School of Nursing
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Ph.D. Program Comprehensive/Candidacy Examination Guidelines

I. Purpose of the Examination

The purpose of the comprehensive/candidacy examination is to demonstrate in-depth knowledge and synthesis in the substantive areas of the student's doctoral program. The questions are designed to integrate knowledge from core courses in nursing, methods, ethics, the minor area of study and guided research. Successful completion of the examination advances the student to candidacy and signals readiness to conduct independent research.

II. Policies Guiding the Examination

A. Each student takes the examination at or near the completion of coursework. It is expected the exam will be taken within a semester of completing formal coursework. Students must complete the Intent to Write form at least 6 weeks prior to writing the examination. Specific requirements include the completion of:
1. Required courses (see III PhD Program Guidelines, at the end of this document).
2. Any grades of incomplete (I) or progress (P) in non-research courses,
3. Graduate School PhD minimum credit requirement.

B. In collaboration with the major professor, the student selects a Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC) to develop, read, and grade the examination. The CEC has a minimum of three and a maximum of five members who must have Graduate Faculty membership.
1. The major professor chairs the committee.
2. At least one member must be prepared as a nurse and hold a research doctorate.
3. It is recommended, but not required, that one member represents the minor area of study.
4. Additional members beyond the minimum of 3 may include graduate faculty, academic staff (including emeritus faculty), visiting faculty, or faculty from other institutions.

[Note: Members of the CEC often go on to become members of the dissertation committee. The Graduate School policy regarding dissertation committee membership is available at: https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1201.]

C. Based upon the student's course work and research, and in consultation with the student, the CEC develops the comprehensive /candidacy examination that will represent content from:
   a. Nursing knowledge,
   b. Theories and methods of inquiry,
   c. The minor area(a) of study,
   d. Guiding research, and
   e. Bridging or integrating the substantive areas.

CI. Together, the CEC and the student will discuss what topics the student should focus on to demonstrate the student's mastery and integration of content relevant to their field of study. Sample questions are available to both students and faculty by contacting the Graduate Advising Manager in Academic Affairs. Typically, students are asked to write answers to 3-4 questions for the exam.

CII. The CEC may help the student to prepare for the examination in one of two ways. The CEC may provide:
1. Basic study questions covering all content relevant to the particular student's exam, but none of the study questions may appear verbatim on the exam.
2. The CEC may provide, in advance, one question as it will appear verbatim on the student's exam. If students have knowledge of an exam question in advance of the actual exam, then the CEC will expect a higher level of scholarship in the response to this question than to other questions that students do not know about. Other than this one question, the remaining exam questions are not to be disclosed in advance.

Faculty will not draft study outlines or notes for students to use in preparation for the exam but may provide references or reading suggestions.

F. The student chooses whether the examination is to be completed
   1. Over two consecutive days for a maximum of six hours each at the School of Nursing, or
   2. As a "take home" over a one week period (7 x 24-hour days).

   The availability of resources (computer, jump drive, references) during the two-day exam period will be determined by the major professor.

   Students may use an editor for proofreading grammar, style, voice, and/or English language conventions. Substantive changes or clarification of major ideas is not allowed. If an editing service is used, students must submit both their original and edited versions of the exam response.

   The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) programs (e.g., ChatGPT) to create content for the comprehensive exam responses will be treated as plagiarism unless all committee members have granted specific permission in advance of the exam. Such an exception might be considered in cases where use and critique of generative AI is a component of an exam question.

G. The student submits the completed exam to the Graduate Advising Manager.

H. The major professor, in consultation with each CEC member, determines which exam question(s) the members will read and grade. Each question is graded by at least two CEC members. One of the graders for each question is the faculty member who wrote that particular question.

I. The Graduate Advising Manager sends the student's responses to exam questions and a grading sheet to CEC committee members.

J. CEC committee members grade the student's responses to each question as: (a) pass with distinction, (b) pass, or (c) fail.
   a. The student must pass each question to achieve candidacy.
   b. A simple majority among the faculty graders of each question constitutes a pass. A tie vote constitutes a fail for that question
   c. Any question on which the student receives a grade of "fail" may be retaken once. The CEC determines the nature of the retake. The major professor and the student determine when the retake occurs, however, the retake must be completed within four months of the date when initial exam results were communicated to the student.

K. The CEC members submit their evaluation of the student's response(s) to the major professor.

L. The major professor communicates results to the student and the Graduate Advising Manager in a timely manner, typically within 2 business days of receiving all CEC members' grades.

M. The major professor is encouraged to convene the CEC for discussion of the results with the student or to provide a written summary of comments.

