

Epidemiology Doctoral Comprehensive Exam Guidelines

(when done in combination with the dissertation proposal)

Purpose of Comprehensive Exam: To evaluate 1) in-depth knowledge acquired by the student in the major area of concentration and in the cognate areas, and 2) the ability to integrate concepts and apply them to epidemiologic research studies. The evaluation will include, but is not limited to, determining the extent to which the student is an expert in their dissertation topic area, is well-versed in the relevant literature, is competent in applying epidemiologic concepts as they relate to his or her research area and more broadly to epidemiologic research, and can demonstrate independent thinking as a PhD-level researcher.

Comprehensive exam structure

- Written exam will consist of the dissertation proposal
- Oral component of comprehensive exam *must* include:
 - Oral defense of dissertation proposal
 - Oral exam of additional questions from dissertation committee (required of all comprehensive exams)
- Oral exam will offer opportunity to ask more detailed questions related not only to the dissertation topic, but more broadly in the student's field of study, including:
 - Methods
 - Measurement
 - Biologic mechanisms
 - Other literature related to the topic
 - New approaches or research questions (beyond proposal)
- Committee members will give the student questions one month prior to oral exam
 - Students will prepare content of questions which will be assessed during oral exam
 - Students will not be required to provide written answers but may need to use the whiteboard to explain mechanisms or formulas
- Timing for exam
 - Oral exam of additional questions should last approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour
 - Total exam time should last approximately 3 hours

Implementation of comprehensive exam

- Students will **not** be allowed to refer to notes during the oral exam
- How is pass/fail determined?
 - A student will fail if the committee feels his/her answers were not adequate
 - The committee should give specific feedback about the deficiencies
- If a student fails, which portion will need to be repeated?
 - This will be left up to the discretion of the committee
 - Portions can include any or all of the components: written dissertation proposal, proposal defense, oral exam questions
- Timeframe for retake
 - Most students should retake the exam within 1-3 months following their initial attempt