PhD Candidacy Exam (NRSC 693) Guidelines

The examination comprises two parts which are separately evaluated. A written proposal and oral defense of the proposal is followed by an oral examination of the candidate’s knowledge in areas of neuroscience relevant to their field of study.

**Written Proposal:** The Candidacy Examination provides an opportunity for the candidate to consolidate his/her knowledge in Neuroscience by producing a written thesis proposal. The proposal should be between 10 and 15 single-spaced pages (including figures, tables and references, 0.75 inch margins and 12 point font). A suggested (but not mandatory) format for the research proposal is:

- Introduction should contain an appropriate literature review (approximately 4-6 pages)
- Relevant Preliminary Data (approximately 1-2 pages)
- Hypothesis and Specific Aims (approximately 0.5 page)
- Experimental Plan including description of techniques and evaluation of potential problems and alternative strategies (approximately 5-6 pages)
- Significance (1-2 pages)

**Through oral examination, evaluators will consider the student’s ability to:**

1) Understand the relevant background information
2) Interpret and understand preliminary data
3) Defend the hypothesis, specific aims and experimental plan

**Oral examination of general knowledge**

1) Demonstrate a level of general knowledge of subjects related to the candidate’s field of study that indicates competency beyond the specifics of the thesis proposal.

**Prerequisites:** NRSC 600, NRSC 601A or B

**Recommended deadline for Candidacy Exam Completion:** within 24 months of entry into the program.

**Examination Process and Format**

This process is expected to take approximately 3 to 6 months. Refer to the *Step-by-Step Planning for Candidacy Exam* document for an overview of the process.

1. **Before the Candidacy Exam**

In advance of the candidacy exam, the student will develop study areas/resources, with input from their committee to help guide their preparation for the candidacy exam. This can be done at a committee meeting, by email, or alternatively, independent meetings with each committee member. **Students must note** that they should not expect the committee to compile detailed study areas/resources and that input from their committee members is **not** intended to comprise “the complete list” of areas/papers for study. Instead, it is helpful guidance, as the student should have gained enough independent knowledge and
experience to use their good judgement in selecting their own additional readings. Familiarity with material covered in the list of study areas/resources should help the student adequately prepare for the question period of the candidacy exam. However, questions may not be confined exclusively to material contained in the list of study areas/resources.

2. Candidacy Committee Meeting
   a) Communicate Study Areas/Resources to the Committee
   b) Sign Candidacy Examination Preparation Form (attached)

3. Oral Examination
   a) Examination Committee must be composed of a minimum of four members with standing in the University of Victoria Faculty of Graduate Studies:
      o Member 1 - Examination Chair: Neuroscience Program Director or designated alternate
      o Member 2 - Member of candidate’s Supervisory Committee (excluding the supervisor)
      o Member 3 - May be a Supervisory Committee member*
      o Member 4 - Must not be a member of the Supervisory Committee* (External Examiner)
   b) Examination Process Instructions for Chair of the Candidacy Exam
      ▪ The candidate’s supervisor is not a participant in the exam and does not normally attend the exam.
      ▪ Upon completion of the candidacy exam, a report is completed by the examination Chair and signed by the Examination Committee. This document is submitted to the Graduate Secretary who circulates it to the candidate, their supervisor, and the Neuroscience Committee.
   c) Oral Exam Format:
      1. The candidacy exam starts with a brief (~15 minutes) presentation by the candidate on their written proposal.
      2. The exam proceeds with an initial round of oral questions focused on the proposal. The second round may involve more general knowledge that is relevant to the candidate’s research endeavours.
      3. There may be more than two rounds of questions, but the exam must not exceed three hours. The initial 15-minute presentation and a short 15 min break midway (if requested) are included in the three hours.
      4. Questions should be aimed at determining the candidate’s comprehension of the background knowledge required to undertake the proposed research, and on other related subject areas (e.g. a demonstrated knowledge of the historical context of the field, the ability to design clear experiments, an understanding of the advantages or limitations of relevant methods, etc.).
5. At the end of the exam, the candidate will leave the room for the in camera discussion by the Examination Committee. The Chair will ask each member of the committee to review and comment on the candidate’s performance on both the written component, including its oral defense and the general oral component. A grade of pass or fail will be given for each component.

6. The exam may be adjourned if the candidate fails any of the three components of the exam: the written, the oral defense of the written, or the general knowledge oral component. The candidate will be required to retake any failed portion of the exam within 60 days.

7. A candidate who fails all three components of the exam will normally be removed from the PhD program within 30 days. The candidate may be transitioned into the MSc program if they and their supervisor agree on this move and petition the Neuroscience Committee to be re-classified as an MSc candidate in the Neuroscience Program. Faculty of Graduate Studies approval for the move is also required.
Candidacy Examination Preparation Form

Completed form must be submitted to the Neuroscience Graduate Secretary a minimum of three (3) months prior to the proposed candidacy exam. The candidate must be present at the meeting.

Candidate’s Name: ________________________________

UVic ID #: _______________________________________

Proposal Title: _____________________________________

Meeting Date: _______________________________________

☐ Candidate has completed all required courses for specialization.
  List courses: ______________________________________

☐ Proposed dissertation topic has been approved.

☐ Yes ☐ No Were all committee members present?

If no, who was absent (please provide reason)

___________________________________________________________________________________________

Date this section completed _________________________

Discussion Checklist:

☐ Key study areas approved by Supervisory Committee

☐ External Examiner (if known): ____________________________

Approximate date of Candidacy Exam: _______________________

Additional Notes on Meeting (may be appended):

___________________________________________________________________________________________

Date this section completed _________________________

Written Proposal:
This section to be completed 2 weeks prior to the scheduled examination date:

☐ Examination committee has reviewed the document and deems it defensible.

☐ If significant concerns about the written document have arisen, the student has been informed of the concerns.

Date this section completed _________________________
I am aware of and in agreement with the arrangements and expectations of my upcoming candidacy exam.

Candidate: ___________________________ ___________________________ Date: ________________
Name (print) Signature

Supervisor: ___________________________ ___________________________ Date: ________________
Name (print) Signature

Supervisor: ___________________________ ___________________________ Date: ________________
Name (print) Signature

Supervisory Committee
Member: ___________________________ ___________________________ Date: ________________
Name (print) Signature

Supervisory Committee
Member: ___________________________ ___________________________ Date: ________________
Name (print) Signature

Supervisory Committee
Member: ___________________________ ___________________________ Date: ________________
Name (print) Signature

Examining Committee
Member: ___________________________ ___________________________ Date: ________________
Name (print) Signature

Graduate Program
Director: ___________________________ ___________________________ Date: ________________
Name (print) Signature