N. The Graduate Advising Manager sends the student an official letter of congratulations and files a Preliminary/ Comprehensive Warrant with the Graduate School signifying the student has achieved candidacy.

O. If the student has concerns about the evaluation or administration of the exam, they can consult the School of Nursing Appeals and Grievances Policy located in the PhD Student Handbook.

III. PhD Program Guidelines

Students must complete the following required coursework by the end of the semester in which the student plans to write the exam:

Students Admitted Prior to Fall 2024

SCHOLARLY INQUIRY – 18 credits minimum required

- N803 and N804 Advanced Research Design and Methods I & II: 6 credits
- N815 Knowledge Development in Nursing: 3 credits
- N816 Proseminar in Nursing Research: 1 credit (Two semesters required)
- N802 Ethics and the Responsible Conduct of Research: 1 credit
- Advanced Methods/Statistics (6 credits)

Students choose an emphasis in either (1) Policy and Leadership or (2) Theory and Practice of Nursing

POLICY AND LEADERSHIP – 3-9 credits minimum required (All students complete a minimum of 3 credits in Policy and Leadership. N817 and N847 are also required if students chose an emphasis in Policy and Leadership.)

- N703 Health Care and Public Policy: 3 credits
- N817 Research in Communities, Populations, and Systems: 3 credits
- Policy and Leadership Practicum: 3 credits

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF NURSING – 3-9 credits minimum required (All students complete a minimum of 3 credits in Theory and Practice of Nursing. N818 and N847 are also required if students choose an emphasis in Theory and Practice of Nursing.)

- N590 Contemporary Practices in Nursing – Various Special Topics: 1-3 credits
- N702 Health Promotion and Disease Prevention in Diverse Communities: 3 credits
- N722 Advanced Practice Nursing Theory: Adults and Older Adults: 3 credits
- N741 Advanced Practice Nursing Theory: Family Process & Child Development: 3 credits
- N751 Advanced Practice Nursing Theory: Psychiatric Mental Health: 3 credits.
- N818 Patient-Centered Research: 3 credits
- Clinical Field Practicum: 3 credits

NURSING EDUCATION – 3 credits minimum required

- N785 Foundations of Curriculum Development and Evaluation in Nursing Education, 3 credits
- N786 Foundations of Teaching and Learning in Nursing, 3 credits
- N787 Nursing Education Practicum: 1-3 credits

INDEPENDENT STUDY – 3 of the 10 minimum credits required must be completed prior to the comprehensive exam

- N799 Independent Study
- N999 Advanced Independent Study

PhD MINOR – 9 credits minimum required

The purpose of the minor is to add breadth to a PhD major. Two minor options are available. The Option A minor requires a minimum of 9 credits in a single department/major field of study. Examples of Option A minors include Women's Studies, Sociology, Educational Psychology, Prevention Science, Industrial Engineering, and Business. The Option B minor, or distributed minor, requires a minimum of 9 credits in one or more departments and can include coursework in the School of Nursing

Students Admitted Fall 2024 or after

NURSING SCHOLARSHIP – 12 credits minimum required

- N705, Seminar in Interdisciplinary Clinical Research Evidence: 3 credits
- N801, Theory in Nursing Research: 2 credits
- N815 Knowledge Development in Nursing: 3 credits
- N816 Proseminar in Nursing Research: 1 credit (Four semesters required)

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS, & STATISTICS – 16 credits minimum required

- N706, Nursing Research: 3 credits
- N803, Quantitative Methods: 4 credits
- N804, Qualitative Methods: 3 credits
- Graduate Statistics: 6 credits

ELECTIVES IN NURSING SCIENCE – 6 credits minimum required

- N590, Contemporary Practices in Nursing – Various special topics: 1-4 credits
- N850, Measurement in Health Research: 3 credits
- N818, Patient-Centered Research: 3 credits
- N819, Clinical Research Practicum: 3 credits
- N847, Health Policy Practicum: 3 credits

LEGAL, ETHICAL, AND SOCIAL CONCERNS IN NURSING RESEARCH – 6 credits minimum required

- N800, Health Equity in Nursing and Health Research: 2 credits
- N703, Health Care and Public Policy (or similar health policy course): 3 credits
- N802, Ethics and Responsible Conduct of Research: 1 credit

PhD MINOR – 9 credits minimum required

The purpose of the minor is to add breadth to a PhD major. Two minor options are available. The Option A minor requires a minimum of 9 credits in a single department/major field of study. Examples of Option A minors include Women's Studies, Sociology, Educational Psychology, Prevention Science, Industrial Engineering, and Business. The Option B minor, or distributed minor, requires a minimum of 9 credits in one or more departments and can include coursework in the School of Nursing

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