

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
SCHOOL OF NURSING

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES  
FOR THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

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**TITLE OF POLICY:**                   **COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION -- MASTER'S PROGRAM**

**ORIGINAL DATE:**                   **JANUARY 1995**

**LAST REVIEWED/REVISED:**   **MARCH 2016**

**POLICY:**   The comprehensive examination is a proctored exam that tests the student's ability to critically analyze, organize, and synthesize material learned over the total period of matriculation for the degree. The examination is comprised of questions which require application of core course material to the student's area of specialization. Students must successfully write the comprehensive examination to complete the course of study.

Comprehensive examinations must be taken at least one month prior to the last day of the term in which the degree is to be granted.

All master's degree seeking students must complete the core and specialty courses prior to taking the comprehensive examination. The research practicum NUR 2002 or thesis credits (if applicable) need not be completed prior to the examination.

Area of Concentration (AOC) Coordinators or designees for each program will determine for their program the eligibility of students to sit for the Comprehensive Exam. A student's cumulative GPA must be 3.0 or higher to be eligible to sit for the examination.

The determination of whether the comprehensive examination must be taken by second master's degree seeking student is made by the AOC Coordinator. The student may be exempted from the examination, or be required to take the entire or a portion of the examination.

The comprehensive exam is developed and administered by the Admission Progression and Graduation (AP&G) Committee of the School of Nursing in consultation with graduate faculty in the areas of specialization.

Criteria used to review the exam have been identified by the AP&G Committee of the School of Nursing in consultation with graduate faculty in the areas of specialization.

If a student fails any portion of the examination, the student may be requested to rewrite all or portions of the comprehensive examination. Graduate faculty in the respective areas of concentration shall be responsible for re-administering any exam portion(s) deemed unsatisfactory.

Failure to pass the exam after the second attempt will result in inability to complete the degree. Should extenuating circumstances exist, they may be communicated by the student in writing to the Dean, Department Chair and AP&G Committee Chairperson for review.

A student who is unable to complete all degree requirements within a two-year period after passing the comprehensive examination may be reexamined, at the discretion of faculty of the AOC.

The results of the examination must be reported to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs and Alumni Relations and the AP&G Committee no later than the last day of the term in which the examination is administered.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Procedure for Administering MSN Comprehensive Exam Onsite (Oakland Campus)  
A comprehensive examination shall be offered three times per academic year, once per term.
2. Graduate faculty advisors in each AOC are responsible for notifying their advisees of an appropriate exam date. Graduate advisors are also responsible for explaining the examination and preparing their advisees to take the examination. Notification of the date of examination administration will be sent to graduate program coordinators two months prior to the examination date. Students will be notified electronically.
3. Deadline for application to take the exam is one month prior to the date of administration. Students may elect to take the examination via the computer. AOC Coordinators will inform the MSN Council as to which students will be sitting for the exam and if they want to use a computer. Students electing to take the examination using the computer will print a hard copy of their answers to submit to proctors for grading at the end of the exam. Students are responsible for the printing fees and must have sufficient funds available on their Pitt ID card at the time. The student Pitt ID card **must be active**.
4. In the event that multiple locations must be scheduled, students will be notified at least 72-hours prior to the exam as to which location they are assigned.
5. The research examination shall be administered on the same day to all students across all AOC's. The clinical/practice examination shall be administered on the same day to all students in the same program writing the examination in a given term. Picture ID shall be required. A maximum of three hours per component shall be allotted. If both the clinical/practice and research components are administered on the same day, the examination will be administered in two three-hour sessions with a break between sessions.
6. The completed examinations will be sent to the respective AOC Coordinators for distribution. A blinded review of each exam will be completed by graduate faculty within each AOC. A second (blind) review will be completed of all examinations (clinical/practice and research) that do not meet passing criteria upon initial (primary) review. In the event of discordant evaluations between primary and secondary review, a third and final blind review will be conducted. AP&G will assist faculty in securing second or third reviewers with appropriate content area expertise upon the request from AOC Coordinators.
7. Notification of Pass/Fail of the examination or any portion of the examination will be sent to the student, the student's graduate advisor, and the Associate Dean for Student Affairs and Alumni Relations by the AOC Coordinator. Faculty in the AOC will administer new items to students failing all or any portion of the initial exam. Faculty will determine the need for and administration of any remedial preparation prior to a retake.
8. After the student passes the examination, the AOC Coordinator notifies the student, and Office of Student Affairs and Alumni Relations

## **Procedure for Administering MSN Comprehensive Exam to Online/Distance Education Students**

1. All students will sit for the MSN Comprehensive Examination on the same day. The morning session consists of the clinical/practice component and the afternoon session consists of the research component. Morning session is 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM EST, and the afternoon session is 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM EST. If the examination is administered in a different time zone, then accommodations must be individualized based on time zone.

### **Two months before the MSN Comprehensive Examination**

2. Student is responsible for identifying a proctor and location and informing the AOC Coordinator and AOC Administrator. If the student chooses to use a computer, all internet capability must be disabled.
3. The AOC Coordinator or designee will orient the proctor to responsibilities of administering the MSN Comprehensive Examination,

### **Two weeks prior to the MSN Comprehensive Examination**

4. The AOC Administrator or designee will send the proctor the examination via UPS. The packet will include:
  - a. Instructions on how to answer clinical/practice and research questions.
  - b. Clinical/practice question(s)
  - c. Research article
  - d. Research critique questions
  - e. Blank booklet (3 booklets for those who handwrite the comprehensive exam)
  - f. Flash drives (2). One flash drive marked “clinical/practice” and one flash drive marked “research” (only for those students who elect to take their examination on the computer).
  - g. Return UPS overnight label/envelope.
5. The AOC Coordinator or designee will be available to students/proctor on the day of the exam should there be any questions with the examination. (Students are not permitted to ask questions related to the content of the exam of the proctor).
6. The completed examination along with supporting documents and flash drives will be mailed back to the AOC Coordinator or designee using the enclosed UPS overnight label/envelope.

Approved by Total Faculty 01/81,5/98, 4/00, 02-03, 4/04, 1/13  
Reviewed 01-02, 03-04, 09-10, 12-13