



Department of Psychology  
University of Northern British Columbia  
3333 University Way  
Prince George, B.C.  
V2N 4Z9

**As of: September 7, 1999**

## **Psychology Ph.D. Candidacy/Comprehensive Examination**

The Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination (PSYC 880-0) satisfies the Faculty of Graduate Studies requirement (section 9.7 Doctoral Candidacy Examination of the UNBC Graduate Studies Calendar 1999-2000) for a doctoral candidacy examination. It should be noted that this document does not supercede the UNBC Graduate Studies Calendar but is meant to establish procedures and expectations for our doctoral students. That is, as required in the calendar, this document is meant to set the form, content, and administration of such examinations.

Appendix A provides a copy of the 1999-2000 Graduate Calendar statements on the Doctoral Candidacy Examination.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies requires that "The purpose of this examination is to test the student's understanding of material considered essential to completion of the degree, and to test the student's competence to conduct the research which will culminate in the dissertation" (page 21 of the 1999-2000 Graduate Calendar).

### **1. Objectives of the Candidacy Examination**

The candidacy examination is designed to test the student's mastery of material essential for the planning, writing, and proposal of the dissertation. That is, as described in the Calendar, this is a *Candidacy* examination whose purpose is to ascertain whether the student is ready to proceed to the planning and writing of the dissertation proposal. Furthermore, the examination should reflect the student's capacity to critically integrate research and/or theories pertaining to one or more issues that are fundamental to her or his field of study. As described below, the "field of study" is determined by the student and approved by the supervisory committee.

It should be noted that, although this examination ascertains the student's readiness to begin the dissertation, the student's responses to examination questions should not comprise an integral component of the dissertation itself (e.g., the student cannot submit their proposal or dissertation literature review or any part thereof as a response to a candidacy examination question).

As described in the Calendar, the objectives of the PhD program in Psychology include the following:

- to develop scholars and researchers who have an advanced level of understanding of the psychological sciences, including comprehensive knowledge of contemporary data and theory in psychology and a high level of methodological expertise
- to prepare graduates with an understanding of the linkages between psychological, biological, social, cultural, and ethical dimensions of human functioning
- to communicate the results of research in order to contribute to the enhancement of northern British Columbia and other regions by developing sound psychological strategies, appropriate assessment tools, and program planning and evaluation methods

To meet these three objectives, the candidacy examination will be a *written examination* with at least one question in each of the following three categories as *related to the student's field of study*:

- (a) ethics,
- (b) research methodology, and
- (c) competency in the field of study.

To meet the program objectives, the student must demonstrate competency in all three categories. That is, a pass on the candidacy examination requires passing all three categories.

If the student does not pass all of the categories (a) through (c) above, the student can re-write the candidacy examination *only once*. However, they only need to re-write the category(ies) that they did not pass. Normally, the second examination will involve different question(s) based on the same content as the initial examination's question(s).

Importantly, because this is a candidacy examination, it must be passed *before* the student can defend her/his dissertation proposal.

## 2. Procedural Guidelines

### **Timeline for the Candidacy Examination**

- Although the Psychology Program's description of the timeline states that normally the candidacy examination takes place by the end of the first year (or 12 credit hours for part-time students), the timing of the examination will be set by the supervisory committee in consultation with the student. In scheduling the examination or any re-examination, the committee will take into consideration:
  - (a) the UNBC Graduate Calendar's statement that a doctoral student *must* pass the candidacy examination within two years of registration as a doctoral student and at least six months before the final oral examination (see Appendix A),
  - (b) the Psychology Program's policy that a student must pass the candidacy examination before he/she can defend the dissertation proposal, and
  - (c) that the two-year limit applies to both part-time and full-time students.

- It is strongly recommended that the candidacy examination occur within the first 20 months of registration to allow for up to 4 months for the student to prepare for re-examination, if a re-examination is needed.
- Our interpretation of the UNBC Calendar is that time spent on an approved leave of absence will not count toward the two-year deadline.

### **Step #1: The Field of Study**

- In consultation with the *supervisory committee*, the candidate must declare a "field of study". In so doing, the candidate is required to write a brief description of the "field of study" which requires approval by his/her supervisory committee. This description must provide enough detail:
  - (a) to determine membership of the candidacy examining committee, and
  - (b) to prepare the examination questions in each of the categories listed above.

### **Step #2: The Examining Committee**

- The examining committee is comprised of the supervisory committee and, where appropriate, additional faculty members to complement expertise in ethics and/or research methodology.

### **Step #3: Initial Meeting of the Examining Committee**

- Within four months of registration in the Doctoral program, the examining committee will meet with the student to:
  - (a) set the examination dates, and
  - (b) prepare a reading list,
 in preparation for the candidacy examination. The examining committee may also advise the supervisory committee of any additional coursework that may be beneficial for the student in preparation for the candidacy examination. The examination dates and reading list are to be passed as a motion by the examining committee. The Chair of the Examining Committee (i.e., the thesis supervisor) is responsible for submitting approved minutes (within 14 calendar days) of any examining committee meeting(s) to the Psychology Graduate Committee.
- Any changes to the examination dates or reading list must be approved by the examining committee and forwarded to the Graduate Committee within 7 calendar days.
- No additional readings are to be added to the student's reading list in the two weeks prior to the examination.

