

PROCEDURES FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS

Purpose

Faculty in each area of specialization may require their students to write comprehensive exams as a program requirement (see Section 8.7 Doctoral Degrees, in the [Graduate Program Manual](#)). A comprehensive exam is not a requirement of the University of Alberta – only the Thesis and Candidacy exams are (see Section 8.3 Conduct of Examinations, in the Graduate Program Manual). This document outlines the procedures to be used by all specializations requiring comprehensive exams in the Alberta School of Business PhD Program.

Delegated Responsibility

The primary responsibility for written comprehensive exams rests with each academic department within the school. This includes: establishing the academic content to be examined, writing the exam questions, administering the exam, and grading the exams.

The Department Chair will appoint an Examining Committee that will be responsible for writing and grading the exam. Members of the committee will be chosen from faculty who are supervising and teaching PhD students and will include the representative of the area of specialization on the PhD Policy Committee as *ex officio* chair. If the area representative is required by Department Comprehensive Exam guidelines to be a member of the examining committee, the Department Chair may be *ex officio* chair of the Examining Committee or may delegate another neutral faculty member to act as chair of the Examining Committee.

Eligibility

A student is eligible to write a comprehensive exam for a specialization when all course requirements for the specialization have been completed.

Examination Dates

Because candidacy examinations must be passed within three years, students should take – and faculty should grade – all elements of the comprehensive exam by the end of the student's 22nd month in the program. Normally, if a student began the program on September 1 two years earlier, this deadline will be June 30th. Exceptions to this deadline must be approved by the area representative for the student's specialization and the Associate Dean of the PhD program, and may be required for students who started the program in Winter term or had to take an approved leave of absence in the first two years of the program. All eligible students shall follow the same timeline (e.g., take the exam on the same day; submit a paper on the same day). The faculty shall consult with students in setting the exam date(s) and ideally arrive at a mutually agreeable date, but the onus is on the student to be available for the exam. Students should be provided one month's notice unless a shorter period of time is mutually agreed to by all students writing the exam and the faculty involved.

Examination Administration

The department will schedule a room or rooms and administer the exam according to the rules it establishes regarding exam length and exam components. Options include: open book, closed book, take home, paper-based, oral presentation, etc. Faculty members responsible for writing the exam can be available for questions while students are taking the exam; students will be informed ahead of time about whether and how questions are allowed. The completed written exams will be distributed to the Examining Committee for grading.

Grading

Each Examining Committee can determine who is grading what part of the exam. Under normal circumstances, all grading will be completed and students informed of the results within one week of writing the exam.

Students will receive a grade of Pass, Fail, or Conditional Pass. The area representative of the specialization (or chair of the Examining Committee) is responsible for communicating the results to the student and the PhD Office on behalf of the Examining Committee.

The Examining Committee may provide brief written comments to those students who pass the exam, with a copy to the PhD Office.

A grade of Conditional Pass indicates that the student is *close to passing* but requires *some further, limited, work*. If a grade of Conditional Pass is given, the Examining Committee will specify, in writing, to the student and the Business PhD Office, the exact nature of the further work to be done, and the time by which it has to be completed. Normally, the work must be completed within 1 month after the student received their results.

The Examining Committee will follow the “Documentation for Comprehensive Exam Retake” template appended below for those students who fail the exam, with a copy to the PhD Office.

Re-examination

Students must pass the exam within a maximum of two attempts. Students who do not pass in two attempts are required to withdraw from the program. Unless an extension is approved by the student’s supervisor and the Associate Dean of the PhD program, the second attempt must be made within 2 months of the original exam (e.g., August 31 for a student who took the exam in June.) The aforementioned procedures generally apply for the second attempt.

History of Policy

Prior Procedures became effective September 1, 2007

Approved by PhD Policy Committee on December 4, 2014

Updated by PhD Policy Committee on March 15, 2018

Revised by PhD Policy Committee on December 19, 2023

Appendix
Documentation for Comprehensive Exam Retake

The following template should be used to communicate results to the student of a failed first attempt at a comprehensive exam. Students must be asked to acknowledge the receipt and understanding of the document. If students fail a second time, they are required to withdraw from the program.

- 1) Provide details on the evaluation of the first attempt, what the grade was, and any feedback from evaluators (or to contact individual evaluators for comprehensive feedback if appropriate in your specialization).
- 2) Describe how the student's performance on the exam retake will be evaluated.
 - a) Include the format of the retake (written, oral, etc. – provide specifics)
 - b) Describe the criteria on which the written work will be evaluated. Describe the criteria on which the oral work (if required) will be evaluated.
 - c) Define who will evaluate the quality of the work.
- 3) Describe what support will be given to the student to prepare for the retake so that they have the best opportunity to succeed.
- 4) Indicate when the retake will be scheduled, and whether students have opportunity to have input on the scheduling.

Email the information to the student, cc the evaluators and busphd@ualberta.ca