**Comprehensive Examination**

**Guidelines/ Rubric**

Graduate programs that require the comprehensive examination or offer the comprehensive examination as an option to fulfill the culminating experience requirement for the degree must provide students with information regarding the expectations to meet this academic requirement. The comprehensive examination should assess the degree to which each student has achieved the program learning outcomes. This document provides (1) guidelines for programs to communicate comprehensive examination requirements to students; and (2) a sample rubric that programs can adapt to include discipline-specific competencies. At a minimum, comprehensive examinations must follow California State policy as described below:

**Excerpt from California Administrative Code of Regulations Title 5, Section 40510**

A comprehensive examination is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, show critical and independent thinking, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination evidences independent thinking, appropriate organization, critical analysis and accuracy of documentation. A record of the examination questions and responses shall be maintained in accordance with the records retention policy of The California State University.

**Recommended Guidelines for the Comprehensive Exam**:

1. Make sure that the comprehensive examination assesses program learning outcomes (PLOs); and when applicable aligns with accreditation standards.
2. Maintain written documentation of who creates, administers and grades the exam (consider inter-rater reliability, develop a rubric for your exam).
3. Archive comprehensive exams and results in an electronic platform that can be available to your College Associate Dean and the Dean of Graduate Studies upon request.
4. Provide students with written instructions for:
   * what the comp exam will cover (e.g. study guide; post sample questions on website or in Canvas)
   * where Comp exam instructions are posted
   * how the exam will be administered
   * how the exam will be graded
   * when to register for the exam
   * when and how the student will receive notification of exam results
   * what happens if the student fails the exam (preparation before sitting for the exam again.)

**Sample Outlines for Instructions**

(adapted from CFS)

* + 1. **Purpose**

[Program should include a narrative explaining the purpose of the comprehensive examination. Include program learning outcomes to be assessed.]

* + 1. **Eligibility**

1. Students will normally take the comprehensive exam in the semester in which they complete their core coursework or in a later semester. If the coursework completion is in progress, the student must receive approval from a graduate advisor. The advisor will verify that the student is enrolled in the remaining courses.
2. The student must complete any of the incomplete work from previous semesters prior to taking the exam.
3. The student must have a GPA of 3.0 or higher in the graduate program.
4. [Program should add additional eligibility criteria; such as, complete specific courses; complete a department approval form, complete the [GS-10 Advancement to Candidacy](https://www.calstatela.edu/sites/default/files/users/u50136/gs-10_application_for_advancement_to_candidacy_-nov2020.pdf) form]
   * 1. **Student Preparation**

[Sample language below. The Program can develop or share their existing student preparation plan]

1. With the help of their graduate advisor, students will confirm their eligibility for the comprehensive exam.
2. The student will attend an orientation workshop about the comprehensive exam. This workshop will be conducted in Fall and Spring semester by the Chair of the department or their designee.
3. Students are free to meet with individual faculty members who instructed in the graduate program.
4. The Program can encourage students to set up study groups*.*
5. NOTE: Program should add other preparations
   * 1. **Development of the Examination**

The comprehensive exam for the MA/MS program in [Insert Graduate Program] will be… [e.g., ***integrative*** rather than focusing on individual questions tied to each content course in the MA program; or will include an assessment of knowledge and skills covered in the following courses…]. The goal of the exam is to assess accomplishment of program learning outcomes. The questions involve the following [examples for program to consider]:

* + - 1. Knowledge of basic concepts and empirically based information in [specify discipline]
      2. Development and application of research designs and analytical procedures in [specify discipline]
      3. Recent research and implications for future studies.
      4. Influential theories and their implication for practice and policy.
      5. Application and evaluation of information.
      6. The structuring and implementation of programs and projects.
    1. **Administration of the Exam**

The exam will … [Program should add text specifying exam administration.] Program suggestions:

* + - * 1. Specify date exam will be sent and date due
        2. Specify open-book or closed book
        3. Proctored/face-to-face or take home exam
        4. Specify whether students will be required to submit through Turnitin.com to prevent plagiarism
        5. Specify the type of exam (e.g., multiple choice, case scenario, analyze a dataset, literature review, case study, choose from multiple essay questions)
        6. Specify expectations including minimum or maximum length, if abstract or references are required
        7. Specify format (e.g., APA style, including title page, headings, all text, in-text references, and references section)
        8. Be completed independently; should **NOT** be completed in groups.
        9. Students will not identified by name but by a special number so that reviewers are blind to the identity of the student.
        10. If plagiarism (i.e., academic dishonesty) should occur, be specific about the consequences (e.g., fail exam, exit from program). Can refer to the grade greviance policy for more specific language. <https://www.calstatela.edu/undergraduatestudies/grade-appealsacademic-grievances>
    1. **Evaluation**

Program suggestions:

1. Student responses will be read by two or more faculty for a “pass” or “rewrite” evaluation. If there is disagreement in the evaluations by the two faculty members, the response will be evaluated by an additional faculty member as a “tiebreaker.”
2. Faculty readers will use a rubric to assess the student response. The rubric will address the content, clarity, analysis, and formatting of the response, and will be distributed to students along with the exam questions.
3. If necessary, final determinations of exam results will be done by faculty consensus at a meeting dedicated to this activity.
4. Students will be notified of the results by the Chair, or their advisor within 5 to 6 weeks or by the date grades are due for that semester.
5. Students who receive a “rewrite” evaluation should meet with their graduate advisor to discuss their performance. The graduate advisor will summarize the main issues related to the inadequate response, and suggest ways to strengthen performance in subsequent attempts.
6. The exam may be repeated two times for a total of three attempts. Inability to pass the comprehensive exam in three attempts will result in the termination of the student from the program.
   * 1. **Instructions for students who do not Pass**: [Examples for program to consider]
7. Written notification will be provided to students that did not pass the comprehensive exam. Student will be informed of the content area(s) where demonstration of competencies did not meet standards.
8. It is the graduate student’s responsibility to contact program advisor to develop a study plan for all retakes.
9. Written study plan should be developed and written in consultation with program designee who assists students with the comprehensive exam process (e.g., grad advisor, comp exam committee, Department Chair)