Department of Human Development and Family Studies

Comprehensive Exam Policy

Approved 4/26/13

**Rationale for new policy**: In the attempt to make comprehensive examinations authentic and meaningful (e.g. grant writing, articles for publication) many exams have become very long and unmanageable, some spanning an entire year or more. This is of concern for a variety of reasons, and *time to degree* has become increasingly important as a funding issue as well as a university quality metric. As we have implemented the portfolio plan, students have opportunities to write articles and proposals with faculty members without the concerns about independent work and authorship created by having these experiences as part of comprehensive exams. An expedited process better serves both students and faculty. The revised comprehensive exam process is complementary to the Portfolio Process, which is an ongoing developmental and mentoring experience. The comprehensive exams and the portfolio are components of the non-coursework requirements for the PhD degree, with the comprehensives being the capstone to the coursework component. The following objectives compare the two processes:

**Objectives of the comprehensive exams are as follows:**

1. Students will identify a body of literature salient to their research topic.
2. Students will provide a succinct synthesis of the key literature related to their research topic.
3. Students will identify and apply key theoretical frameworks related to their research topic.
4. Students will select research methods related to their research question and provide a clear and concise rationale for use of these methods.
5. Students will develop skills for verbally presenting research and application related to their content area.

**Objectives of the portfolio process are as follows:**

1. To assist students in the development of research skills. This includes mentoring by faculty, student participation in research trainings, and actual research experiences.
2. To mentor students in the presentation and publishing process. This includes presentations at professional meetings and co-authoring publications.
3. To prepare students for teaching roles. This includes writing a teaching philosophy, gaining experience as a TA or guest lecturer, and attending professional development activities.
4. To engage students in the service and citizenship aspects of academic life. This includes membership in professional organizations and participating in academic service and community outreach activities.

**Overview:**  Comprehensive exams will be completed in one month within one semester. Two exams will be written, and the third exam will be an oral presentation. Maximum length of each written exam will be 8-10 pages (double-spaced, 11 font, references additional).

**Procedures:**

1. The three exams will cover:
   1. Theories related to concentration (i.e. CFT, child development, HDFD) (written)
   2. Research methodology related to concentration (written)
   3. Practice (e.g. clinical, pedagogy) related to concentration (oral component)
2. A slight revision of the existing comprehensive exam form will be used. Students will not have specific questions for the two written exams, but will have input into question formulation during a meeting of the guidance committee. The oral component should be scheduled well in advance during the comprehensive planning meeting, and the student will know the topic of the presentation to be made.
3. The major professor will be responsible for
   1. Final development of the two written questions and forwarding electronically to Graduate Secretary at least 2 weeks prior to commencement of exam. Student will receive both questions on Monday at 8am, confirm receipt, and turn in no later than two weeks following.
   2. Facilitating scheduling of orals and evaluation process within the one month time-line.
   3. Communicating results of two written exams to student prior to oral exam. If revisions needed, oral will be delayed.
4. The student will be responsible for:
   1. Determining the time frame (during *academic year)* during which she/he wants to take the exam and convening a meeting of the committee well in advance (e.g. 3-4 months. Strongly urge students to write comps in first half of semester so any revision can be accomplished within that semester.
   2. Provide confirmation to Graduate Secretary that questions were received; submit responses electronically in no more than two weeks.
   3. In collaboration with major professor, schedule oral exam.
5. Committee members will be responsible for:
   1. Attending comprehensive planning meeting and assisting in the planning process and question development.
   2. Providing feedback within one week of completion of the written exams.
   3. Participating in an oral exam as 3rd component.
   4. Outside committee member may waive participation.
6. The Graduate Secretary will be responsible for:
   1. Administering the questions electronically. (May set up on D2L)
   2. Receiving the completed responses and sending to committee electronically. Confirm with student that responses were received.
   3. Scheduling room for oral exam.
   4. Providing the final certification form to major professor at time of oral exam.

**Evaluation:**

1. Each set of questions will be evaluated on a 10-point scale, with a minimum score of 7 required to pass on each set of questions. This is not an average—any score below 7 will result in non-pass and revisions. Criteria for evaluation will include accuracy, comprehensiveness, documentation, and quality and organization of the writing. Providing they meet their deadlines, students will receive feedback within one month of the commencement of the exam.
2. Revisions (if a written exam receives less than 7) will be within two weeks after student receives written feedback or by the end of the semester, whichever comes first. Revisions will be re-write based on feedback on original question. Failure of any portion of the revised exam will result in termination from the doctoral program.

**Oral Examination:**

1. The oral examination will be the third component of the comprehensives and will address the practice component of the concentration. It should be scheduled well in advance and follow within one week of successful completion of the two written components. (i.e. all revisions of written component complete before oral).
2. The purpose of the oral exam is to:
   1. Provide the student the opportunity to formally present and discuss applications appropriate to the concentration area (e.g. clinical, pedagogical)
   2. Extend the evaluation of the student’s knowledge and understanding covered in the two written exams. Emphasis may be placed on areas considered to be weaknesses.
   3. To consider the student’s ability to respond in an articulate manner to verbal questions.
   4. To extend discussion beyond content covered in the written exams.
3. Student will know the topic of the oral presentation –to be decided in the comprehensive planning meeting.
4. Following the oral (approximately 60 minutes) the student will be excused. Both written exams will have been evaluated at this time. Committee members will discuss the results of the oral component, and a verbal vote will be taken. A majority affirmative vote will be required to pass the student on the oral component. Immediate feedback will be provided to the student.
5. Oral may be repeated once if it is determined to be a non-pass. This should be scheduled at the earliest possible date.
6. Completion of comprehensive exam form will be signed at the oral meeting.

**Timeline: Effective immediately. Current students, including those students in process of planning comprehensive exams (but have not yet started the first exam,) may opt to retain current plan or implement new plan. Cohort entering fall, 2013 will have this as required format.**

Prepared by B. Ames. Proposed to Graduate Education Committee 1/14/13. Approved with revisions reflected kin 1/18 draft. Credit to MSU Department of Kinesiology for assistance with comprehensive exam policy language. Further revisions made after 4/8/13 Graduate Education meeting. Approved by HDFS faculty 4/26/13.