

Experimental Comprehensive Doctoral Exam

Rationale for the Experimental Comprehensive Doctoral Exam

The purpose of the Experimental Comprehensive Doctoral Examination (“the Exam”) is to evaluate the student’s ability to integrate and critically evaluate their overall knowledge about current research and directions in Psychology. The Exam will test students’ ability to integrate knowledge that they have gained via coursework and practical research experience, and to critically address important issues in psychological theory, diversity/multiculturalism, research ethics, research methods and data analysis. Hence, the focus of this evaluation is on the student’s ability to integrate information from the relevant basic psychological theories, methodology, ethical issues, diversity issues, law, and research in the topic area.

Competencies to be Demonstrated

Competency in psychological theory will involve the following:

- (a) Productively applies existing theory to new problems and applications.
- (b) Appreciates strengths and weaknesses of theories from the perspective of competing theories.
- (c) Recognizes points of difference between competing theories and testable hypotheses that would distinguish between them.

Competency in ethics will involve correctly applying guidelines regarding treatment of human subjects in research settings and correctly applying ethical guidelines common to all forms of applied psychology.

The competencies assessed for research design and data analysis will include:

- (a) Recognizing the differential importance of research questions.
- (b) Connecting empirical findings to broader theoretical issues beyond the particular area of substantive research represented.
- (c) Understanding strengths and weaknesses of general research methods in an area of research.

The competencies assessed for diversity/multiculturalism will include:

- (a) Understanding how culture can affect the study of psychology.
- (b) Understanding how research findings and appropriate research questions can vary by culture.
- (c) Applying these understandings to the critical analysis of theory and research.

Timing

Students will likely begin working on their Exam after completing two years of coursework in the Program. The Exam will ordinarily be taken when the student has completed all coursework (i.e., 60 credits), including transfer credits. Therefore, the Exam will typically be taken after the formation of the Dissertation Committee, between the Second and Third Doctoral Examinations. Successful completion of the Exam is a prerequisite for the scheduling and completion of the Third Doctoral Exam defense.

Committee for the Experimental Comprehensive Doctoral Exam

The Experimental Comprehensive Doctoral Examination Committee will be a subcommittee of the Curriculum and Examination Committee. All self-designated 'Experimental' faculty members will serve on the Committee and be eligible to grade Exams.

Requirements for the Exam

The Experimental Comprehensive Doctoral Exam comprises two written products, which can be submitted simultaneously or in succession.

Either:

1. A 25 single-spaced page *Psychological Bulletin*-style review of research: (a) on a topic in a related area of psychology, such as social, developmental or cognitive; or (b) on a topic which bridges a related area of psychology (i.e., social, cognitive, etc.) with forensic-psychology and law. The treatment of the related area of psychology should not be incidental but represent a significant contribution to the theorizing and analysis in the manuscript. The topic will be agreed upon by the student and the three members of their comprehensive examination committee. The faculty committee members will include the student's primary advisor plus two readers drawn from the elected comprehensive examination committee.

- AND -

2. A full-scale, ready-to-submit (as judged by the comprehensive committee) NSF or NIMH grant proposal that gives appropriate attention to theoretical, ethical, diversity and methodological issues and which will typically encompass several experimental studies or quasi-experimental analyses.¹

- OR -

TWO complete, full-scale, ready-to-submit (as judged by the comprehensive committee) NSF or NIMH grant proposals that give appropriate attention to theoretical, ethical, diversity and methodological issues and which will typically encompass several experimental studies or quasi-experimental analyses.¹ Only one of these may overlap with the content of the Second Doctoral Examination.

Grading of the Exam

The Experimental Comprehensive Doctoral Exam will be graded by Exam subcommittees. Each Exam will be read by no fewer than *three* subcommittee members. Students will receive their Exam grades approximately one month after an Exam is submitted to the *subcommittee*.

Subcommittee Composition:

(a) The student's primary mentor/advisor will Chair the student's Exam subcommittee(s).

¹ NOTE on grants: Diversity/multicultural issues are generally addressed, at a minimum, in the 'Broader Impact' statement, which has been increasingly important to NSF. Their emphasis on these issues was the basis for the choice of NSF and NIMH as grant venues. For details, see: <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/gpg/broaderimpacts.pdf>

- (b) The student and advisor together will select a second subcommittee member. This member will most likely be selected based upon knowledge of the topic/area under consideration.
- (c) The DET will select *at random* (and invite participation by) the third subcommittee member, regardless of area of expertise. This provides an opportunity for a variety of faculty members to contribute to student development through their unique perspectives and insights, distributes the workload, and represents the grant review process.
- (d) Students can have two different subcommittees – one for each written product.

Subcommittee Grading:

- (a) Once selected, the 3 subcommittee members will receive electronic copies of the student's Exam submission(s) for review. Their independent grades for each submission (pass/fail) should be available within approximately one month of receipt of the Exam(s).
- (b) Students *must pass both Exams unanimously*. If there is a discrepancy in the subcommittee members' grades, they should meet in-person to decide how to proceed. The subcommittee chairperson will coordinate this meeting.
- (c) Resolutions could involve partial or complete revision, resubmission and subcommittee re-grading; or partial or complete revision, resubmission and subcommittee chair re-grading.
- (d) If there are subcommittee disagreements that cannot be resolved, the DET can either appoint an additional subcommittee member or grade the Exam(s) him/herself in an effort to resolve the disagreement. However, in general, subcommittee members' concerns should be resolved by the student before an Examination is passed.

The subcommittee chairperson should report Exam grades to the DET, who will communicate them to the student officially and have them placed in the student's file.

Outcomes of the Exam

Each of the two written Exams will be graded with the following grades possible: "pass", "conditional pass" or "fail". A "pass" indicates that the student completed the requirement and the written Exam was satisfactory, as determined unanimously by the subcommittee. A "conditional pass" indicates that the written work requires relatively minor to moderate revisions before the document is considered satisfactory. The student will typically be required to revise and resubmit that component of the Exam for re-grading to the subcommittee chairperson or, in some cases, the full subcommittee. A "fail" indicates that the student failed to meet the minimum requirements of that Exam. If the student receives a "fail" on either component of the Exam, the student will typically be required to revise and resubmit that component of the Exam for re-grading to the full subcommittee. To complete the Experimental Comprehensive Doctoral Exam requirement, the student must "pass" *both exams*. Any student failing a single Exam TWICE may be terminated from the Doctoral Program.

Timing & Satisfactory Completion of the Exam

Ordinarily, the Exam will be completed after a student earns 60 credits. Student must pass the Exam before they can schedule and complete the Third Doctoral Exam defense. Any student who does not successfully complete the Exam by January of their eighth year in the program (or by January of their seventh year, if matriculating with 30 credits) will be deemed as not making satisfactory progress within the Graduate Center guidelines. If the Exam is not passed by this point, the student will not be permitted to enroll in any additional classes in the Program before

passing the exam. Students not making satisfactory progress for this reason will only be permitted to continue in the Program with special permission of the Subprogram Head.