

School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy Protocol for the Administration and Evaluation of
Comprehensive Examinations (Effective Fall 2024)

Administration of Comprehensive Examinations

Which type of comprehensive examination is required to complete the doctoral degree program: oral, written, or both?

Both. Students must sit for a written and oral examination before entering the substantive (i.e., theory and specialization courses) in their second year. Students who are required to take both written and oral examinations in two fields: the “Core” (i.e., UAPP 8009, 8010, 8011) and the “Methods” sequence (i.e., UAPP 8014, a Qualitative Methods Course, and a GIS course). After completing the written portion of the exam, students will sit for their oral examination.

Does the program allow a thesis or master's project defense instead of a comprehensive examination? No.

When are comprehensive examinations scheduled, and who schedules them?

Comprehensive examinations are typically scheduled in the spring semester for full-time students after they complete the core and methods courses. Part-time students must notify the Graduate Program Director once they have completed the Core and Methods sequence before taking specialization courses. The department's Graduate Program Director schedules the exams. Students must notify the Graduate Coordinator of their intent to take the exams by the fifth week of the semester.

What is the format of the comprehensive examination?

Comprehensive examinations will include both a take-home written exam and an oral exam. The graduate program director gives students the questions, and they have 72 hours to complete and return their responses in the written portion. Students will answer two questions on each of their two fields (for a total of four questions). Responses are suggested to be at least ten pages (double-spaced) each. A separate works cited page should be provided for each answer. Answers should be submitted to the Graduate Program Director, who will check each student's answers for plagiarism before furnishing the answers to the Comprehensive Exam Committee members.

Strong written answers are coherent essays demonstrating an understanding of – and ability to synthesize – the relevant literature. The reading list for your comprehensive exams is drawn from the syllabi of your coursework. Students are directed to create an annotated bibliography of sources (books, articles, other readings) as a study guide. Because courses are redesigned each time they are offered, exam questions are also redesigned each semester.

Evaluation of Comprehensive Examinations

Who evaluates the comprehensive examination? A departmental Comprehensive Examination Committee writes and evaluates the comprehensive examination. The Committee includes one expert reviewer per subject area.

The Exam Coordinator selects the student's Oral Examination Committee based on the questions chosen and answered. The Committee includes at least one representative for each examination field. Students may receive a "Pass" or "Fail." If a student fails their comprehensive exam, they have one additional attempt at the exam before program dismissal.

How is the comprehensive examination evaluated?

The student's overall performance on the written and oral components of the exam must be acceptable to the Comprehensive Examination Committee. A favorable vote by a majority of the Committee is needed for the student to pass the examination. The written component of the exam is administered roughly two weeks before the oral component. If the student fails any portion of the written exam, the student will have the opportunity to re-take that exam field the following semester. A student must pass all written exams before taking the oral exam.

How are the results communicated to the Graduate School?

When a student passes their exam, the Comprehensive Examination Results form must be signed by the Comprehensive Exam Committee, the Graduate Program Director, and submitted to the graduate school. It is the student's responsibility to bring the comprehensive results form to the oral exam (available through the links on the Student Resources section of the department's web page), get the form signed by faculty, deliver a copy to the Department's Program Director, and file the form with the Graduate School.

School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy Protocol for the Administration and Evaluation of
Comprehensive Examinations (Effective Fall 2021-Fall 2023)

Administration of Comprehensive Examinations

Which type of comprehensive examination is required to complete the doctoral degree program: oral, written, or both?

Both. After completing all coursework, students must sit for a written and oral examination. Students are required to take both examinations in their substantive field of interest, which is determined by the composition of a student's comprehensive exam committee. Students may take comprehensive exams in the last semester of coursework if they choose or wait until all classes are completed to sit for exams. Students will sit for their oral examination after completing the written portion of the exam.

Does the program allow a thesis or master's project defense instead of a comprehensive examination? No.

When are comprehensive examinations scheduled, and who schedules them?

Comprehensive examinations are typically scheduled for full-time students in the spring or fall semester after completing their coursework (i.e., Program Core, Six Focus Area Courses, and Two Methods Courses). It is the student's responsibility to create their comprehensive exam committee. The Comprehensive Exam Committee Declaration form is on our website's Students Resources page.

Students must furnish a 75-source annotated bibliography to committee members, who will be used as a study guide for the student and as the basis for creating a student's comprehensive exam questions. Students will be expected to answer no less than THREE but no more than FIVE questions during their comprehensive exam. Since each student's exam committee is different, questions will differ for each student.

Part-time students must notify the Graduate Program Director after completing their coursework and creating a comprehensive exam committee. The department's Graduate Program Director schedules the exams based on the availability of committee members. Students should notify the Graduate Coordinator of their intent to take the exams by the fifth week of the semester they intend to sit for exams.

What is the format of the comprehensive examination?

Comprehensive examinations will include both a take-home written exam and an oral exam. The graduate program director gives students the questions, and they have 72 hours to complete and return their responses in the written portion. Students will answer at least THREE and at most FIVE questions on their exam. Responses are suggested to be at least ten pages (double-spaced) in response to each question. A separate works cited page should be provided for each answer.

Strong written answers are coherent essays demonstrating an understanding of – and ability to synthesize – the relevant literature. The reading list for your comprehensive exams is drawn from the syllabi of your coursework. Students are directed to create an annotated bibliography of sources (books, articles, other readings) as a study guide. The exam is taken home, and notes can be used if needed. Because courses are redesigned each time they are offered, exam questions are also redesigned each semester.

Evaluation of Comprehensive Examinations

Who evaluates the comprehensive examination? Once the written exam is completed, the student should supply the answers to the Graduate Program Director, who will check for plagiarism before passing the answers to the student's Comprehensive Exam Committee. A student's Comprehensive Examination Committee writes and evaluates the comprehensive examination. The Committee includes one expert reviewer per subject area as determined by the annotated bibliography supplied by the student.

The Comprehensive Examination Committee will review the written and oral exam responses. Students may receive a "Pass" or "Fail." If a student fails their comprehensive exam, they have one additional attempt at the exam before program dismissal.

How is the comprehensive examination evaluated?

The student's overall performance on the written and oral components of the exam must be acceptable to the Comprehensive Examination Committee. A favorable vote by a majority of the Committee is needed for the student to pass the examination. The written component of the exam is administered roughly two weeks before the oral component. If the student fails any portion of the written exam, the student will have the opportunity to re-take that exam field the following semester. A student must pass all written exams before taking the oral exam.

How are the results communicated to the Graduate School?

When a student passes their exam, the Comprehensive Examination Results form must be signed by the Comprehensive Exam Committee and the Graduate Program Director and submitted to the Graduate School. It is the student's responsibility to bring the comprehensive results form to the oral exam (available through the links on the Student Resources section of the department's web page), get the form signed by faculty, deliver a copy to the Department's Program Director, and file the form with the Graduate School.