



Doctoral Candidacy Examination Process

Purpose

The Doctoral Candidacy Examination Process is intended to: 1) assess the student's abilities to conceptualize, read, interpret, critique, and synthesize candidacy, substantive knowledge that derives from qualitative, quantitative, and theoretical sources and is relevant to the discipline of nursing; and 2) assess the student's competence to complete original independent research at the doctoral level.

Examination Process

In the School of Nursing, the candidacy examination process involves two milestones: first, completing *candidacy exam papers* and second, *successfully developing and defending a research proposal*. Once students successfully pass the oral defence of the research proposal, they are considered doctoral candidates, designated by the initials PhD(c).

Timeline

The candidacy exam process will be held after the student has completed coursework. The candidacy process includes: 1) writing and orally defending the candidacy exam papers within the first 24 months after admission to the doctoral program, and 2) developing and orally defending a research proposal within 36 months from admission. Students who are unable to meet this deadline must request an extension in writing from the Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies. Supervisors must also write a memorandum to the Dean indicating whether they support an extension.

Milestone 1: Candidacy exam papers (CEP)

The CEPs include both a written component (*either* writing two papers or sitting for a written examination) and an oral component. The content of the papers or exam is related to course work, the substance and methodology of the candidate's research interests, and provides a basis for proposal development. The candidacy exam papers provide an opportunity to demonstrate skills in thinking, writing, presenting and developing an argument, and critically analyzing and synthesizing relevant information from course work and independent study. The exam papers will demonstrate readiness to proceed with work that will advance scholarship in the field. This is an exam, therefore no substantive contact between the student and his/her supervisory committee should take place during the examination period.

Candidacy exam papers process

1. At the first stage, the student will present a professional portfolio (see PhD handbook) to the supervisory committee as a demonstration of progress to date and of readiness to proceed. The

portfolio is submitted electronically and discussed with the supervisory committee via Skype, other media, or in person. Within three weeks of submission, the supervisory committee meets with the student to assess if the portfolio represents adequate learning, and if the student can progress to the next stage.

2. At the second stage, the student and supervisory committee together decide upon a candidacy procedure. The candidacy exam papers (CEP) will include both a written and oral component. The student and members of the supervisory committee will work together and agree to the specific substantive areas and research method/methodology. Potential CEP topics will be generated by the supervisory committee with student input, and a list of 4-6 possible questions/topics will be created. As well, a list of sample candidacy exam questions used in the past is available online for students and faculty on the Graduate online course management system. The specific questions to be used for the candidacy examination will not be provided to the student before the examination begins. The CEP options are:
 - a. Option A: Students must independently write two scholarly papers, one focused on the selected substantive area in the discipline of nursing and the other on a chosen research method/methodology. The student will be given four (4) weeks to complete two papers approximately 25-30 pages (double spaced) each in length.
 - b. Option B: Students will sit for two, timed three-hour “open-book” examinations, one focused on the selected substantive area and the other on a chosen research method/methodology. The understanding of ‘open book’ includes: 1) the student will use a blank computer, not their own, 2) students may bring hard copies of books and published articles, 3) there will be no access to the internet, electronic files, or access to their previous written work. These written exams are taken on two consecutive days. To give students the opportunity for thoughtful reflection and to consider their approach to answering the questions, students will be given the questions 30 minutes prior to the start of the timed exam. Students bring a blank memory stick and hand it to the invigilator/supervisor before the exam. At the end of each exam, the student is given the memory stick and s/he will save his/her answers. The memory stick is returned to the invigilator or supervisor who submits the response by email to the supervisor or designate. Students taking the program via distributed learning may choose to come on campus for the written component of the candidacy exams. Students not present on campus for the exams, must work with their supervisor to have the exam invigilated ([see Invigilation Information, below](#)). Students are encouraged to come to campus for the oral component of the CEP but this is not required.
 - c. Following submission of the candidacy papers/exams, the committee will review them within two weeks and communicate by email, or in person, to determine if the papers/exams meet characteristics of successful examination or whether revisions are required. Once the committee has made its decision, the supervisor contacts the student. If satisfactory, the student progresses to the oral examination (stage three).

