COMPREHENSIVE EXAM POLICY

Program in Community and Regional Planning
School of Architecture
The University of Texas at Austin
1. PURPOSE AND EXPECTATIONS

The purpose of the comprehensive exam is for the student to demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of key literature and research methods in the field of Planning, advanced proficiency in a field of specialization within or closely related to Planning, and advanced understanding of a proposed dissertation topic area closely related to the planning specialization. The subject areas on the comprehensive exam are as follows:

Planning Theory
Planning Research Design
Planning Specialization
Dissertation Topic

2. SCHEDULE

The following comprehensive exam periods allow for the student to complete the exam and any revisions within one semester or two summer sessions. The process begins with submission of the student’s reading list at least two months prior to the student’s chosen exam period. The subsequent proposal defense can be scheduled immediately upon the student passing the comprehensive exam; see the Proposal Defense Policy for specific policies pertaining to the proposal defense.

**Spring/early summer exams**
February 15: Exam reading list submitted to CRP-GSC
April 15: Exam essay questions due to PhD Program Coordinator
Soon after the last day of class in May: Exam period starts (10 days)
One month following student’s submission of essay: Grades due.
One month following submission of grades: Student revisions due.
Two weeks following student’s submission of revisions: Final grades due.

**Late summer/fall exams**
May 15: Exam reading list submitted to CRP-GSC
July 30: Exam essay questions due to PhD Program Coordinator
Last week of August/First week of September: Exam period starts (10 days)
One month following student’s submission of essay: Grades due.
One month following submission of grades: Student revisions due.
Two weeks following student’s submission of revisions: Final grades due.

**Winter exams**
September 15: Exam reading list submitted to CRP-GSC
December 1: Exam essay questions due to PhD Program Coordinator
Week before-first week of spring semester: Exam period starts (10 days)
One month following student’s submission of essay: Grades due.
One month following submission of grades: Student revisions due.
Two weeks following student’s submission of revisions: Final grades due.
3. FORMING A COMPREHENSIVE EXAM COMMITTEE

Before scheduling the comprehensive exam, the student must form a comprehensive examination committee. The committee should include five (5) members. The chair of the committee must be a member of the CRP-GSC, and at least one member of the committee must be from a program or department outside the CRP-GSC. The chair of the committee should be the intended chair of the student’s future dissertation committee. The comprehensive exam committee chair must provide PhD Program Coordinator with the names and contact information of the student’s examination committee before the comprehensive exam can be scheduled.

The student and the chair must secure all committee members’ agreement to (1) write questions for the comprehensive exam, (2) grade all essays on the comprehensive exam (in the case of external readers, only question 3 and 4), and (3) participate in a meeting following submission of the exam to determine revision requirements. The comprehensive exam committee is formed for the purpose of evaluating the student’s comprehensive exam, and committee members are not required to continue serving on the committee following the conclusion of the exam, and student is free to select different faculty members for their final committee. However, comprehensive exam committee members would ideally continue to serve on the proposal defense and the final supervisory committee. The final, official supervisory committee will be formed following the proposal defense and when the student advances to candidacy, per University of Texas at Austin Graduate School Catalogue.

4. DEFINING THE PLANNING SPECIALIZATION AND DISSERTATION TOPIC

It is the responsibility of the student to work with the comprehensive exam committee chair, PhD Program Coordinator, and other members of the comprehensive exam committee to specify their Planning Specialization area and their Dissertation Topic.

The Planning Specialization must be one of the following:

- Economic and Community Development
- Environmental and Natural Resource Planning
- Historic Preservation
- Housing
- International Studies in Planning
- Land Use and Land Development
- Public Health and Planning
- Transportation
- Urban Design
- Special Field (must be approved by the CRP Ph.D. Committee)

The Dissertation Topic will be defined by student, working closely with the chair of the comprehensive exam committee and the members of the exam committee.
5. DEVELOPING AND SUBMITTING THE READING LIST

Based on the student’s definition of Planning Specialization and Dissertation Topic, the student will work with the comprehensive exam committee chair and other members of the comprehensive exam committee to develop a reading list for each of the four areas (questions) covered on the comprehensive exam: Planning Theory, Planning Research Design, Planning Specialization, and Dissertation Topic.

It is recommended that the faculty members who teach core courses (Planning Theory and Research Design) review the reading list before submission to the CRP-GSC. All members of the CRP-GSC are invited and encouraged to review and comment on the reading list and otherwise participate actively in the comprehensive exam process. In addition, the following applies:

- The reading list must be submitted by the student or the comprehensive exam committee chair to the PhD Program Coordinator and any external committee members by February 25 for spring exams and May 15 for fall exams.
- The comprehensive exam committee chair and the members of the student’s comprehensive exam committee are expected to review and comment on the student’s reading list in a timely manner.

