

**INTERNAL POLICY**

## Comprehensive Examination Doctoral Program

The **goals** of the comprehensive examination are:

- a) To allow the student to acquire knowledge and demonstrate the ability to deepen and integrate theories, concepts and reflection on social intervention practices within the student's area of interest in social work.
- b) To prepare the student for the work required for the thesis project and the thesis itself.

The comprehensive examination comprises **two** components: a theoretical component and a specific component.

- **The goal of the theoretical component** is to allow the student to gain an overall and advanced comprehension of current social work knowledge in the field of the student's project. The student must demonstrate deep and wide-ranging knowledge and an ability to synthesize, along with a critical and extensive understanding of the principle debates and perspectives in the field or general area. The student must also demonstrate the ability to communicate ideas clearly, both in writing and orally.
- **The goal of the specific component** is similar but concerns an area of knowledge more directly linked to the student's research topic.

### **PROCESS:**

After successfully completing the prerequisite courses, namely SVS 7501, SVS 7502, SVS 7590 and the chosen elective course, the student will write the comprehensive examination (SVS 9997).

Note that the thesis committee must be formed during the second term of doctoral studies, namely before the start of the comprehensive examination process. To this end, the thesis supervisor must complete the online form entitled [Thesis Committee Membership](#) and send a copy by email at the School of Social Work secretariat.

Once the student has initially enrolled in the comprehensive examination, the student has at most two terms to write and defend the comprehensive examination, with one additional term possible if the student's first writing or defence of the comprehensive examination is deemed unsatisfactory (see Section 6 of this document). Within this timeframe, re-enrolment is mandatory every term, until such time as the examination is complete.

Note that the defence of the comprehensive examination must take place no later than the end of a term, failing which the student must re-enrol in the comprehensive examination the following term (check the [Important dates and deadlines](#) for end-of-term dates). If the student does not successfully defend the comprehensive examination before the end of the third term of enrolment in the comprehensive

examination, the student will receive a failing grade and will be asked to withdraw from the doctoral program.

Note that no defence can be scheduled during the months of July or August, unless exceptional circumstances prevail and only if all members of the committee are available to evaluate the answers and attend the defence.

### **First term of enrolment**

*In the typical academic path, the student spends the first term of enrolment in the comprehensive examination to prepare the potential questions and draft a reading list, and to reading the required texts.*

1. At the start of the first term of enrolment in the comprehensive examination, the student and the thesis supervisor will draft the comprehensive examination's **potential** theoretical and specific questions for the other members of the thesis committee. The committee will discuss these questions, propose changes if necessary, consult with the student, and approve the questions. The committee will have one week to approve the questions.
2. Afterwards, the student will prepare two reading lists (one for each question), each of which will include 20-to-25 major classic and contemporary works: books, journals, articles, etc. The student must submit these reading lists to the thesis supervisor, who will forward them to the other committee members. The thesis committee then has **10 business days** to request changes or additions to the proposed reading lists. The committee members each send their comments to the thesis supervisor, following which the thesis supervisor approves the final reading lists and provides them to the student. The student then reads and covers the material in the reading lists.

### **Second term of enrolment**

*In the typical academic path, the student spends the second term of the comprehensive examination researching the final questions, drafting answers and preparing for the defence of the comprehensive examination.*

3. After completing the readings, the student must propose final questions for the comprehensive examination (one for each component) to the thesis supervisor, who will then send these questions to the other members of the thesis committee for discussion, modifications and approvals, in consultation with the student. The questions should be based on the knowledge acquired in the readings and meet the general objectives and goals of the comprehensive examination (see top of document). The thesis committee has one week to ask for changes or additions to the proposed final questions, after which the thesis supervisor sends the final version of these questions to the student. The drafting of the comprehensive examination begins at that point. **Note that the student must receive the final version of these questions no later than two-and-a-half months before the end of the term to avoid having to re-enrol in the comprehensive examination for a further term.**
4. Once the student has received the final version of the questions, the student has **30 days** to draft answers to the questions posed in the comprehensive examination. The answer to each question should be between **30 and 35 pages (about 10,000 words) double-spaced**, not including bibliography. The answers must be drafted without the assistance or guidance of the thesis supervisor or other committee members. The student must submit the answers to the comprehensive examination to the **thesis supervisor**.

