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Comprehensive Examination Guidelines for Ph.D. Students

Department of Pharmacology

Objective

- The Comprehensive Examination is a combination of written and oral examinations. It is designed to assess the breadth and depth of student's knowledge base in the field of Pharmacology and areas related to the student's own research project. The candidate will be particularly examined for his/her ability to discuss principles and controversies related to the assigned topics and to demonstrate the critical ability to work through practical problems.

Timing

- The comprehensive exam can only be conducted once the student has completed PHAC5405: Advanced Pharmacology
- For students admitted to the M.Sc. program and transferred to the Ph.D. program, the examination must occur before 28 months into the program.
- For a student admitted directly into the Ph.D. program, the examination must occur before 24 months into the program.

Examination Committee

- The examination committee will follow the same regulations as the Pharmacology Examination Committee Policy. In brief, the examination committee consists of a Chair (the Graduate Coordinator or designate), two examiners, and the student's thesis supervisor(s).
- The student's supervisor will not serve as an examiner but will be present during all stages of examination. Supervisors may not assist their students with the written or oral examination. However, the supervisor may ask questions following those from the committee at the oral examination.

Written Examination

- The exam will consist of written questions designed by the committee to test both a broad background in pharmacology and particular expertise related to the student's own research area. The student will prepare a 1-2 page summary of his/her current research project and distribute to the committee at least 2 weeks prior to preparation of questions by the examination committee.
- Each examiner will provide a question aimed at testing the student's ability to conduct a critical and concise survey of current scientific literature and demonstrate a practical knowledge of the assigned topic. While the topic may be relevant to the student's thesis work, it should broaden the knowledge base of the student and may not be directly related his/her thesis project. It is also important that the question address relevant pharmacologic/therapeutic issues.
- Members of the Committee will meet to review the questions prior to providing the exam to the student.

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- The student will be given two weeks to complete the written portion of the exam and is expected to provide a comprehensive response (~12-15 pages, double spaced, excluding references and figures) for each question. The student may consult with examiners for clarification and guidance throughout the process of completing the written component of the exam.
- After receiving the written response, each examiner will inform the Chair within three days regarding acceptability of the written answer to his/her question (i.e. Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory). If any examiner deems the written answer unsatisfactory, the student will not proceed to the oral part of the exam. In either case, the student will be notified of the outcome within 48 hours of the scheduled start time for the oral examination.

Oral Examination Process

- The oral component of the examination will proceed one week following submission of the written answers.
- Each examiner will be allotted ~25 minutes in the first round of questions and ~20 minutes in the second round. Each round will proceed according to order in which the questions appear in the written comprehensive exam.
- During the oral examination, each examiner can ask questions from either of the assigned questions as well as relevant general pharmacology questions. The supervisor will also be given the opportunity to ask questions at the end of each round.
- The total length for the oral exam and in camera session is 3 hours.
- At the completion of the oral defence, the student will be excused from the room while the committee discusses the outcome of the examination.

Evaluation Outcomes

- The committee will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the written and oral examination.
- Each examiner will then determine if the oral exam was “satisfactory”, “satisfactory upon remediation”, or “unsatisfactory”.
- “Satisfactory” means that the student has adequately answered questions and no further action from the student is required.
- “Satisfactory upon remediation”. This remediation will be determined by the committee and can take multiple forms such as extra course work, re-writing of the written response, etc. The committee will discuss which individual (e.g., examiner or supervisor) is responsible for deciding if and when the remediation is completed. A clear deadline of when the remediation must be completed will be given to the student. If remediation is completed successfully, then the student will be given a

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“satisfactory” evaluation. If remediation is not completed, then the student is given an “unsatisfactory” decision.

- A “unsatisfactory” from either examiner will result in the student not completing the comprehensive.
- If the student obtains an unsatisfactory at the written or oral stage of the exam, the student may be re-examined within three months. This second comprehensive exam, with a new committee, will follow the same procedure as the first. Should the student be given an unsatisfactory on either the written or oral component of the second exam, the student will have failed the comprehensive. The failed grade will be reported to FGS and will result in academic dismissal.
- The Chair will complete and sign the Report of PhD Comprehensive Examination form.
- The student will be invited back into the room and be given the result from the examination committee.
- The Chair will report back at departmental staff meeting regarding the outcome of the exam.
- A grade of pass/fail for PHDP 8000 will be submitted once the comprehensive is completed (including any required remediations).

Summary of proceedings:

Pre-EXAM	WRITTEN EXAM	Between WRITTEN and ORAL EXAM	After ORAL EXAM
1. Committee formed 2. Student submits 1-2 page summary of research proposal for background 3. Committee meets to review questions	1. Student receives questions; consults with committee members for clarifications if needed 2. TWO WEEKS are available for the student to complete the written exam	1. Written component is evaluated by each examiner 2. If successful, student proceeds to ORAL defence ONE WEEK following completion of the written component	1. Written feedback on strengths and weaknesses provided to student as well as decision on satisfactory, remediation, or unsatisfactory 2. Outcome of exam reported to faculty