6. DEVELOPING AND SUBMITTING QUESTIONS FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

All members of the CRP-GSC are invited and encouraged to develop and recommend comprehensive, written exam questions, and otherwise participate actively in the comprehensive exam process. In addition, the following applies:

- The chair of the comprehensive exam committee is expected to develop questions for each of the four essays (Theory, Research Design, Planning Specialization, and Dissertation Topic).
- The chair of the comprehensive exam committee is expected to solicit questions from other committee members, including external members.
- Faculty members teaching core courses (Planning Theory and Research Design) are expected to develop questions relevant to the courses taught.
- All questions must be submitted by the chair of the comprehensive exam committee and by other interested faculty members to PhD Program Coordinator by the following dates:
  - April 15 for spring and early summer exams
  - July 30 for late summer and early fall exams
- PhD Program Coordinator is responsible for submitting the questions to the student on the beginning date of the 10-day exam period. This date will be determined by the student, PhD Program Coordinator, and the chair of the comprehensive exam committee, following the exam schedule above.
• Student has 10 days to complete the essays. By the end of the 10th day, student shall submit the essays electronically to PhD Program Coordinator.
• PhD Program Coordinator will then immediately forward the essays to the CRP-GSC and any external committee members identified by student and the chair of the exam committee.

7. READING AND GRADING THE INITIAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAM ESSAYS

The comprehensive exam essays must be read, graded and returned to PhD Program Coordinator within four weeks of receipt of the exam essay. A student can receive a pass with honors (must be unanimous on all four essays), pass, a pass with revisions, pass with major revisions, or an unsatisfactory score. These grades will be provisional and can be revised by the reader during the meeting discussed in section 8, below. In addition, the following applies:

• Each of the four essays (Planning Theory, Planning Research Design, Planning Specialization, and Dissertation Topic) must be graded by the comprehensive exam committee chair, and by all CRP-GSC faculty members who are members of the comprehensive exam committee.
• The Dissertation Topic essay must also be graded by at least one external member of the student’s comprehensive exam committee. Note: comments and grades provided by external members are ‘advisory only,’ since final exam results are a CRP-GSC decision.
• The Planning Specialization essay should also be graded by external members of the student’s comprehensive exam committee if the specialization corresponds closely with the faculty member(s)’ expertise. Note: comments and grades provided by external members are ‘advisory only,’ since final exam results are a CRP-GSC decision.
• The Planning Theory and Research Design in planning essays can be graded by external members when appropriate and in agreement with the chair of the comprehensive exam committee. Note: comments and grades provided by external members are ‘advisory only,’ since final exam results are a CRP-GSC decision.
• The Planning Theory and Research Design must also be graded by faculty members who teach relevant core courses in the doctoral curriculum (Planning Theory and Research Design).
• Other members of the CRP GSC are also invited to read and grade comprehensive exams.

8. REVISING THE INITIAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAM ESSAYS

The student must receive a ‘pass’ from all readers on all four sections of the comprehensive exam to satisfactorily complete this requirement without revisions being required. Students who do not receive a ‘pass’ from all readers on all essays will have the opportunity to revise the essay(s) in question. Only one round of revisions of one or more essays is allowed.
In cases where one or more readers recommend(s) ‘pass with revisions,’ ‘pass with major revisions’ or ‘unsatisfactory’ on one or more essays, PhD Program Coordinator and the chair of the comprehensive exam committee will convene a meeting to determine necessary revisions. In addition to PhD Program Coordinator and the student’s comprehensive exam committee chair, the meeting will include the faculty members(s) who have taught the most relevant core courses, and any interested members of the CRP-GSC. The purpose of the meeting is for readers to discuss the student’s essays, deliberate and determine the final grades, and jointly delineate clear requests for revisions, if revisions are deemed necessary. During the meeting, readers may revise the grade(s) they initially awarded for each essay. Following the meeting, PhD Program Coordinator will communicate the revision requirements to the student. The student will have four weeks to complete the revisions.

9. READING AND GRADING THE REVISED COMPREHENSIVE EXAM ESSAYS

The grade options for the revised essays are ‘pass’ or ‘unsatisfactory.’ The student must receive a minimum grade of ‘pass’ from all readers for all revised essays in order to complete the requirements for the comprehensive exam and to advance to candidacy. Students will have no further opportunity to revise the comprehensive exam essays or to retake the exam.

