

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION
THE MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION

CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE – COMPREHENSIVE EXAM OPTION

The comprehensive examination option requires the student to demonstrate his/her knowledge of a substantive area within communication and to demonstrate a capacity to integrate theory, research, and practice in response to comprehensive questions. The questions will cover specific substantive areas as determined by the student and the faculty advisor in consultation with the student's Examining Committee.

REQUIREMENTS FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OPTION

The comprehensive examination option requires the following:

- Completion of 30 hours of coursework as outlined in the student's approved Permanent Program of Study (Form III). With the written approval of the faculty advisor, a student may substitute up to six (6) credit hours of cognate work.
- Completion of six (6) hours of written comprehensive examinations.
- Completion of a one (1) hour oral defense of the written examination.

FACULTY COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION ADVISOR

The Permanent Advisor shall serve as the chair of the Examining Committee.

THE PERMANENT ADVISOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING:

- Working with the student to establish the Examining Committee
- Overseeing the selection and preparation of the examination questions
- Overseeing the administration of the examination
- Coordinating the review and evaluation of student responses
- Coordinating and overseeing the oral defense of the exam
- If needed, coordinating and overseeing the rewrite of exam questions

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION COMMITTEE

Each student selecting the Comprehensive Examination option must have a three-member Examining Committee. In consultation with the faculty advisor, the student shall select an

additional two members of the graduate faculty in the School of Communication to serve on his/her Examining Committee. The faculty should represent the areas of study and/or methods the student has emphasized in his/her Program of Study. The advisor and student should submit Form V: Request for Appointment of Capstone Committee.

THE EXAMINING COMMITTEE WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING:

- Selecting and preparing examination questions for the student
- Reviewing the student's exam responses and determining the outcome of the exam
- Providing feedback on the exam to the advisor
- Participating in the conduct of the oral defense of the exam
- Reviewing rewrites of exam questions where needed

THE DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOLLOWING:

- Communicating and consulting with the graduate faculty in preparation of the exam questions reflecting the areas of study within the master's curriculum
- Maintaining a pool of potential comprehensive examination questions
- Determining the schedule for the administration of comprehensive examinations
- Providing guidance to students and faculty as needed on procedures and substance.

ELIGIBILITY FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

Students are eligible to take exams during their final semester of enrollment. During fall and spring semesters, students will complete the written comprehensive exams during the scheduled times between the tenth to twelfth week of the semester. During summer I and summer II, the student must complete the written comprehensive examinations during the third week of the term. Students must request permission to take examinations by completing Form VII: Eligibility for Comprehensive Examinations.

Students' specific substantive, theoretical, and research expertise developed as a master's student will be reflected in the examination. The areas of examination will consist of a theoretical component (2 hours), a methodological component (2 hours), and a content specialty area (2 hours). The Examining Committee members may select questions from a School of Communication question bank. These questions may be modified at the discretion of the committee. The committee also may generate exam questions independently.

Students will be notified of the exact schedule for the comprehensive exams and the exam procedures a minimum of one month prior to the exam dates.

GUIDELINES FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

Students choosing the comprehensive examination option should:

Prepare for the examinations. Exemplar questions from prior exams will be available for review by the student.

Complete each examination at the scheduled time during the scheduled week. The Director of Graduate Studies is responsible for coordinating the distribution of exam responses for committee review and for the securing of exam responses.

Receive feedback on written exams. Members of the Examining Committee will read all the exam questions and give feedback on the student's performance to the faculty advisor within two weeks of receipt of the exam responses. The faculty advisor will then meet individually with the student. A general evaluation of the student's written answers will be shared with the student.

The oral defense must be scheduled no sooner than one week after receipt of the exam feedback from the Examining Committee and no later than three weeks. During the oral defense, students must be prepared to answer questions about their written answers; to elaborate on aspects of their written answers that, upon reflection, require further development; to clear up any logical inconsistencies or unclear statements; etc.

