



**Okanagan School of Education**  
**IGS PhD Degree**  
**Candidacy and Comprehensive Exam Formats and Processes**

## Overview

All PhD students undergo a 'candidacy' process at the end of which they receive the designation Candidate on their transcripts indicating they have completed all the requirements for their doctoral degree except their dissertation. There are three major requirements for advancing to candidacy:

1. Course Work
2. Comprehensive Exams
3. Dissertation Proposal

PhD students in the Faculty of Education are encouraged to see these three requirements as related and interdependent. Students must purposefully seek connections and invest their efforts toward building a strong foundation in preparation for their comprehensive exams and the development of their dissertation proposals. The Supervisory Committee provides guidance to the students, overseeing the path to candidacy.

As stated in the Academic Calendar, "It is required that a doctoral student will be admitted to candidacy within three years from the initial registration. A student who is not admitted to candidacy (by 36 months into the program) will be required to withdraw from the program. Extensions may be granted under exceptional circumstances and with the permission for the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies."

## Purpose

Comprehensive exams act as an important gateway, indicating readiness for dissertation research and writing. The exams should evidence 1) depth and breadth of knowledge; 2) theoretical and applied competencies; and 3) capacities to communicate and articulate understandings.

All written work should reflect the student's ability to:

- Organize the writing sensibly so that the ideas unfold clearly
- Support opinions and conclusions with the appropriate use of evidence
- Use the forms/structures of expression appropriately in order to indicate the meaning, relationship, and the importance of ideas
- Present ideas with precise and appropriate words/images and avoid inappropriate jargon and cliches.
- Use a recognized citation style. APA is preferred. You can check with the library for more information regarding APA formatting: <https://library.ok.ubc.ca/guides-and-tools/citation-style-guides/>

♦Formats and processes adhere to guidelines published in the **UBC Okanagan Campus Academic Calendar**

## Formats & Processes

In consultation with their Supervisory Committee, students select one of three comprehensive exam formats:

- Written responses to a series of exam questions
- Portfolio including a field essay and focus essay
- Combination of the written and exam formats

In order to complete the comprehensive exam process, all students move through three consecutive parts. The type, quantity and due dates for the comprehensive exam must be determined in advance and clearly articulated on the **IGS Doctoral Planning Report** with the student and supervisory committee members all signing the report. The processes and structure of the comprehensives must adhere to general guidelines published in the UBC Okanagan Campus Academic Calendar. **It is expected that all PhD students (no matter the format selected) will move through Part I (written component), Part II (oral component), & Part III (dissertation proposal) as outlined below:**

### Format 1: PhD Comprehensive Exam Questions

#### Part I--Responses to Key Questions

Key questions (3-5) are generated by members of the student's supervisory committee in consultation with the student. Candidates are given a choice of questions from the generated list, comprising a bank of questions approved by the supervisory committee as a whole and have ten days to submit their written responses to the supervisory committee. Students write take-home papers (max. number of 5) in response to selected questions. Each committee member will assume primary responsibility for reading and assessing one of the written responses. Paper length (approximately 5- 8 double-spaced pages) and evaluation criteria for the written responses should be established in advance with all involved fully informed and expectations documented in writing. A deadline date for written responses to be forwarded to supervisory committee members must be set and noted in advance for all involved. The supervisor will not provide feedback in advance of all members receiving the exam responses. Each supervisory committee member will provide specific input based on his or her assessment of one of the responses. But, all exam responses will be made available to every member of the Supervisory Committee.

By a pre-arranged date, all members of the supervisory committee will indicate in writing to the Supervisor if they support the student moving to the oral examination or recommend revisions and/or rewriting. All revisions and rewriting recommendations must be noted in writing and sent to the supervisor to be discussed with the supervisory committee as a whole, compiling a written plan for the student to address. Dates for revisions, rewrites, and the oral exam will be adapted accordingly and all involved will be informed in writing.

**NOTE:** Students must have their Supervisory Committee's approval to move to Part II.

#### Part II--Oral Exam

The oral exam's purpose (approx.1.5 hours) is to give students the opportunity to articulate connections between texts and issues central to their written responses to key questions. It is a way to develop thinking about the dissertation. The supervisory committee explores topics that the student has dealt with in their comprehensive exam questions and determines if the student is ready to move to the dissertation proposal stage.

Oral Exam will consist of:

- Overview of written responses to exam questions shared by student
- Questions related to each essay from each committee member
- General discussion

After the oral exam, the student will be excused while the supervisory committee discusses the written responses alongside the oral exam. The student will be informed of the supervisory committee's discussion directly following the oral exam. If the student must do further work to pass the comprehensive exam requirements, the faculty members must clearly delineate the nature and extent of the work in a written report to be shared with all involved. The student will be informed in writing of the results of the exam.

**NOTE:** Students must have their Supervisory Committee's approval to move to Part III.

### **Part III—Dissertation Research Proposal**

The final stage of the candidacy process entails the preparation of a written dissertation research proposal to be shared with the supervisory committee for their feedback and approval. It should be noted that, where research ethics approval is required, the supervisory committee must approve the research proposal before the student applies for Ethics Review. The research may not commence until the ethics approval has been received.

