

PHD IN NURSING PROGRAM – COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
Adopted May 31, 2005
Revised January, 2007

All students are required to take the Comprehensive Examination. The comprehensive examination may occur no later than six months after completion of course work requirements as represented in the Plan of Study, and prior to the defense of the dissertation proposal. The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to:

1. Summarize and synthesize the current state of knowledge related to the areas of inquiry in which the student is developing expertise.
2. Demonstrate evidence of ability to select, organize, synthesize, and critically appraise supporting literature relevant to a problem or issue.
3. Demonstrate capacity for original thought, in-depth knowledge of theory, and expertise in research methodology related to nursing phenomenon of interest.
4. Demonstrate ability to analyze theoretical formulations and strategies for theory development.

PROCEDURE

Overview

The comprehensive examination consists of two parts: written and oral. The evaluation of both components of the comprehensive examination shall be completed by a three member examination committee, led by the student's faculty advisor. The procedure is as follows:

1. The student shall identify a substantive area in which he or she is developing an expertise. A comprehensive outline of the topic shall be drawn up by the student and approved by the advisor.
2. The examining committee consists of three faculty members holding appointments in the College of Nursing and having at least Associate Member status in the College of Graduate Studies. The three faculty members include the student's advisor and two others, one being knowledgeable in the student's subject area. The student's advisor shall chair the committee and in collaboration with the student, select the two other members.

Written Examination

The written component shall be a paper which synthesizes mastery of knowledge gained through the student's program of study. The paper should reflect the current state of the knowledge of the topic. The written paper should follow American Psychology

Association (APA) guidelines for publication, and shall be no more than 30 pages in length, including references and appendices. The topic and type of paper shall be selected by the student in consultation with the advisor. The paper shall be an original document and may build on previous work, however, papers from previous courses may not be used solely as a substitute for writing the examination. Because the emphasis is on scholarly synthesis, the student may consult published material, notes, and the like. Students are encouraged to confer with the advisor in the preparation for this examination for general advice about procedures, format, and guidelines. Examining committee members shall not read the written examination paper in draft form before the examination. No faculty is to edit, review, or help in any way with the student's written or oral examination work. The student may seek assistance from The Center for Academic Excellence.

Examples of types of papers

- Concept analysis
- Theoretical/conceptual framework
- Methodology
- Systematic or integrative review of the literature

The written examination shall be scored by each committee member on the Written Examination Scoring Sheet (attached) based on the following general and specific evaluation criteria:

General criteria:

- Clarity and logic of the student's presentation
- Ability to conceptualize, analyze, and synthesize knowledge from a nursing perspective
- Capacity for original thought, theoretical and professional sophistication, research expertise, and substantive knowledge
- Depth of understanding of the phenomena of interest
- Competence in communicating (parsimony, clarity, and accuracy of language) and defending ideas and/or positions

Specific criteria:

1. Clarity of topic and purpose – Clearly states in the introduction to the paper the topic or issue and the reason(s) for its selection. The purpose of the paper is well defined, concisely stated, and congruent with the selected topic or issue.
2. Significance – States significance of the topic for nursing (practice and research). The history and importance of the topic or issues are described.

3. Quality of literature review – Comprehensive coverage of the literature related to the topic. Literature is synthesized and logically presented.
 - Non-research literature (theory and issues) – Clearly articulates main point(s) of article; established credibility of author/content
 - Research literature – Sample: subjects and selection criteria; procedure: description of procedural steps; measures: reliability and validity, description/definition of measurement; results: data analyses described, data fully presented, findings logically presented; conclusions: author’s interpretation of findings, author’s discussion of limitations, author’s discussion of generalization
4. Quality of references – Selects significant literature, including classic and current articles.
5. Quality of theoretical discussion – Clearly discusses a relevant theory that demonstrates an enhanced understanding of the topic or issue. In some cases, theory may more directly related to another section, such as practice implications.
6. Critical appraisal of literature – Analyzes the body of literature. Summarizes the significant accomplishments in the literature, presents discussion congruent with the reviewed articles and appropriate to the topic and purpose.
7. Implications - Discusses the relationship between major findings and identifies gaps in literature, the implications for practice, and further research. Formulates pertinent, researchable questions, propositions, and hypotheses based on the synthesis of findings/gaps. Describes the application and significance to nursing.

After receiving the student’s paper, the committee may take up to one week to read and evaluate the written examination. The oral examination shall be conducted within two weeks of the student receiving the “pass” score on the written component. In the event of a “not pass” on the written component of the comprehensive examination, the student can either withdraw from the program or resubmit the written re-examination within three months of the “not pass”. A plan will be formulated with the advisor and student. Re-examination shall be done by the same examination committee. “Not pass” on the second written re-examination will mark the end of the student’s progression and the student shall withdraw from the program.