The Examining Committee will determine, upon completion of the oral defense, whether the student has successfully passed all her/his exams. The committee will consider both the student's written and oral performances in making its decision. The committee's deliberations and vote are to be held in private. The committee shall vote by simple majority. Committee members may vote to abstain.

The committee may determine one of the following outcomes:

- the student's written and oral performances are acceptable;
- the student needs to revise and resubmit one or more of the essays;
- the student needs to retake the exams with new questions.

The student and his/her faculty advisor will file Form VIII: Results of Capstone Experience with the Graduate Director.

Revise specific exam questions, as needed. Students who need to revise or retake specific exam questions must consult with their advisor regarding their first efforts and regarding the scheduling of the rewrites. The Examining Committee shall decide the appropriate mechanisms for evaluation of the rewrites.

Retake written and oral comprehensive examinations with new questions, in cases of failure to pass. In such cases students must wait until the following semester to retake their exams and must follow the same procedures for completing this capstone experience.

STANDARD TIMELINE FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS

Each term the Director of Graduate Studies will publish and distribute the specific dates and procedures for the comprehensive examinations scheduled for that term.

The following is a representative framework. *Please note*, each stage of this guide represents the latest possible time to complete the required activities.

BY THE END OF THE FIRST WEEK OF THE TERM:

- Meet with your advisor to discuss the exam process and the exam timeline.
- File Form VII: Eligibility to Hold Comprehensive Examinations form.
- By the end of the third week of the term:
- File Form V: Request for Appointment of Capstone Committee form.

BY THE END OF THE SIXTH WEEK OF THE TERM:

- Distribution of potential comprehensive exam questions by the Examining Committee.
- Seek any needed clarifications from your advisor.

BY THE END OF THE ELEVENTH WEEK OF THE TERM:

- Exam session one: Theoretical foundations
- Exam session two: Methods
- Exam session three: Specialty area
- Schedule an oral defense

BY THE END OF THE TWELFTH WEEK OF THE TERM:

- Comprehensive examination results to advisors.
- Schedule meeting with advisor to review results.

BY THE END OF THE FOURTEENTH WEEK OF THE TERM:

- Hold the oral defense of the comprehensive exam.

GRADUATION CHECKLIST FOR MASTER'S STUDENTS WITH COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

The following activities should be completed prior to or during the semester listed.

YEAR ONE: FALL SEMESTER

- _____ *Meet with temporary advisor.*
- _____ *In consultation with temporary advisor, prepare tentative program of study; discuss capstone options.*
- _____ *Complete one course of Communication Research Core.*
- _____ *Complete one course of Communication Foundations Core.*

YEAR ONE: SPRING SEMESTER

- _____ *Select permanent faculty advisor (Form I) and in consultation with your advisor; complete Form II: Permanent Program of Study.*
- _____ *Submit Forms I and II to Director of Graduate Studies for approval.*
- _____ *Continue progress on Communication Foundations Core, Communication Research Core.*

YEAR TWO: FALL SEMESTER

- _____ *Notify Director of Graduate Studies of Eligibility to Complete Examination (Form VII).*
- _____ *In consultation with permanent advisor, identify area(s) of specialty for examination and file Form V to request appointment of exam committee.*
- _____ *For April graduation, apply for graduation by December 1.*
- _____ *Continue progress on Communication Foundations Core, Communication Research Core, and electives.*

YEAR TWO: SPRING SEMESTER

- _____ *Complete Communication Foundations core requirement.*
- _____ *Complete Communication Research core requirement.*

- _____ *Complete elective course requirements.*
- _____ *For June graduation, apply for graduation by February 1.*
- _____ *Prepare for comprehensive exams.*
- _____ *Complete written comprehensive exam during scheduled examination period.*
- _____ *If needed, schedule and hold oral defense of comprehensive exam.*
- _____ *File Form VIII with Director of Graduate Studies.*