Once the comprehensive examinations have been successfully completed and the dissertation proposal approved, the supervisor completes the **PhD Advancement to Candidacy Form**.

### **Format 2: PhD Comprehensive Exam Portfolio**

#### **Part I--Field and Focus Reading Lists**

The Supervisor alongside the Supervisory Committee will provide primary guidance to the PhD student regarding the development of two reading lists, articulating a Field and Focus area and discussing options before the comprehensive portfolio is underway. The Field Reading List should reflect a general knowledge base to theoretically and philosophically support the student's research interest. The Focus Reading List should comprise relevant resources particular to a research focus. The student is responsible for providing the supervisory committee with a cover letter mapping out the choice of the field and focus areas and the relations to be addressed, and, providing annotated bibliographies of each reading list. The Supervisory Committee must approve these reading lists before a portfolio completion date is set and an oral exam date is set. Students should maintain and annotate using reference software such as RefWorks, which is supported by the UBC O library.

Specifically, the student in advance of portfolio completion will provide the supervisory committee with—

- Cover letter explaining the rationale for the field and focus reading lists and the relations across the lists to be addressed.
- Annotated bibliographies noting
- Field Reading List—primary texts and critical works reflecting a general knowledge of the field area identified as central to the student's work and situating their proposed study within the existing research

literature (approximately 30 items).

- Focus Reading List—defined texts and critical works particular to the student's developing research focus offering substance and depth for the proposed task (approximately 30 items).

After input from the Supervisory Committee and their approval of the reading lists, a portfolio completion date will be set (usually 4-6 months). The supervisor will read drafts and offer feedback throughout the process of writing the essays and regarding the other parts of the portfolio. By a pre-arranged date, all members of the supervisory committee will indicate in writing to the Supervisor if they support the student moving to the oral examination or recommend revisions and/or rewriting. All revisions and rewriting recommendations must be noted in writing and sent to the supervisor to be discussed with the supervisory committee as a whole, compiling a written plan for the student to address. Dates for revisions, rewrites, and the oral exam will be adapted accordingly and all involved will be informed in writing.

### **Portfolio will consist of--**

- Cover letter describing the major ideas, themes, and issues represented in the portfolio and giving an overall view of its contents
- 30 page double-spaced (approx.) integrative essay with a thesis bringing together the readings from the field list
- 30 page double-spaced (approx.) integrative essay with a thesis bringing together the readings from the focus list
- Current curriculum vitae
- Philosophy of Education Statement (2-3 double-spaced pages)
- Additional artifacts such as a course syllabus developed for current or proposed use, curriculum materials, recent conference presentations, reports, and/or publications

**NOTE:** Students must have their Supervisory Committee's approval to move to Part II.

### **Part II--Oral Exam**

The oral exam's (approx. 1.5 hours) purpose is to give students the opportunity to articulate connections between texts and issues central to their chosen Field and Focus. It is a way to develop thinking about the dissertation. The supervisory committee explores topics that the student has dealt with in their comprehensive portfolio and determines if the student is ready to move to the dissertation proposal stage.

### **Oral Exam will consist of--**

- Overview of essays shared by student
- Questions related to the field essay from each committee member  
Questions related to the focus essay from each committee member
- Question related to the additional components of the portfolio from each committee member
- General discussion

After the Oral Exam, the student will be excused while the supervisory committee discusses the portfolio alongside the oral exam. The student will be informed of the supervisory committee's discussion directly following the oral exam. If the student must do further work to pass the comprehensive exam requirements, the faculty members must clearly delineate the nature and extent of the work in a written report to be shared with all involved. The student will be informed in writing of the results of the exam.

**NOTE:** Students must have their Supervisory Committee's approval to move to Part III.

### **Part III—Dissertation Research Proposal**

The final stage of the candidacy process entails the preparation of a written dissertation research proposal clearly articulating the methodology to be shared with the supervisory committee for their feedback and approval. It should be noted that, where research ethics approval is required, the supervisory committee must approve the research proposal before the student applies for Ethics Review. The research may not commence until the ethics approval has been received.

Once the comprehensive examinations have been successfully completed and the dissertation proposal approved, the supervisor complete the **PhD Advancement to Candidacy Form**.

### **Format 3: Alternative – Combination Exam Questions/Portfolio**

The mix of written exams, papers, and alternative modes must be delineated in advance (**IGS Doctoral Planning Report**) with the students and supervisory committee members moving through **Part I (written component), Part II (oral component), & Part III (dissertation proposal)** following the general guidelines as outlined above in formats one and two.

**NOTE:** Students must have their Supervisory Committee's approval to move from Part I, to Part II, to Part III.

**IMPORTANT TIMELINE:** A student who is not admitted to candidacy (by 36 months into the program) will be required to withdraw from the program. Extensions may be granted under exceptional circumstances and with the permission for the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies.