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Related policy: [FGSR Graduate Program Manual: Section 8.3.3, Doctoral Candidacy Examination.](#)

PhD Candidacy Examination Procedure and Timeline

Office of Accountability:	Office of Educational Programs
Approver:	Vice Dean
Scope:	Compliance with this School of Public Health procedure provides PhD students, supervisors, and other supervisory committee members the steps required to arrange the candidacy examination.

Overview

The purpose of the Candidacy Examination is to determine whether a PhD student is adequately prepared to continue his/her doctoral studies and is qualified to proceed with thesis research. The Candidacy Examination process recognizes disciplinary differences and expectations and emphasizes the role of the arms-length examiners and the supervisory committee.

Purpose

This document outlines the steps to arranging, and the responsibilities of the student, supervisor, and committee members for the PhD Candidacy Examination.

Procedure

A Candidacy Examination must occur within 3 years of the start of the program, once all course work is **successfully** completed. The Candidacy Examination is normally an open oral examination and based on an original research proposal, developed by the student and approved by the supervisory committee. The proposal is expected to represent research to be undertaken as part of the thesis.

Composition of the Candidacy Examination Committee

The Composition of the Candidacy Examination Committee follows Faculty of Graduate Student (FGSR) guidelines. In this section, “Committee Chair” refers to the Chair of the Examining Committee, and “Supervisor” refers to the student’s supervisor(s).

The Candidacy Examination Committee will have a minimum of five voting examiners and a Chair:

- The supervisory committee (minimum of three members) and **one additional arm’s length examiners**;
- At least **one** of the Examination Committee members **must be from outside the School of Public Health**;
- The Examining Committee Chair must be a member of the School of Public Health; the Examining Committee Chair is typically not one of the examiners, i.e., does not ask questions.

Examination Format

The PhD Candidacy Examination is an Oral Examination that provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to pursue and complete original research at an advanced level. In addition, the Candidacy Examination is intended to ensure that the student’s thesis research is of an adequate level of inquiry for the School’s PhD program. The Candidacy Examination will primarily take the form of a proposal defense, wherein the student briefly presents an overview of the thesis research (in approximately 20 minutes) and defends his/her proposed research. The duration of the Candidacy Examination is normally three hours and the Examination Committee members are expected to be present until the end of the Candidacy Examination.

Prior to the Candidacy Examination, each student will prepare and distribute a research proposal to **their Examination Committee**



at least 4 weeks prior to the Oral Examination. The research proposal will be a maximum of 20 pages, single-spaced (or 40 pages, double-spaced) in length, excluding references and appendices, using 2.5cm (1 inch) margins, and 12-point font. The proposal must include the following sections:

- o Background literature review
- o Justification for the significance of the research including the relevance to Public Health
- o Formulation of the research question and rationale including epistemology and ontology
- o Methods to be used with justification & limitations
- o Timeline
- o Budget and source of funds
- o Knowledge translation plan

Examination Outcomes

The Candidacy Examination Committee will deliberate on the student's performance during the Oral Examination and the quality of the written Research Proposal. Examiners will be asked to rate the student's knowledge of their research area and their ability to pursue and complete original research at an advanced level. Potential outcomes for PhD Candidacy Examinations include: Pass, Conditional Pass, Fail (see FGSR "[Doctoral Candidacy Examination](#)").

Responsibilities

Student

1. The student is expected to adequately prepare (academically and organizationally) for the Candidacy Examination.
2. The student is expected to prepare a research proposal and distribute it to Examination Committee members at least 4 weeks prior to the Candidacy Examination.
3. The student will provide the Supervisor with a current CV at least 1 week prior to the Candidacy Examination. The CV should include the student's educational history, presentations and publications, a list of completed graduate courses, and other material that might be pertinent to the Examining Committee's appreciation of the student's preparation for the examination.
4. The student is expected to prepare a short (approximately 20 minute) presentation of the research proposal.