### **Step #4: Setting the Examination Questions**

- The questions for the candidacy examination are set and graded by the examining committee.
- The student will see the questions for the first time at the examination.
- Markers for each question are assigned before the candidate sits the examination.

### **Step #5: The Examination Days**

- The candidacy examination will take place over three *consecutive* days -- one day devoted to each of the above three categories. The examination will be conducted from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- The candidacy examination will use an open-book format.
- The student is *not* permitted to consult with anyone in preparing his/her responses to the examination questions. Violations will be treated under the university's policy on academic offenses.
- The student will be provided with a computer and a quiet place to write the examination.

### **Step #6: Grading the Candidacy Examination**

- All questions are to be graded on a pass/fail basis. If a category is comprised of more than one question, all questions must receive a passing grade in order for the category to receive a pass. Recall that a student must pass all three categories to pass the candidacy examination.
- Each question will be graded by two members of the examining committee. Given that one of the program goals is communication skills, grading should reflect both the content and writing of the answer.
- Markers will independently evaluate the student's responses. If the two markers cannot agree on a pass/fail decision, the examining committee will meet to arrive at a pass/fail decision for that question.

### **Step #7: Providing a Letter to the Graduate Committee**

- A letter signed by all members of the examining committee is to be sent to the Graduate Committee within 21 calendar days of the date of the candidacy examination indicating the pass/fail outcome of the examination.
- If the outcome is a pass, the Graduate Committee will then forward this letter to the Dean of Graduate Studies on behalf of the examining committee.
- If the outcome is fail, the examining committee must indicate which categories require re-examination and provide detailed reasons for the failing grade on any question. As per normal practice, a student who fails the candidacy examination has the right to appeal before re-examination and should consult with the Dean of Graduate Studies regarding the appropriate procedures.

### **Step #8: Re-Examination (if necessary)**

- Recall that a student need only re-write the category(ies) that he/she did not pass.
- Candidacy examinations can be re-written only once.
- When setting the date for the second examination please refer to the Timeline (see above) and follow Steps #3 through #6.
- It may be suggested in Step #3 that the student complete further readings in preparation for re-writing the examination.
- Normally, the second examination will involve different question(s) based on the same content as the question(s) on the initial examination.

- After the re-examination and grading, a letter signed by all members of the examining committee is to be sent to the Graduate Committee within 21 calendar days of the date of the candidacy examination indicating the pass/fail outcome of the examination.
- If the outcome of the candidacy examination is a pass, the Graduate Committee will then forward this letter to the Dean of Graduate Studies on behalf of the examining committee.
- If the outcome of the re-examination is fail, the examining committee must provide detailed reasons for the failing grade on any question. The Graduate Committee will then forward the examining committee's letter to the Dean of Graduate Studies and recommend to the Dean that the student be required to withdraw from the Doctoral Program due to unsatisfactory academic performance. A student who fails the candidacy examination has the right to appeal and should consult with the Dean of Graduate Studies regarding the appropriate procedures.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **From the 1999-2000 UNBC Graduate Studies Calendar:**

#### **9.7 Doctoral Candidacy Examination**

Within two years of registration as a Doctoral candidate and at least six months before the final oral examination, a student must pass a candidacy examination. The purpose of this examination is to test the student's understanding of material considered essential to completion of the degree, and to test the student's competence to conduct the research which will culminate in the dissertation. The candidacy examination may be written or oral, or both, at the discretion of the Program or College. Individual Programs or Colleges or supervisory committees may also require other examinations in addition to the candidacy examination. Examples of such examinations would be those to test competence in languages other than English, in statistics, in computing, or in other research skills. In some Programs or Colleges there may be, in addition to the candidacy examinations, comprehensive examinations to be completed before the candidacy examinations, to test knowledge in the field.

The candidacy examination is a requirement of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and cannot be waived by any Program or College. However, the form, content, and administration of such examinations are determined by the individual Programs or Colleges. While there may be wide variety in the content of candidacy examinations, the manner in which the examinations are constructed, conducted, and evaluated must be consistent within Programs and Colleges.

Programs or Colleges are responsible for providing students with a written statement of procedures, requirements, and regulations governing candidacy examinations. This information must be provided to Doctoral students at their initial registration, and must be on file with the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

When a student has successfully completed the candidacy examination, the College Dean, Program Chair or Graduate Advisor is responsible for sending confirmation of the fact, signed by all members of the supervisory committee, to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

(pages 21-22 of the 1999-2000 UNBC Graduate Studies Calendar)

#### **From the Description of the Psychology Ph.D. Program:**

Normally, students will take a comprehensive examination by the end of the first year in the program (or 12 credit hours for part-time students). Upon successfully completing the comprehensive examination and presenting an acceptable dissertation proposal to their supervisory committee, a student is granted PhD Candidate status, and embarks upon completion of the dissertation under the supervision of a Faculty Academic Supervisor. Normally, it is expected that the defence of the dissertation by full-time PhD Candidates will take place within three years of acceptance into the program. (page 38 of the 1999-2000 UNBC Graduate Studies Calendar)