PhD Comprehensive Examination

Exam Description
The exam consists of two components:

1. written presentation of the student’s research topic
2. oral presentation of the student’s progress in their research and along their training pathway (coursework & timeline).

These sections are described in more detail below. Students are highly encouraged to discuss these items with his/her research advisor(s) and thesis committee, which comprises of the comprehensive exam review committee.

Part 1: Comprehensive Document
A comprehensive exam document should be prepared by each PhD candidate covering their research progress.

The first two chapters are on introductory and background/significance topics; the candidate may use a traditional format for their introduction, or may use a grant-submission “Specific Aims” format. After these opening chapters, the document should contain an additional chapter for each submitted manuscript or draft manuscript the candidate has assembled from their research. These chapters may be the actual journal manuscripts, with only the original heading numbers altered and a brief introduction (half-page) included so they may properly flow with the complete document. Lastly, a final, non-manuscript chapter should briefly summarize the candidate’s progress to date, and describe work remaining for completion of the thesis.
While document formatting may conform to the *Guidelines for Thesis Dissertations* (2008) published by the Graduate School, single spacing and wide margins are acceptable and generally reduce printed document length. In some sense, the exam document may informally be considered a “Draft Dissertation”. While there are no formal length requirements for the comprehensive exam document, it is generally substantial (> 50 pages, occasionally > 100 pages).

**Part 2: Oral Exam**

The candidate will give a 1-hour presentation (i.e. 30-40 slides) to their thesis committee and the campus at large that: summarizes their didactic training; reviews their current research progress; and proposes work required for the completion of the thesis. In detail:

1. **Summary of Didactic Training** (<5 slides): Brief review of classes the candidate has completed (or is currently taking) to fulfill their training plan; how these classes went; whether there were revisions to their original training plan; etc. The candidate may, at their discretion, briefly reference their didactic training in the remaining two presentation topics. If the candidate has successfully obtained a pre-doctoral award, they should briefly review their progress during this period.

2. **Research Progress** (15-25 slides): A review of their research work to date split up, if appropriate, by progress on individual research aims, i.e. how the work satisfies the research aims/hypotheses. The student should state which portions of the current work are in preparation or have been submitted as manuscripts, and provide status (“in revision”, “in press”, etc.) for the latter.

3. **Remaining Research** (10-15 slides): A proposal of remaining research to be accomplished to satisfy the research aims and/or hypotheses. Here, the candidate should strive to provide specific, attainable goals – such as:
   a. work to prepare
   b. expected additional manuscripts and/or abstract submissions and
   c. a timeline in which they expect these goals will be met.

During and after the presentation, candidates will be questioned by their committee. At the end of the exam, public attendees (i.e. those not on the committee) will be
asked to leave, and candidates should expect feedback on their remaining research goals, and how attainable they are in the candidate's proposed timeframe.

**Exam Outcome**
The Comprehensive Examination Committee will then make one of the following decisions:

1. Student has unconditionally passed the Comprehensive Examination.
2. Student has conditionally passed the Comprehensive Examination. Conditions that the student must fulfill must be provided to the student along with a date by which the student meet these conditions.
3. Student has failed the Comprehensive Examination. The committee may recommend that the student stand for the Comprehensive Examination a second time (no student may take the Comprehensive Examination more than twice) or may recommend that the student discontinue further PhD study.

The Comprehensive Examination Committee will then send this exam report to the Graduate School indicating whether or not the student has passed. The student cannot handle this document, as it is considered a grade sheet.

**Graduate School Rules and Policies**
The department follows the Graduate School Rules and Policies on the Comprehensive Examination. Please consult this publication and note the following requirements.

1. The comprehensive examination is typically scheduled at the end of the second year; it must be completed no later than the end of the third year.
2. The student must have at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA prior to taking the examination and the student must apply for admission to candidacy to the PhD at last two weeks prior to the examination.
3. All required non-thesis credit hours must be completed by or registered for during the term in which the examination is taken; and all transfer credit must be transferred prior to the term in which comprehensive examination is taken.
4. No more than 10 thesis credit hours may be taken prior to passing the comprehensive examination.

5. The comprehensive examination committee and the examination schedule must be approved by the program director. The examination committee shall consist of a minimum of three Graduate Faculty members. The chair of the committee must be a member of the degree-granting program. The student's dissertation advisor, if already identified, may not chair the examination committee.

Please note that all PhD candidates will work with the Graduate School to schedule this exam and process the outcomes. Contact Stephanie Puello at stephanie.puello@ucdenver.edu with any questions. It is also helpful to review the Graduate School Policies & Procedures manual (specifically, page 28), which can be found on the Graduate School website.