

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF NURSING

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE
GRADUATE PROGRAM

TITLE OF POLICY: PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION – PhD PROGRAM

DATE EFFECTIVE: MARCH 2007

LAST REVIEWED/REVISED: FEBRUARY 2016

POLICY: The preliminary examination assesses the breadth of the student’s knowledge of the discipline, achievement during foundational doctoral study, and potential to apply research methods independently. Students must complete the preliminary examination in order to progress through the doctoral program.

The preliminary examination is to be taken in the term immediately following the completion of NUR 3016: Theoretical Foundations for Nursing Research (3 cr.), NUR 3020: Research Methods (3 cr.), NUR 3022: Qualitative Research Methods (3 cr.), and NUR 3027: Seminar on Structure of Knowledge (3 cr.).

The preliminary examination is a take-home, online exam to be completed in one week (7 days). The exam tests knowledge of theory and research methodology as applied to the area of research emphasis. The exam is comprised of two parts. In part 1, the student reviews three research articles and writes a critique of each article (maximum 3 pages, single-spaced for each critique). In Part 2 the student addresses the following: 1) synthesize the research critiques and knowledge gained across the studies and integrates the information from these studies with the state of knowledge in the research area, 2) identify the “next step” in the research, 3) write a research plan based on that next step including the purpose, aims or research questions, conceptual framework and methods. Part 2 is limited to a maximum of 12 pages, single-spaced.

Criteria used to review the Preliminary Examination are identified by the PhD Progression and Graduation Committee and by faculty who are members of the University Council of Graduate Faculty.

The examination is used to identify those students who may be expected to complete a doctoral program successfully and also to reveal areas of weakness in the student’s preparation. Students with specific area of weakness will be required to engage in remedial activities (e.g. coursework, paper, additional laboratory or clinical experiences, etc.) as determined by faculty reviewers.

Results of the examination are reported to the student’s academic advisor, the PhD Program Director, and Student Services no later than the last day of the term in which the examination occurs.

Students must complete any remedial activities targeted to their weaknesses at the conclusion of the subsequent term or, if additional course work is required, students must complete that course work in the first semester in which that course is offered following the preliminary examination. When extenuating circumstances exist, the student may request in writing a

review by the Dean. This request must be accompanied by a letter of support from the academic advisor and the PhD Program Director.

PROCEDURE:

1. The Preliminary Examination may be taken three times per year during the 2nd and 3rd weeks of October, February, or May.
2. Students are eligible to take the preliminary exam in the term following the completion of NUR 3016: Theoretical Foundations for Nursing Research (3 cr.), NUR 3020: Research Methods (3 cr.), NUR 3022: Qualitative Research Methods (3 cr.), and NUR 3027: Seminar on Structure of Knowledge (3 cr.).
3. The student downloads the Preliminary Examination application form from the Organization in Courseweb entitled, "NURS EPE: Enhanced Preliminary Examinations for the PhD Program," https://blackboard7.cssd.pitt.edu/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=22056_1, completes the application with his/her advisor and indicates the date they wish to start the exam.
4. The advisor or the PhD student emails the completed Preliminary Examination application form to the PhD Program Director and the Chair, Progression and Graduation Committee no later than one month prior to the date the student wishes to take the exam.
5. The academic advisor selects three research articles in the student's research emphasis area and identifies potential faculty members who could serve as reviewers of the preliminary examination and sends this information to the Chair, Progression and Graduation Committee. Three faculty members will be selected by the Progression and Graduation Committee to be reviewers. A fourth faculty reviewer will serve as an alternate in the event that one of the three is unable to serve as a reviewer.
6. The Chair, Progression and Graduation Committee forms a Courseweb Group comprised of him/herself and the student. The Chair uploads the Preliminary Examination Instructions and the three research articles for the exam. The Progression and Graduation Committee Chair informs the student of the title of their Group and how to access the Group in the Courseweb Organization.
7. The student downloads the exam and articles from his/her Group at 9 a.m. on the date designated on the Preliminary Examination application form. The student must upload their completed Preliminary Examination via file exchange in the Courseweb Group no later than 9 a.m., one week (7 days) after he/she begins the exam. The Chair of the Progression and Graduation Committee will remove the student from access to the Group at 9 am on the designated close date.
8. After the student has been removed from the Group, the Chair, Progression and Graduation Committee then adds the reviewers as members of the Group and sends an email to the reviewers alerting them that the exam is available for review. Reviewers will also be informed about how they access the Group, the documents for review and the deadline for completion of the review.
9. Faculty reviewers upload their completed reviews into the Organization file exchange within two weeks. Once all reviews have been uploaded, the Chair moves the reviews to the student's Group in the Organization. If there is not a consensus among reviewers about whether the student has successfully completed the exam, reviewers may dialogue about the preliminary examination via discussion board in the Group or meet in order to reach a consensus recommendation. A consensus recommendation will be made by the three reviewers to the Chair.

10. The Chair notifies the PhD Program Director of the final decision within one week of receipt of the reviews who then distributes the decision to the student and his/her academic advisor.
11. The student's academic advisor will discuss the results of the examination with the student.
12. In case of remediation, it is the academic advisor's responsibility to provide evidence of completion of required activities to the Progression and Graduation Committee.
13. Upon successful completion of the preliminary examination, the academic advisor will complete a Status Forms for Graduate Programs form (Milestones).

Approved by Graduate Council: 2/86, 3/89; 6/92

Approved by PhD Council: 10/94; 3/95; 1/98

Reviewed: 06/07, 09-10, 10-11, 12-13, 15-16

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Approved by TFO: 3/98; 3/07, 10/08, 10/10, 01/13, 3/16