

Department of Art History & Visual Studies, University of Victoria PhD Candidacy Examination Guidelines

The Faculty of Graduate Studies regulation states: “Within three years of registration as a provisional doctoral student, and at least six months before the final oral examination [i.e., the oral defense of the dissertation], a student must pass a Candidacy Examination.” The purpose of the Candidacy Examination is to test the command of material essential to the completion of a PhD, as well as the student's competence to undertake an independent program of research that will culminate in the PhD dissertation. Students may not commence the research and writing of the dissertation until all components of the Candidacy Exam are successfully completed. The Candidacy Exam is Pass-Fail.

The Candidacy Examination in Art History & Visual Studies consists of three components: Two written exams: Comprehensive Exam 1 (Major Field), and Comprehensive Exam 2 (Secondary Field), and an Oral Examination (The Candidacy). See below for details.

A full academic year is devoted to preparing for and taking the exams, after the student has completed all coursework. No coursework is to be undertaken during the year devoted to the Candidacy Examination. Details about the Candidacy Exam components are:

- **The Major Field Examination:** take-home exam, five consecutive days; 25-page (7,500 words) critical literature review on a key theme or issue in the field, to be determined in consultation with the supervisor. Normally done between November and January of Year 2.
- **The Secondary Field Examination:** take-home exam, five consecutive days, which would normally be Monday to Friday; detailed course syllabus on a key theme in the field and 15-page (4,500 words) explanation (which may include a sample lecture), to be determined in consultation with the supervisor. Normally done between January and March of Year 2.
- **The Special Topics/ Dissertation Proposal Examination:** 2 weeks before the oral exam, submit to committee a 10-page (3,000 words) dissertation proposal (plus footnotes, bibliography, and images) based on the departmental format for proposals; for the oral exam prepare a 20-minute presentation of the proposal, which will be followed with two rounds of questions. At the end of the question period, the student will leave the room and the committee will discuss the oral presentation. Normally done by mid-April of Year 2.

Examination Committee: The examination committee is the same as the student's PhD committee. It consists of at least two regular faculty members from the department: the supervisor and one or more departmental members, as well as one or more outside committee members from the University of Victoria. All members of the examination committee evaluate the examination answers.

Reading Lists: The student compiles the reading lists for the Major Field Examination (25-30 books/articles) and Secondary Field Examination (25-30 books/articles) in consultation with the supervisor and the examination committee.

Process: For the Major and Secondary Field Examinations, questions will be sent via e-mail at Monday, 9:00 am. Answers are due via email to the supervisor and Graduate Secretary on Friday 5:00 pm.

Evaluation

Major and Secondary Field Examinations: A majority of committee members (2/3 or 3/4) must agree that the written exams are satisfactory to be awarded a PASS/ EXCELLENT based on the following criteria:

- a) thorough command of the scholarly literature, the major issues under debate, and future directions in research;
- b) critical insight into the central question or theme
- c) capacity to analyze theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches effectively
- d) ability to arrive at a convincing synthetic analysis of the issues
- e) ability to formulate a sophisticated argument supported by evidence
- f) excellent written skills

Special Topic/ Dissertation Proposal Examination: The oral examination will be considered passed if the majority of the committee (2 /3, or 3/4) judge the oral defense to be satisfactory based on the following criteria:

- a) scholarly contribution
- b) appropriate theoretical framework
- c) sound methodology
- d) ability to answer the committee's questions in a competent and insightful manner
- e) command over the proposed dissertation research process in terms of knowledge of key items in the bibliography, scope of the research, presentation of important questions, available resources, anticipated travel plans, language plans.
- f) ability to inspire confidence that they are able to pursue independent research and that they are capable of framing, planning, and bringing to completion a large-scale research project.

A student who fails the oral defense may be counseled to withdraw from the programme but has the right to attempt the examination again. Failure a second time will result in withdrawal from the programme.

Candidacy Examination Results: Students will be evaluated as FAIL, DEFERRED, PASS, by their examination committees.

For each student, based on the results of each of the three parts of the Candidacy Examination, the examining committee will approve one of the following decisions, with the following conditions:

1. (PASS)

An outcome of PASS can be expected if the student achieves a PASS result in each of the three parts of the Candidacy Examination.

2. (DEFERRED)

If a student fails any one of the three parts of the Candidacy Examination, the failed exam(s) can be re-taken at a mutually agreed upon date between the committee and student, but no longer than six months after the first attempt, and within either the Fall or Winter session. Exams that are scheduled for a re-take, though based on the same study materials, may be

framed around a different set of examination questions. Only examinations that are failed can be re-taken.

3. (FAIL)

The Major Field Examination, or the Secondary Field Examination, or the Special Topic/Dissertation Proposal Examination have been failed. This outcome can be expected if it is the second attempt at one or more of the three parts of the Candidacy Examination, and if the student receives a FAIL on any one of the re-taken examinations.

In the case of the oral component of the Special Topic/Dissertation Proposal Examination, the committee may, at its discretion, recommend to the examining committee that the student be allowed to re-take the oral examination without having to re-write the proposal but this must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

A student may attempt any part of the Candidacy Examination a second time only. In the event of a decision of FAIL, the Faculty of Graduate Studies is informed of the student's result, and the student will be asked to leave the PhD program.

Reporting the Outcome of the Candidacy Exam:

The student's supervisor will provide a written report on the decision on the Major and Secondary Field Examinations and the Special Topic/ Dissertation Proposal Examination to the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Secretary, which is placed in the student's file.

All components of the Candidacy Examinations must adhere to the University of Victoria's policies on [academic integrity](#).

Students who require accommodation should notify the Graduate Advisor. Where applicable, students should register with the [Centre for Accessible Learning](#), at least two months before the exam schedule has been set.

Revised: May 2015. Oct 2015. Jan, Apr 2016. Oct 2017,
Dec 2019. Jan 2023.