



Women+ and Children's Health Sciences (WACH) PhD Oral Comprehensive Examination

Students in the WACH PhD program will be required to successfully complete the oral comprehensive examination after 18 months of starting the PhD program. The comprehensive exam should be scheduled as early as feasible, and no later than 30 months.

For students that transfer from the MSc program to the PhD program, the timing of the comprehensive exam starts from the date of entry to graduate studies at UBC (i.e. the start date of the MSc, not the date of the transfer to the PhD program).

The comprehensive examination is a requirement for advancement to candidacy in the PhD program. It is required by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies that all doctoral students be admitted to candidacy within 36 months from the date of initial registration. The program deadline for the comprehensive examination is designed to allow students to meet the timeline for advancement to candidacy.

The oral comprehensive examination will determine if the student has developed the following skills in order to successfully complete their PhD thesis research:

- strong analytical, problem-solving and critical thinking abilities
- required breadth and in-depth knowledge of the discipline
- required academic background for the specific doctoral research
- potential ability to conduct independent and original research
- ability to communicate knowledge of the discipline

Objectives of the Exam

1. To determine if the student has an appropriate PhD thesis research project and the required academic and research skills to conduct independent and original research. Areas for improvement should also be identified.
2. To assess the student's breadth of knowledge and critical thinking skills in 3-5 core research areas relevant to their PhD thesis research field.

Components of the Exam

Thesis proposal

The student will prepare a 6 page (not including references; 12 pt font, single spaced) thesis proposal. The thesis proposal should include the following sections:

- Relevant background and rationale for their proposed thesis research
- Hypotheses and/or research questions
- Specific aims/objectives
- Experimental approaches

The thesis proposal should not be written in the format of a grant. It should not be the supervisor's grant/ research proposal or a grant application by the student.

It should be written by the student and without significant input from their supervisor.

It is not expected to contain a full written literature review; this is part of the final thesis. However, it is expected that the student conducts an appropriate review of the literature and provides sufficient references in the thesis proposal.

The student will provide the thesis proposal document to their examination committee at least 2 weeks in advance of the exam.

The student will defend their thesis proposal during the oral exam.



Core Research Areas

Prior to the exam, the student and their thesis supervisory committee will agree on the 3-5 core research areas to be covered during the exam. Examiners with content expertise will be identified (see further details below). The examiners will provide the student with a reading list and/or other learning materials relevant to the research area that each will address during the exam. Typically, each examiner will address one core research area but there can be some overlap between examiners. The learning materials from each examiner will be provided to the student 3 months prior to the exam.

Oral Comprehensive Examination Committee

The committee membership will be determined by the thesis supervisory committee, supervisor, and student. The supervisor can attend the exam but does not participate in the questioning and adjudication.

The composition of the Examination Committee includes the following:

- Chair, one of the WACH program Co-Directors (or designate)
- 1 examiner from the thesis supervisory committee
- 2 external examiners (at least 2; maximum of 3); content experts in the core research areas

External examiners must not be on the thesis supervisory committee or directly involved in the student's thesis research.

The examiners must be a UBC faculty member (Assistant Professor or higher rank) and can be from any department and/or graduate program.

The external examiners should be at arm's length from the student (e.g. no publications with the student in the past 3 years; or have not previously supervised the student).

The committee will be formed at least 4 months prior to the examination date.

The Chair does not vote unless there is a tie among the other examiners.

Oral Examination Format

- The oral exam will typically take 2-3 hours.
- The exam will begin with a 15-20min presentation of the thesis proposal by the student.
- This will be followed by questioning by the examiners on the thesis proposal and core research areas.
- There are 2 rounds of questions. Round 1, 15-20min/examiner; followed by a 2nd round of 10-15min/examiner.
- Following the question period, the student leaves the examination room and the committee will adjudicate the student's written thesis proposal, presentation, and depth of the student's knowledge and critical thinking skills.
- Once the adjudication is complete, the student is asked to return to the examination room and they are provided with feedback. Any remediation will be provided to the student at this time.
- The Chair of the examination committee will compile a report of the exam and include any feedback the committee provides to the student and remediation (if required). The report will be provided to the student, the examination committee, and the WACH Program office within 72 hours of the examination.



Evaluation

The committee determines if the candidate passes the examination based on the thesis proposal and performance during the oral defense. This will be decided immediately following the oral exam. Areas for improvement and further study should be identified. The student's performance will be rated as one of the following:

Unconditional pass: granted if the committee feels that the thesis proposal is exceptional, the student performs exceptionally during the oral examination, and demonstrates exceptional depth of knowledge and understanding of the core research areas.

Conditional pass: granted if the committee feels that the student should complete remediation in specific areas. This is at the discretion of the committee. The remediation requirements should be discussed with the student at the end of the examination and specific details provided including how the remediation will be evaluated by the examiners. Written documentation of the remediation requirements will be provided to the student in the Chair's report (see above). The remediation requirements should be complete within 6-8 weeks of the examination. The Chair will provide written documentation of the outcome of the remediation to the student within 1 week of completion. All correspondence regarding the remediation process will also be sent to the WACH Program office.

Fail: granted if the student does not meet expectations in the oral examination; does not demonstrate sufficient depth of knowledge and understanding of the core research areas; and/or the written thesis proposal is inadequate. The student will be given the opportunity to redo the thesis proposal and/or oral examination. This should occur within 6-8 weeks of the original examination, or at a time recommended by the examination committee. Written documentation of the reasons for the failure, and the requirements for the re-examination will be provided to the student in the Chair's report (see above). Students will be given one attempt to redo the examination. A student who fails the examination twice will not advance to candidacy and will have to withdraw from the PhD program.

Summary of Timeline

- Oral examination date set 18-30 months from program start date.
- Core research areas and examiners should be identified at least 4 months before the oral examination.
- Examiners provide the student with a reading list and/or other learning materials specific to the core research areas 3 months before the exam.
- Student provides the examination committee with their thesis proposal document at least 2 weeks before the exam.