

PhD in Family Medicine Graduate Program

Department of Family Medicine
Western University

**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
REGULATIONS, PROCESSES, AND SCHEDULE**

Revised January 2025

All students enrolled in the PhD program in Family Medicine must successfully complete a PhD Comprehensive Examination (CE) prior to proceeding to the dissertation proposal. Within your first year of registration in the PhD program, the Program Graduate Chair informs you in writing (via this document) of the format, nature, and timing of the CE and meets with you to review regulations and processes. The CE process consists of preparing a CE proposal, writing the CE paper, and orally defending the CE paper.

1. PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

The CE is designed as an evaluation of your scholarly conceptual, analytical, integrative, and communication skills. The CE provides an opportunity to consider the area of research for your PhD dissertation through a thorough and critical literature review which will lead to the research questions that form your dissertation work.

The CE will be in the form of a scoping or systematic review which will make a substantive and original contribution to knowledge in your area of research interest. It will be in a format appropriate for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. Further information about conducting scoping and systematic reviews can be found on the Western Libraries website at: <https://guides.lib.uwo.ca/knowledgesynthesis/otherresources>.

2. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION COMMITTEE*

Your Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC) will consist of two to three faculty members (Chair of the CEC and one to two additional CEC member(s)). The CEC Chair

will have a PhD. Each CEC member is expected to be a faculty member and have expertise in some aspect of the content or methodology related to the content domain on which your CE focuses.

Your CEC Chair* will be assigned to you within the first 18 months of starting the PhD program. As you work with your CEC Chair to develop your proposal, your CEC Chair will work with the Program Graduate Chair to assign the additional CEC member(s). This will typically happen within the second year of registration in the program.

All CEC members: (1) review and approve your CE proposal; (2) provide written feedback on drafts of the CE paper; and (3) participate in the oral examinations of the CE paper. Another faculty member will be invited to participate in the oral examination.

**Please note: 1) The Advisor you are assigned upon entry into the PhD program may or may not go on to become your CEC Chair depending on their capacity; and 2) The Dissertation Supervisor and Supervisory Committee members will be determined after successful completion of your Comprehensive Examination. The Dissertation Supervisory Committee often includes members of the CEC.*

3. PREPARATION OF COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION PROPOSAL

Prior to preparing the Comprehensive Examination proposal (CE proposal), you will meet with your CEC Chair to discuss your proposed research area. This may take place in person, by email, conference call, or Zoom. Your initial CE proposal draft including a short preliminary reference list should provide sufficient context for your CEC Chair to provide feedback and guidance, and to determine that the content and scope of the proposed paper is adequate to meet the requirements of the CE. CE proposals are typically 4 to 6 pages long (references excluded). The CE proposal should follow the parameters appropriate for the type of review you are conducting (i.e., scoping or systematic review) and outline an appropriate amount of work (neither too many nor too few articles for the review).

You will work with your CEC Chair to set a deadline for your CE proposal. Typically, CE proposals are to be completed no later than six months after your course work is completed.

It is your responsibility to initiate regular meetings (in person, by email, conference

call, or Zoom); you will work with your CEC Chair to establish the frequency of your meetings with your CEC Chair and with your CEC. It is expected that meetings with your CEC Chair will be more frequent than with your CEC.

You will submit drafts of your CE proposal to your CEC Chair - and less frequently to your CEC - well in advance of when you expect feedback. CEC members may normally take up to three weeks to provide feedback on your proposal. Once your CEC Chair deems that your CE proposal is ready, you will email a copy of the CE proposal to all members of your CEC. The CE proposal is reviewed by your CEC, and you will be either asked to make some adjustments or it will be approved.

Once approved, you will email a copy of the approved CE proposal to the Program Graduate Chair for record-keeping, copying your CEC members. You can then start preparing your Comprehensive Examination paper.

4. PREPARATION OF COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION PAPER

The Comprehensive Examination paper (CE paper) will be formatted as a manuscript suitable for submission to a journal. As such, it should be approximately 15 to 20 double-spaced pages (excluding references, tables and figures) using a standard 12 font size. Throughout the writing of your CE paper, you are encouraged to consult with your CEC through regular communication via in-person, email, teleconference, or Zoom, as the drafts of your CE paper evolve. It is your responsibility to initiate regular meetings, but as with the CE proposal stage, you will work with your CEC Chair to establish the frequency of meetings.

As with the CE proposal stage, you will submit drafts of your CE paper to your CEC Chair and to your CEC well in advance of when you expect feedback. CEC members may take up to three weeks to provide feedback on your CE paper. Your CEC will inform you when they consider that the CE paper is acceptable and ready to proceed to oral examination.

5. ORAL EXAMINATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION PAPER

The major criterion for evaluating the CE paper will be the extent to which it provides an original and substantive contribution to your understanding of the domain of interest in an articulate, cogent manner. The purpose of the oral examination is to offer you the opportunity to verbally express your mastery of the content and analytical choices expressed in your CE paper.

When your CEC informs you that your CE paper is ready to move to the oral examination stage, you will submit your CE paper to the Program Graduate Chair. The Program Graduate Chair will organize the oral examination which may take place in person, virtually, or in a hybrid format. The oral examination will be chaired by your CEC Chair and you will be examined by the remaining members of your CEC and one faculty member external to your CEC. The external examiner will read the CE paper prior to the oral examination.

The oral examination will last 2 to 2.5 hours. The oral examination will begin with you giving a 20-minute presentation on your CE paper. After your presentation, the oral examination will consist of two rounds of questions from the examiners. At the end of the oral examination, the examiners will render their decision on the oral examination. The examiners will determine whether you have obtained a PASS, PASS CONDITIONAL UPON REVISIONS, or UNACCEPTABLE. The outcome of the oral examination will be communicated to the Program Graduate Chair.

The oral examination will be considered a PASS if two examiners assign PASSES with the third and fourth examiner (in the case of three or four examiners) assigning, at minimum, a PASS CONDITIONAL UPON REVISIONS. The oral examination will be considered UNACCEPTABLE if two or more examiners have assigned an UNACCEPTABLE. Anything else will be considered a PASS CONDITIONAL UPON REVISIONS.

In the case of a PASS CONDITIONAL UPON REVISIONS, the examiners will provide you with expected changes to your CE paper that must be approved by your CEC Chair. You will be expected to make these changes within three weeks of the oral examination date. If the CEC Chair considers the CE paper acceptable after the changes, the CE paper will then be considered a PASS. If the CEC Chair does not consider the CE paper as acceptable after the changes, the CE will then be considered an UNACCEPTABLE.

In the case of an UNACCEPTABLE of the oral examination, the examiners may allow you to have a second oral examination and will provide you with expected changes to your CE paper that must be approved by your CEC Chair prior to undertaking a second oral examination. Prior to this second oral examination, you will be required to meet with your CEC Chair to discuss the expected changes from the examiners and to determine remedial steps to improve your chances of success in the second oral examination. This second examination is not guaranteed and the examiners may decide that the UNACCEPTABLE stands with no second oral examination offered.

If you are allowed to have a second oral examination, a revised version of the CE paper will be completed in response to the expected changes and the remedial measures specified by the examiners and your CEC Chair. The revised CE paper will be evaluated by the examiners. The second oral examination based on the revised version of the CE paper will be scheduled as soon as possible and will follow the same format and assessment as the first oral examination.

VERSION HISTORY

March 2012	Original version
October 2012	Revision 1
June 2024	Revision 2
January 2025	Revision 2 with correction