5. As soon as the thesis supervisor receives the answers to the comprehensive examination, he or she must send the student's answers by email, along with a copy of the online form called [Thesis Committee Evaluation of the Comprehensive Examination](#), to each thesis committee member.
6. The thesis committee members (including the thesis supervisor) then have a maximum of **four weeks** to evaluate the answers to the two questions based on the objectives and goals of the comprehensive examination (see above). Each member completes a copy of the above evaluation form, assigning a mark to each question's answer, and attaching comments. They then send the completed form to the thesis supervisor. The student and the thesis supervisor must be given enough time to review the evaluators' written comments before the comprehensive examination defence.

A mark of "P" means that the written answer is satisfactory for the purposes of the defence, while a mark of "F" means that the answer does not meet the criteria for a comprehensive examination defence. **If at least two members\* of the thesis committee mark the same answer as unsatisfactory**, the comprehensive examination will not be considered as ready for defence. In this case, the student may resubmit the written part of the comprehensive examination **only once**, with the questions remaining the same. This resubmission must occur within the term following receipt of the mark. The revision of the answer(s) must take into consideration the comments and criticism that the thesis committee has issued for the first submission. If following the revision at least two members of the thesis committee again mark the comprehensive examination as unsatisfactory, whether for a single question or both questions, the student will have failed the comprehensive examination and will be asked to withdraw from the program.

\*In cases of co-supervision, the evaluation of the co-supervisors will be considered as the evaluation of a single committee member.

7. During the evaluation period, the **thesis supervisor** is responsible for communicating with the thesis committee members and the student to set a date and time for the comprehensive examination defence. Once the date and time have been set (at latest, at the end of term, as specified in the University calendar), the **thesis supervisor** will ask the School secretariat to book a room for the defence.
8. **The defence**

**Unless the student wishes to hold a public defence**, the only individuals allowed at the comprehensive examination defence are the student and the members of the thesis committee. The thesis supervisor will chair the defence, which will follow these steps:

- First, the student will take 20-to-25 minutes to briefly present his or her answers to the questions
- Next, the student will answer questions asked by the thesis committee members
- Finally, the thesis committee will ask the student to leave while the committee deliberates.

#### **VERDICTS:**

**A) If the committee members are generally satisfied with the comprehensive examination (even though it could benefit from minor changes)**, the comprehensive examination will be **accepted**. After deliberation, the committee members will come to an agreement on the comments and suggestions that the student will need to take into account when working on the thesis.

**B) If a single committee member feels that the comprehensive examination is unsatisfactory**, the examination will be **accepted**, but the dissenting evaluator will explain his or her objections and the committee members will need to clearly agree on, and state, which concerns the student will need to address, to their satisfaction, when pursuing the thesis.

**C) If two or more committee members agree that the comprehensive examination does not meet the requirements of the program, the student will need to submit a new version** and conduct a second defence before the end of the following term. If a mark of "F" is assigned to the second

attempt, the student will have failed the comprehensive examination and will be asked to withdraw from the program.

Once the committee members have taken a decision on the verdict and comments, suggestions or concerns that the student will need to address when pursuing the doctoral thesis, the thesis supervisor and committee members will sign the online form called [Defence of the Comprehensive Examination](#).

The student is then called back into the room and the thesis supervisor, as chair of the proceedings, describes the results of the committee's deliberations to the student, and the defence is complete.

After the defense, the **thesis supervisor** sends a copy of the signed form by email to the School secretariat to record the final grade and index the form in the student's file. The supervisor keeps the original as well as the members' comments and recommendations.

**IMPORTANT:**

If the student fails the oral or written part of the comprehensive examination, the student is allowed only one re-examination, which must take place no later than the end of the following term. If the student fails a second time, the student will be asked to withdraw from the program.

The entire process (written answers, defence and, if necessary, re-examination due to revision requests or failure of the defence) cannot exceed three terms of enrolment in the comprehensive examination.

*Policy approved at the Departmental Assembly held on March 27, 2012*