The results of the written component shall be communicated to the student within one week of the completion of the evaluation by the examination committee. The advisor is responsible for this communication and all other procedural communications appropriate to the comprehensive examination process.

Oral examination

The oral component of the comprehensive examination is conducted by the student's examining committee upon successful completion of the written component of the examination. The oral examination is attended only by the examination committee and the student.

Typically, the student begins the oral component of the comprehensive examination with a twenty- to thirty-minute oral synthesis that summarizes the paper and should include, but is not limited to: topic; problem; significance; literature utilized; methods; limitations; implications; and salient content related to the student's program of study. In the ensuing discussion, committee members may question the student about aspects of the paper including alternative potential methodologies to study the nursing phenomenon; alternative conceptual and theoretical frameworks; clarification of statistical information; the potential for further study; and application to practice or significance to nursing. The entire oral examination shall not exceed two hours in length of time.

The oral examination shall be evaluated by the standards established for the written examination, but modified by the following criteria:

- Organization of information
- Delivery of presentation (clarity and voice projection)
- Logical sequence of discussion
- Choice of visual aids

Each committee member shall write a brief description and evaluation of the student's performance on oral examination on the Faculty Comment Sheet (attached) and submit the comment sheet to the advisor, who with the committee, shall then determine whether the student passed or did not pass the oral component of the examination. A copy of committee members' Score Sheets and Comments Sheets will be given to the student. The advisor shall then submit a recommendation of "pass" or "not pass" to the Director of the Doctoral Program. An initial finding of "not pass" will mean that the student will be given the option either to drop out of the program or to take the oral examination one additional time. If the second option is chosen, a time will be established within three months of the "not pass" for a second attempt at the oral component of the comprehensive examination. The student and advisor will work together to formulate a plan. "Not pass" on the second oral re-examination will mark the end of the student's progression and the student shall withdraw from the program.

The results of the oral component shall be communicated to the student immediately. The advisor is responsible for this communication and all other procedural communications appropriate to the comprehensive examination process. Students shall successfully complete both components of the comprehensive examination in order to be admitted to candidacy for the doctoral degree.

Faculty Guidelines and Procedures

All committee members are required to:

- Record their evaluation on the Scoring Sheet (attached) for the written examination component.
- Comment either directly on the comprehensive examination or on the Faculty Comment Sheet (attached), which should be signed. The examining committee member will fill out two Faculty Comment Sheets, one for the written examination and another for the oral examination.
- Comment on the positive as well as on the negative aspects of the examination, specifically remarking upon items rated two or below and identifying them by number (written examination only).
- Return the student's examination, Scoring Sheet, and Faculty Comment Sheets to the advisor within the one week deadline for the written examination and immediately after the oral examination (all sheets are retained by the advisor and a copy will be provided to the student).

Prior to scoring the examination, the examining committee shall decide on the technical merit of the paper based on the following criteria:

- Grammar and spelling
- Organization of paper (clear and logical sentence structure)

In the event that the technical merit of the paper is deemed unacceptable by the examining committee, the paper shall not be scored, and returned to the student. The student shall have two weeks to make improvements and resubmit the paper to the advisor.

The scoring system provides an objective way to indicate whether the student has addressed the stated areas of evaluation. Each criterion needs to be considered separately so that performance on one does not affect the assessment of another. If a committee member's opinion regarding a more effective approach is based on the literature or course work to which the student has been exposed, then such an opinion is reason for deducting points. However, a faculty member's greater expertise and practice knowledge should not be grounds for deducting points but serve as useful comments without penalty.

Scores of three (3) or below on the written examination should be addressed on the Scoring Sheet in an objective tone and instruct the student by giving examples of what should have met the criterion for a higher score. Penalties for omissions should be accompanied by suggestions on how to condense elsewhere or better focus the content. The "not pass" examination requires clear comment on problem areas, distinguishing between those that are major and minor.

Positive comments should identify the strengths of the written and oral components of the comprehensive examination. It may not reflect the capability of the student, who may have concentrated on specific criteria and not always addressed broader areas. An offer to discuss the examination in person would be especially beneficial if a committee member has recognized flaws attributable to haste or touched on questions that the student may

not have considered. Informative and considerate comments are helpful to passing and not passing students alike.

Sample statements identifying strengths in the comprehensive examination

- Ideas are logically expressed and paper is well organized.
- Problem is clearly and concisely stated.
- Relevant research has been succinctly and critically reviewed.
- Creative approach to problem is demonstrated, as well as an adequate synthesis of theory/clinical data to arrive at appropriate solutions.
- Valid evaluation measures have been identified.

