam after additional study. Students are allowed one retake for the written portion of the exam and one retake for the oral portion of the exam. Students only need to retake the exam (written or oral) that they fail on the first attempt. If a student passes one section (written or oral) on the first attempt and fails the other, he/she only has to retake the failed exam. The second attempt (retake) of the exam, should occur within three months of the first attempt. A written plan of action for retaking the exam must be submitted to the graduate school and student within two weeks of the original unsuccessful attempt at the exam. Second attempts scheduled beyond three months, must be pre-approved by the program director and Dean. A new exam will be prepared by the Examination Committee for the second attempt. Failure of the second retake of either portion of the exam (written or oral) will result in the student being considered for dismissal from the graduate program and The Graduate School.*

**All** attempts and results (scores) must be reported to the Graduate School. Scores must be reported to the student and TGS within ten (10) days of taking the written exam and within two (2) days of the oral exam or, for Biostatistics, within ten (10) days of the second part of the written exam. If there will be a delay in reporting grades, TGS and student must be notified. Students and TGS must be provided with the results of their written exam before continuing on to their oral exam. Students original, completed and graded exams must be kept on file by their graduate program.

## **V. Students are required to meet the comprehensive exam requirements of their program/major**

In the event that a student changes program/major the student will be required to meet the comprehensive exam requirements of their new program/major and thus must pass the comprehensive exam of their new program. This is required regardless of whether he/she has taken and passed all/part of the comprehensive exam from their previous program.

Students switching programs who have not taken or who have passed the comprehensive exam in their previous program will follow the same procedures outlined above. Students who have failed the exam one (1) time in their previous program without having ever passed that exam will have only 1 opportunity to pass the exam in their new program (no retakes, as the student has already failed the exam once). For this latter group of students, failure to retake or pass the examination after one attempt will result in the student being considered for dismissal from the graduate program and The Graduate School.

The deadline for passing the comprehensive exam will be determined depending upon the timing in the curriculum of when the change occurred. Both sections of the exam must be successfully completed and passed no later than the end of the semester that is one year (12 months) from the time of the lab and program/major change. Deadlines set earlier than the end of the semester one year from the time of the change may be warranted and may include adherence to the programs standard semester deadline. Extensions beyond the end of the semester one year from the time of the change must be submitted in writing to the dean no later than the first week of the semester of the exam completion deadline.

Requests for exceptions for retaking the comprehensive exam must be submitted in writing to the dean of The Graduate School at the time of the lab and program/major change. Written requests must provide a clear rationale for requesting that the student be exempt from meeting the comprehensive exam requirements of their new program/major. A written plan of action (including approved deadlines) for taking (or not taking) the comprehensive exam in the new program/major must be submitted to the graduate school and student by the program director, no later than one month from the time of the program/major change.