It is the responsibility of each reader who requests revisions to grade the revised comprehensive exam essay within two weeks of receipt of the revised essay, unless exceptions are made due to unavoidable scheduling conflicts. If no prior arrangements are made and PhD Program Coordinator does not receive a response from readers within two weeks, it is understood that the reader is satisfied with the student’s revisions and has awarded a ‘passing’ grade.

In cases where one or more readers submits an ‘unsatisfactory’ grade on one or more essays, PhD Program Coordinator and the chair of the comprehensive exam committee will convene a meeting to discuss the student’s case. In addition to PhD Program Coordinator and the student’s comprehensive exam committee chair, the meeting will include the student’s comprehensive exam committee, the faculty members(s) who have taught the most relevant core courses, and the faculty member(s) who has/have recommended “fail” on one or more essays. Note: comments and grades provided by external members are advisory only, since final exam results are a CRP-GSC decision. Students will have no further opportunity to revise the comprehensive exam essays or to retake the exam the exam sequence. In the meeting it will therefore be determined by consensus whether:

a. The student receives a ‘passing’ grade and will advance to candidacy,
b. The student will be required to complete additional coursework or studies to correct deficiencies, or
c. The grade of ‘fail’ should stand and the student has therefore failed the comprehensive exam requirement.

If consensus is not reached in this meeting and one or more reader(s) still recommend(s) ‘fail’ on one or more comprehensive exam essays, all members of the CRP-GSC will be asked to read the essay(s) in question within two weeks. CRP Program Coordinator and CRP
Program Director will then convene a meeting of the CRP-GSC for deliberation of the student’s case. Students will have no further opportunity to revise the comprehensive exam essays or to retake the exam the exam sequence. Therefore the decision before the CRP-GSC will be whether (1) the student receives a ‘passing’ grade and will advance to candidacy, (2) additional coursework or studies will be sufficient to correct deficiencies or (3) the student has failed the comprehensive exam requirement and the student’s course of study therefore shall be terminated. A majority vote of the CRP-GSC is required to terminate a student’s course of study per University of Texas Graduate School Catalogue.

If consensus is reached (in the meeting of the students’ committee and other faculty discussed above) that the student has failed the comprehensive exam requirement, all members of the CRP-GSC will be asked to read the essay(s) in question within two weeks. CRP Program Director and PhD Program Coordinator will then convene a meeting of the CRP-GSC for deliberation of the student’s case. The decision before the CRP-GSC is whether (1) additional coursework or studies will be sufficient to correct deficiencies or (2) the student has failed the comprehensive exam requirement and the student’s course of study therefore shall be terminated. A majority vote of the CRP-GSC is required to terminate a student’s course of study per University of Texas Graduate School Catalogue.
COMPREHENSIVE EXAM CHECKLIST

Program in Community and regional Planning
School of Architecture
The University of Texas at Austin

1. I have completed all my required coursework. Yes! □

2. I have assembled my comprehensive exam committee Yes! □

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You need a minimum of 5 committee members. Your preliminary dissertation advisor must be a member of the CRP-GSC. At least one committee member must be ‘external,’ i.e. from UT, but a program outside CRP-GSC. Additional, external committee member(s) can be from outside UT.

3. I have informed PhD Program Coordinator that I intend to take the comprehensive exam. Yes! □

4. I have decided when to take the comprehensive exam:
   - In the fall (last week of August-first week of September) □
   - In the spring (first two weeks after end of classes) □

5. I will start my 10-day exam period on this date: _______________________

6. I have worked with my advisor and my exam committee to assemble my reading lists. Yes! □
7. My advisor or I have sent my reading lists to the CRP-GSC and to my exam committee:
   By May 15 for fall semester exam
   By February 28 for spring semester exam
   □
    
8. I have completed revisions to my reading lists. Yes! □

9. I have sent my revised reading lists to the CRP-GSC and to my exam committee. Yes! □

10. My advisor has gathered and submitted proposed exam questions to PhD Program Coordinator:
    By July 30 for fall semester exam
    By April 15 for spring semester exam
    □

11. I have written my comprehensive exam essays and emailed them to PhD Program Coordinator! Yes! □

12. I have received my grades and any requests for revisions from PhD Program Coordinator (within 5 weeks of submitting my exam essays). Yes! □

13. I have submitted my revised comprehensive exam essay(s) to PhD Program Coordinator (within 4 weeks of receiving the request for revisions). Yes! □

14. I have received my final comprehensive exam grade (within 3 weeks of submitting my revisions)! Yes! □
EXAM PHASE COMPLETED!!