Sample statements identifying weaknesses in the comprehensive examination

- The main problem is not identified or poorly described.
- The setting is not defined.
- The discussion of whether the research instruments were reliable and valid needs to be expanded.
- It is not clear what impact the proposed intervention will have on the defined population. Desired outcomes described are too broad in nature and not measurable. The outcomes are not reflective of research/literature presented in the paper.
- The choice of alternatives seems questionable.

Timeline for Comprehensive Examination Procedure

The written and oral components of the comprehensive examination are to be conducted within six months of completion of course work according to Plan of Study.

- During the final semester of course work, meet with advisor to review the examination process and initiate arrangements for examination procedures:
 - Discuss ideas for topic
 - Discuss ideas for type of paper
 - Identify potential committee members
 - Identify potential dates for written and oral examination
- After successful completion of course work, meet with advisor to:
 - Confirm topic and submit outline of paper
 - Determine type paper
 - Select committee members
 - Set dates for written and oral examination. The oral examination must be conducted within two weeks after successful completion of written examination.
 - Fill out and submit the Comprehensive Examination Application Form (attached)

**Medical University of South Carolina
College of Nursing
Written Comprehensive Examination, PhD Program**

Scoring Sheet

Student: _____ Date: _____

Scoring Procedure:

1. Refer to PhD In Nursing Program – Comprehensive Evaluation document, Faculty Guidelines and Procedures, for detailed instructions and definitions of criteria listed below.
2. Consider each criterion separately, and circle the appropriate rating for each criterion. Criterion scores for “passing” should be predominantly 4 and 5. A consistently fair (3) performance or lower shall not yield a pass. Scores of 3 or below require written comments by faculty.

- 5 = excellent
- 4 = good
- 3 = fair
- 2 = poor
- 1 = very poor or absent

Technical Merit

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Logical flow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Quality of references | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Followed APA guidelines | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Is the technical merit of the paper acceptable? Yes No
If NO, do not score the rest of the criteria and return the paper to the student.

Conceptual Merit

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Clarity of topic and purpose | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
- Clearly states in the introduction to the paper the topic or issue and the reason(s) for its selection. The purpose of the paper is well defined, concisely stated, and congruent with the selected topic or issue.

- **Significance** 1 2 3 4 5
States significance of the topic for nursing (practice and research). The history and importance of the topic or issues are described.

- **Quality of review of literature** 1 2 3 4 5
Comprehensive coverage of the literature related to the topic. Literature is synthesized and logically presented.

Non-research literature (theory and issues) – Clearly articulates main point(s) of article; established credibility of author/content

Research literature – Sample: subjects and selection criteria; procedure: description of procedural steps; measures: reliability and validity, description/definition of measurement; results: data analyses described, data fully presented, findings logically presented; conclusions: author’s interpretation of findings, author’s discussion of limitations, author’s discussion of generalization

- **Quality of references** 1 2 3 4 5
Selects significant literature, including classic and current articles.

- **Quality of theoretical discussion** 1 2 3 4 5
Clearly discusses a relevant theory that demonstrates an enhanced understanding of the topic or issue. In some cases, theory may more directly related to another section, such as practice implications.

- **Quality of critical appraisal of the literature** 1 2 3 4 5
Analyzes the body of literature. Summarizes the significant accomplishments in the literature, presents discussion congruent with the reviewed articles and appropriate to the topic and purpose.

- **Implications** 1 2 3 4 5
Discusses the relationship between major findings and identifies gaps in literature, the implications for practice, and further research. Formulates pertinent, researchable questions, propositions, and hypotheses based on the synthesis of findings/gaps. Describes the application and significance to nursing.

1. Positive comments regarding examination.

2. Suggestions for improvement. Items rated “not pass” shall receive comment.

Check one: Pass Not Pass

Examining Committee Member: _____

Date submitted: _____

Medical University of South Carolina

**College of Nursing
Comprehensive Examination**

**Faculty Comment Sheet
Oral Examination**

Student: _____ Date: _____

1. Positive comments regarding examination.

2. Comments regarding areas needed for improvement.

Check one: Pass Not Pass

Signature of Examining Committee Member: _____

COLLEGE OF NURSING

MEDICAL UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

PhD in Nursing - Comprehensive Examination Application

Name of Student: _____

Current Date: _____

Name of Advisor: _____

Nursing doctoral program faculty: _____

Nursing doctoral program faculty: _____

Scheduled Date of Written Examination: _____

Scheduled Date of Oral Examination: _____

Approval of Director of Doctoral Program: _____

Date of Approval: _____

RETURN COMPLETED FORM TO DIRECTOR OF DOCTORAL PROGRAM

Approved by Doctoral Committee May, 2005: Revised January, 2007