If the committee agrees that one or both of the papers/exams is determined to be unsatisfactory, the supervisor immediately contacts the student to request a meeting. During the meeting, the supervisor provides the results of the written examination/paper and general feedback. A full committee meeting is set up for the student to receive detailed, constructive feedback from the

committee members on how to improve the paper(s)/exam(s). The supervisor reports the outcome to the PhD Program Coordinator and the Associate Director, Graduate Education. The student will have a single opportunity to re-take the written examination

Students who initially selected Option A will have two weeks to complete the re-write of each paper; students who initially selected Option B will repeat the “open-book” examination as they did for the initial examination.

3. The third and final stage of the CEP is the oral defence of the candidacy papers/exam, in which the student responds to questions posed by the examining (supervisory) committee about the papers/exams. The date for the oral examination will be established with input from the student and the committee. The oral examination will be closed to the public and other students. It is the student’s responsibility to book a room for the defense, with assistance as needed from the Graduate Secretary. All students are encouraged to come on campus for the oral defense of their candidacy papers/exams, however if this is not feasible the invigilation process must be followed. The examination will be judged on a pass-fail basis, according to the majority decision of the committee. If there are two or more dissenting votes, the examining committee, in consultation with the Associate Director, will determine the appropriate course of action. **If the oral examination is failed**, the candidacy examination papers will be submitted to Graduate Admissions and Records. The student will have a single opportunity to re-take the oral examination, and it must be conducted within one month. **If the full candidacy paper/examination examination is failed**, the PhD Candidacy Examination Report must be submitted to Graduate Admissions and Records, and the student will be withdrawn from the program.

Information for Invigilation of Written Candidacy Examination

An invigilator is required for a distance candidacy examination. The exam will occur in an examination centre where an accredited invigilator is employed, for example, a university, community college, technical institute, or hospital library. If no such institution is within a 100 km radius, students are required to write at an educational institution. For example, a high school, with a suitable invigilator, such as a teacher.

Students must ensure the exam site has the required technology (for example, a computer with internet access), the technological support staff, and are responsible for both booking the exam room and any payment required for any fees involved. Most invigilators request a fee to invigilate student examinations. Students may also be required to pay the institution that is invigilating the examination.

The School of Nursing (SON) will need to know the name and contact information for the invigilator and the technological support person. Students must provide the invigilation information to their supervisor for submission to the Graduate Nursing Program Administrative Assistant at gradnurs@uvic.ca as soon as possible. The PhD Candidacy Examination Request form must be submitted (at least 10 working days before the examination), so that all administrative tasks may be completed in a timely manner.

It is expected that a member of the technological support staff at both sites will be present to support the Written Candidacy Examination.

Photo ID must be presented to the invigilator at the time of the exam.

Characteristics of a Successful Candidacy Examination

Written Components

In a successful candidacy examination, the student will demonstrate the ability to situate the chosen topic or method within the knowledge of the discipline and the profession; to construct a sound argument with relevant and persuasive evidence; to convey a broad knowledge of the field of inquiry including theoretical, methodological, and contextual literature; and to synthesize a large amount of information coherently.

In addition, for the candidacy papers/exam, the student will demonstrate the advanced level of skill in writing needed to proceed with the dissertation. A “high level of skill” may be defined as clear and succinct writing style; correct grammar, syntax, spelling, and punctuation; and correct use of APA (6th edition) style.

For the 3-hour exam, markers will show some leniency around elements of refinement (i.e., copyediting; transitions; global coherence) and will expect shorter answers than for the take-home exam. However, students writing the short exam should nonetheless demonstrate clear expression of ideas and coherent use of the English language sufficient to indicate they will be able to write a dissertation. If a student believes s/he is unable to do this, then selecting the 3-hour exam option may not be wise.