Supervisor

1. The Supervisor is responsible for complying with all FGSR documentary requirements, timelines and rules.
2. The Supervisor is responsible for completion of the PhD Candidacy Examination Plan (**Attachment 1**), in consultation with the student and the Supervisory Committee. The PhD Candidacy Examination Plan must be submitted to the PhD Committee at least 3 months prior to Candidacy Examination.
3. The Supervisor in collaboration with the Supervisory Committee is responsible for assisting the student with the development of the research proposal prior to the Candidacy Examination.
4. The Supervisor is responsible for recruiting arm's length examiners who meet FGSR requirements.
5. The Supervisor is responsible for informing the Director of Graduate Education of the Examination Committee composition and Candidacy Examination details (i.e., time, date).
6. The Supervisor should discuss with the student the nature of the comments to be presented by the Supervisor about the student's background, CV and any brief remarks to be made by the Student prior to the commencement of questions.
7. The Supervisor is responsible for organizing audio-visual, computer or other required materials.

Supervisory Committee

1. The Supervisory Committee in collaboration with the supervisor is responsible for assisting the student with the development of the research proposal prior to the Candidacy Examination.
2. The Supervisory Committee members are responsible for reading and approving the student's Research Proposal and preparing questions prior to the Oral Examination.
3. Supervisory Committee members, as part of the Examination Committee, are responsible for evaluating the student's



performance and determine the outcome of the Candidacy Examination

Arms Length Examiners

1. Arms-Length Examiners are expected to come new to the Student's Candidacy Examination (i.e., have not been directly involved in the student's research training), and not be in conflict of interest with the Student or Supervisor
2. Arms-Length Examiners are responsible for reading the student's Research Proposal and preparing questions prior to the Oral Examination.
3. Arms-Length Examiners, as part of the Examination Committee, are responsible for evaluating the student's performance and determine the outcome of the Candidacy Examination.

Examination Committee Chair

1. The Chair is responsible for meeting with the student and reviewing Oral Examination procedures, approximately 1 week prior to Oral Examination
2. The Chair is responsible for the conduct of the Oral Examination, as outlined in the FGSR Graduate Program Manual "[Doctoral Candidacy & Final Oral Exams](#)".
3. The Chair is responsible for completing the "[Minutes for Candidacy Examination Form](#)", and forwarding it to the Graduate Programs Administrator in a timely fashion, typically within 1-2 days after the Oral Examination.

PhD Committee

1. Will review the PhD Candidacy Examination Plan. This review is intended to ensure consistency in form and level of inquiry for all PhD students in the School.



PhD Candidacy Examination Timeline

Timeframe	Person Responsible	Task(s)
At least six months prior	Student and Supervisory Committee	Discuss the student's progress and develop a draft thesis proposal. Potential dates and External Examiners should be identified.
At least three months prior	Supervisor(s)	Submit the PhD Candidacy Examination Plan to the PhD Committee;
At least two months prior	PhD Committee	Review and approve the Candidacy Examination Planning Form.
At least six weeks prior	Supervisory Committee	Identify the members of the Candidacy Examination Committee (names, ranks and department affiliations); Identify the Examining Committee Chair; Notify the Education Office of the members, date, time and place of the examination.
At least four weeks prior	Student	Distribute the research proposal to the Examination Committee.
Three weeks prior	Office of Educational Programs	Submit "Notice and Approval of Candidacy Examination Committee" form to FGSR. Sends by email "Public Presentation" information (Student, Date, Time and Place as well as Title of thesis, abstract, bio) to MARCom (copied to Dean and Vice Dean), for putting in SPH "Weekly Digest" and the "SPH Calendar" on the "SPH Site"
At least a week prior	Examination Committee Chair	Meet with the student to inform the student on the nature of oral candidacy examinations and on the procedures that likely will be followed;
	Student and Supervisor	Discuss the nature of the comments to be presented by the supervisor about the student's background and any brief remarks to be made by the student prior to the commencement of questions;
	Student	Prepare a copy of CV for distribution to the Examining Committee;
	Supervisor	Distribute a copy of the "School of Public Health: PhD Candidacy Examination Procedures and Timeline" to any members of the Examining Committee who are not members of the School

Contact information

For assistance or further information, please contact the Office of Educational Programs at 780.492.8211 or sph.programs@ualberta.ca.