

## Guidelines: SOM Comprehensive Examinations and Final Defenses

Successful completion of comprehensive examinations and successful defenses of dissertations are required for all Ph.D. degrees. Successful defenses of theses are required for Master's degrees in Anatomy & Neurobiology, Biochemistry, Human Genetics, Medical Physics, Microbiology & Immunology, Pharmacology & Toxicology and Physiology & Biophysics. A student must be making satisfactory academic progress to undertake a comprehensive examination or final defense.

Comprehensive examinations and final defenses are conducted by a student's graduate advisory committee (GAC) or other committee as determined by the program. Comprehensive examinations and final defenses must be scheduled at a time during which all GAC members are available to participate. If a single GAC member cannot participate in a previously scheduled examination or defense, the student and advisor can choose to reschedule the examination. Alternatively, the student can proceed with the meeting if approved by the advisor and the graduate program director with the understanding that the absent GAC member will be considered to have voted to fail the student. If two or more GAC members cannot participate in a previously scheduled examination or defense, the meeting must be rescheduled. A student may present and defend their work via video conference with prior approval of their GAC and program director, in which case the student is responsible for organizing all aspects of the video conference.

A student must provide their GAC with a draft of their dissertation research proposal, dissertation or thesis at least 10 working days prior to the scheduled comprehensive examination or final defense.

Comprehensive examinations have written and oral components. Comprehensive examinations focus on core information in the area of the anticipated degree and the proposed directed research project.

Final dissertation (Ph.D.) and thesis (Master's) defenses require the student to present their dissertation or thesis research in a public seminar and then defend their dissertation or thesis to their GAC. During the defense, the GAC will determine if the student has:

- Demonstrated mastery of the student's general research area
- Demonstrated mastery of the background information for their dissertation or thesis project and their completed studies including all major analyses and interpretations
- Performed with appropriate technical and other care all major experiments required for their dissertation or thesis project
- Constructed a draft of their dissertation or thesis document that appears will be suitable after being revised in response to comments from the GAC

Each GAC member must vote to pass or fail the student before the comprehensive examination or final defense is adjourned. An absent GAC member will be considered to have voted to fail the student. A student passes the examination or defense if there is no more than one total vote of fail. The student fails the examination or defense if there are two or more votes of fail. A student may be allowed to retake an exam per the guidelines of their program and with approval of the School of Medicine Graduate Programs Committee.

A student who has passed their final defense should expect to revise their thesis or dissertation before receiving final approval from their GAC. The student and the GAC should identify a specific scope of work and a reasonable time-line for the revisions, and should work collaboratively and expeditiously to complete the revisions.

Approved by the School of Medicine Graduate Programs Committee: 2020.08