Oral Examination

In a successful CEP, students will provide a brief reflection on their thinking about the papers/exams during the interval since they were submitted. This may be an opportunity to share any questions that have arisen or thoughts that were not fully developed in the papers/exams. The committee members then pose questions to the student about the papers/exams. The student’s responses to the questions will demonstrate comprehension of the field of inquiry and methodological issues, and the ability to use evidence persuasively and succinctly.

Upon conclusion of the discussion, the student is asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates. When the committee has made a decision, the supervisor finds the student and accompanies the student back to the room where the decision is announced.

Milestone 2: Dissertation Proposal

Purpose

After successful completion of the candidacy examinations, students will write and orally defend a dissertation proposal. However, reading, writing, and dissertation proposal development may be occurring concurrently as students are preparing for the candidacy examination. The purpose of the dissertation proposal is to create a plan for doctoral research. In the dissertation proposal, students consolidate their understanding of the research literature in their substantive area and develop an argument for the need to conduct the proposed study. Students also develop a detailed plan for the study that addresses such topics [as appropriate]: sampling, recruitment, data collection method(s), instrumentation, data analysis, and dissemination.

Written Component of the Dissertation Proposal

Depending on the research methodology adopted, students may be drafting dissertation proposals alongside preparations for candidacy exams. In some instances, this may be a more linear process (first candidacy papers/exam, then dissertation proposal), or these processes may be intertwined. Either way, students meet with their supervisory committee to discuss dissertation proposal development and oral defence. This will include an anticipated timeline and whether the dissertation will be in a traditional or a publication-based format.

The dissertation proposal should include the following content (may take different forms):

- **Introduction**, including a statement of the problem
- **Background/Review of the Literature** including identification of gaps, discrepancies, and inadequacies of the research to date; an argument for the need for the proposed study; and research question(s) and/or hypotheses
- **Methodology**, including philosophical underpinnings of the proposed study, details of the use of the proposed method, establishing rigour, addressing ethical considerations, and limitations of the study
- **References**
- **Appendices** (tables, figures, instruments, interview schedules, consent forms)

The proposal can take one of two forms: a) the first three chapters of the dissertation, or b) a 20-30 (double spaced) page proposal, decided together by the student and the supervisory committee. Factors to consider in deciding which format to pursue include preference of the supervisory committee, students' familiarity with the literature, and congruence with research methods. The development of a proposal is a process and students can expect to submit multiple drafts of the proposal before it is ready to defend.

Oral Defense of the Dissertation Proposal

The final stage of the dissertation proposal process is the oral defense, which is scheduled for two hours. The student makes a brief (20 minutes) presentation of the proposal and responds to questions posed by the examining (supervisory) committee about the proposal. The date for the oral defense will be established with input from the student and the committee. It is the student's responsibility to book a room for the dissertation proposal defense, with assistance as needed from the Graduate Secretary. While many students chose to come on campus for the oral proposal defense there is also an option to defend via videoconference such as the BlueJeans video system. The oral defense of the proposal will be closed to the public and other students. The defense will be judged on a pass-fail basis, according to the majority decision of the committee. If the student fails, the committee reserves the option to offer the student re-examination, which must occur within three months. A second failure results in the student's withdrawal from the doctoral program. (see information above concerning invigilation for exams).

Important Administrative Details

There are two forms that must be filled out in order to conduct the candidacy examination and are submitted to the graduate secretaries (see table below).

The PhD Candidacy Examination Report is a single document with 2 parts corresponding to each Milestone. The form must record the outcome of each milestone; following the dissertation proposal defence the completed form must be signed by the entire committee, no later than 10 working days after the oral exam.

Form	Due by	Signed by	Responsibility of
PhD Candidacy Examination Report- part 1 Milestone A	10 working days prior to written examination	Signatures required after the completion of Milestone B will be used in approval of both Milestones A and B	Supervisor (who may delegate to student)
PhD Candidacy Examination Report- part 2 Milestone B	10 working days following the research proposal oral examination	All members of supervisory committee plus Graduate Advisor or Associate Director, Graduate Education and Director(sent to FGS)	Supervisor