

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 programs that require them. 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 committee members are available to participate. If a single committee member cannot participate in a previously scheduled examination or defense, the meeting can occur if approved by the advisor and the graduate program director. If two or more committee 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 committee and program director, in which case the student is responsible for organizing all aspects of the video conference.

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

A comprehensive examination has written and oral components that focus on foundational information in the area of the anticipated degree and the proposed dissertation research project.

A final dissertation (Ph.D.) or thesis (Master's) defense requires the student to present their dissertation or thesis research in a public seminar and then defend their dissertation or thesis to their graduate advisory committee. During the defense, the graduate advisory committee will determine if the student has:

- Demonstrated mastery of the 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 experiments required for their dissertation or thesis project
- Constructed a draft of the dissertation or thesis document that appears will be suitable after being revised in response to comments from the graduate advisory committee

Each GAC member must vote to pass or fail the student before the comprehensive examination or final defense is adjourned. A student passes the examination or defense if there is no more than one vote of fail. A 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 SOM Graduate Programs Committee: pending