Comprehensive Exams: Neuroscience

Comprehensive exams must be undertaken within the first 18 months of registration in the PhD program. *Students that roll-over into a PhD should complete this program requirement within the first year of PhD registration.

Step #1 – Hold an Advisory Committee meeting (typically your 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} meeting)

At this meeting you will determine the following:

- Which method of comprehensive exam you will complete (Classic or Grant Writing)
- Mentors (Grant Writing only): The mentor may include the supervisor, but can’t act as an examiner
- Examiners (Three): Members of the Advisory Committee, excluding the supervisor, and faculty that are not members of the neuroscience program may serve on the examination committee. Examiner must be at arm’s length from the supervisor.
- Topic: Either the Topic of your Grant Proposal (which should be related to, but not the same as your research) OR (Classic option) three different areas within neuroscience for each examiner to test you on

All reports MUST be returned to the program office (RRI 3203). Meeting reports are available online at [http://www.schulich.uwo.ca/neuroscience/graduate/advisory_committee.html](http://www.schulich.uwo.ca/neuroscience/graduate/advisory_committee.html)

Step #2 – Approval of Examiners/Topic(s)

This step will be completed by the program office and you will be contacted once the Program Committee has reviewed the request.

Examiners will be contacted by either your supervisor(s) or the program office to ensure participation.

Step #3 – Meet With Your Examiners (Classic) or Mentors (Grant Writing)

**Classic** – You should arrange to meet several times with each examiner to discuss readings and areas which should be concentrated on for the examination.

**Grant Writing** - You will have several meetings and/or email exchanges with your mentor(s) over the course of several weeks. They will provide feedback as to the scope of the research and the specific aims during the preparation of the initial summary page only. The mentor will not edit (or write) the summary page, but rather provide feedback concerning the hypotheses and proposed experiments, and may point you in the right direction to think about expected outcomes and potential caveats of the experiments. Once the summary page is submitted, they will no longer be permitted to provide feedback on the scope of the research, but may be consulted on matters of methodology or grant format.
**Step #4 – Classic option only**

When ready, contact the program office to schedule your written exam. The exam will last four hours and will be proctored by the Program Coordinator.

The Program Coordinator will contact your examiners for two questions each. During the exam, you will be required to answer one question from each examiner. There are no specific formatting rules. To pass the written component, an overall grade of 70% is required on each question.

**Step #5 – Grant Writing option only**

After submission of the summary page, you will have 4 weeks to submit the full grant proposal. Both the summary page and full proposal are submitted to the program office. Copies will be forwarded to the examiners and program Director.

The proposal must outline a research project of 3-5 years (usually 3 aims). It must contain a lay abstract (<250 words), a summary (<500 words), plus the main body of 10 pages or less; including tables and figures (12 point, 1 inch margins). Additional pages are permitted for references only.

The proposal will be rated as either “Acceptable”, “Acceptable with Minor Revisions”, or “In Need of Major Revision”. At least two out of the three examiners must find the grant proposal “Acceptable” and/or “Acceptable with Minor Revisions” to proceed to the oral exam. Constructive feedback will also be requested from each examiner. If the grant is deemed “In Need of Major Revision”, you will receive written feedback and will have 3 weeks to correct the deficiencies in the proposal and resubmit.

**Step #6 – Scheduling your Oral Exam**

The program office will arrange the date, time and location of your oral exam. A tentative date will be arranged as early in the process as possible.

**Classic** – approximately one week after you have passed the written component  
**Grant Writing** – approximately 2 weeks after the grant proposal is submitted

The oral exam will take approximately 1.5 - 2 hours and follows the following format:

- Student gives a short 15 minute presentation (grant writing option only)
- 1<sup>st</sup> round of questioning is normally 15 minutes/examiner
- 2<sup>nd</sup> round of questioning is approximately 5-10 mins/examiner

The program office will find a Faculty member to chair the oral exam (preferably a member of the Program Committee).
Step #7 – Results of the Comprehensive Exam

The oral exam is graded on a Pass/Fail basis.
The program office will add the course (and grade) to your student records.

You are permitted two attempts at the written examination, or one major revision of the grant proposal. After successful completion of the written component, you have two attempts at the oral component. If unsuccessful at any of the components, you would meet with your Advisory Committee to determine a course of action, which normally would involve withdrawal from the graduate program.

Important!

You are expected to devote the majority of your time to preparing for and completing the comprehensive exam in the four weeks prior to the written examination or submission of the grant proposal. Supervisors are asked to respect this and should not expect their student to spend much time on experiments during this time period.

Students with research activities (i.e. presentation at a scientific meeting) that conflict with the comprehensive timeline should consult the Director of the Neuroscience Program to arrange an alternate timeline.

Failure to complete this critical program requirement will result in unsatisfactory progression.