

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.
- The student will initiate a request to proceed with the ENSC Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination by submitting a copy of their research proposal to the Graduate Coordinator who will distribute it to the committee (see Proposal, below). The Comprehensive Examination Committee will then be assembled and shall meet to: (i) prepare the written essay question for the candidate (see Written Essay, below), and (ii) set the date and location of the oral examination (see Oral Exam, below).
- Once the candidate has been given the essay question from the Chair, he/she will have 10 working days to submit their answer. The oral examination will be held between 5 to 10 working days after the candidate has returned the essay to the Chair. This allows for distribution of the essay to the committee for their reading and assessment.

- 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 essay is satisfactory such that the oral component of the comprehensive should proceed.

Research Proposal

- The Ph.D. research proposal will identify the student's topic of research for their dissertation and plan for progression and completion of the degree.
- In all cases the proposal will identify the goal and objectives of the research and provide substantive rationale for the research. The proposal will also typically include: (i) a review of relevant and current literature in the candidate's research area, (ii) identification of specific research questions and/or hypotheses where appropriate, (iii) description of and rationale for the methods to be used, (iv) significance and limitations of the expected results, and (v) a work plan with timelines, budget and data management plan. It is recognized that each proposal will be developed for a unique situation and that deviations from these guidelines are inevitable, particularly in circumstances where the proposed research plan does not fit a conventional disciplinary academic approach. In these instances, students should receive specific guidance from their supervisory committee on the structure of the proposal.
- It is expected that the supervisory committee will have met with the candidate to discuss the proposal before the comprehensive examination.
- The proposal should be 5000-6000 words, double-spaced with 12 point font and 1 inch margins (excluding figures and bibliography).

Written Response

- The intent of the written response is to have the student demonstrate their academic skills and capabilities within the field of environmental studies and/or science. This could be achieved through consideration of other disciplinary approaches or fields, other sub-fields within the student's core area in an essay, or the design of course syllabi, experiments or research proposals in fields beyond the student's core research. This will challenge the student to contextualize their specific topic of research within the broader interdisciplinary area of environmental studies and/or science. There is potential for this written response to lead to subsequent publications, course design or further research.
- The length and format of the written response will be decided by the committee but will not exceed 5000 words (excluding figures and bibliography).