

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF NURSINGACADEMIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE
GRADUATE PROGRAM

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

ORIGINAL DATE: **JANUARY 1995**

LAST REVIEWED/REVISED: **FEBRUARY 2019**

POLICY: The comprehensive examination is a proctored examination 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 examination 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 be enrolled in or complete the core and specialty courses prior to taking the comprehensive examination. Area of Concentration Coordinator (AROC) will determine for their program the eligibility of students to sit for the Comprehensive Examination. 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 and post-professional certificate program student is made by the AROC Coordinator. The student may be exempted from the examination or be required to take the entire or a portion of the examination.

The comprehensive examination consists of 2 components that includes research and clinical practice examinations; the research examination is developed by the MSN Council Comprehensive Examination Committee and the clinical examination is developed by the AROC Coordinator in consultation with graduate faculty in the areas of concentration. Each AROC Coordinator will submit their written examination for the clinical component along with a test plan that maps the content to show that the examination reflects the depth and breadth of knowledge, in their area of concentration, to the MSN Comprehensive Examination Committee for approval. This must be done once and only again if major components of the clinical examination change. Both research and clinical examinations are administered by the MSN Council Comprehensive Examination Committee.

Criteria used to review the research examination will be developed by the MSN Council Comprehensive Examination Committee; criteria used to review the clinical practice examination will be developed by the AROC Coordinator in consultation with graduate faculty in the areas of specialization.

A minimum grade of 80% is required on each component of the comprehensive examination. If a student fails to achieve at 80% on either component, the student will be required to retake that component of the examination. The advisor will develop a remediation plan that the student will complete prior to repeating the examination. The advisor's permission is required before the examination can be taken a second time. If a student fails to pass either or both examinations on the second attempt, the AROC Coordinator, in consultation with the student's advisor, will develop a comprehensive remediation plan that includes a substantial plan of study and/or additional coursework to address the student's deficits on previous attempts to pass the examination. The remediation plan will be signed by the AROC, the advisor and the student. It is expected that remediation prior to taking the examination a third time will extend the student's program of study by at least one term.

Failure to pass either or both of the examinations after the third attempt will result in the inability to complete the MSN degree. Should extenuating circumstances exist, they may be communicated by the student in writing to the Dean and MSN Comprehensive Examination Committee for review.

PROCEDURE:

Procedure for Administering MSN Comprehensive Examination Onsite (Oakland Campus)

1. A comprehensive examination shall be offered three times per academic year, once per term; dates will be determined by MSN Council Comprehensive Examination Committee who will notify designated support staff. Designated support staff will notify AROC Coordinators who will then notify students in the AROC of the examination date via email 2 months prior to examination date.
2. Students are responsible for contacting their advisor to discuss eligibility for taking the examination. Graduate faculty advisors in each AROC are responsible for approving the eligibility of their advisees to take the examination. Graduate advisors are also responsible for explaining the examination and preparing their advisees to take the examination.
3. Any student request for specific accommodations related to taking the comprehensive examination must be supported by documentation from Disability Resources and Services (DRS). The student should present the DRS documentation supporting the request to their advisor and AROC Coordinator. If the requested accommodation(s) is(are) feasible, the AROC Coordinator will communicate the accommodation(s) to the designate support staff at least 3 weeks in advance so that appropriate accommodations can be made.
4. Deadline for application to take the examination is one month prior to the date of administration. Students may elect to take the examination via the computer or paper and pencil. AROC Coordinators will inform the designated support staff as to which students will be sitting for the examination and if they want to use a computer. All internet capability will be disabled during the examination. 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 examination. Students are responsible for the printing fees and must have sufficient funds available on their Pitt ID card or alternate card at the time. The student Pitt ID card **must be active**. All students must provide Pitt ID card or government-issued photo ID upon taking the examination.
5. Students will be notified of the location of the examination by designated support staff. In the event that multiple locations must be scheduled, students will be notified at least 72-hours prior to the examination as to which location they are assigned.
6. The research examination shall be administered on the same day to all students across all AROC. The clinical practice examination shall be administered on the same day to all students in the same AROC. 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.
7. The completed examinations will be sent to the respective AROC Coordinators for distribution for grading. A blinded review of each examination will be completed by graduate faculty within each AROC. A second blinded review will be completed of all examinations (clinical practice and research) that do not meet passing criteria upon initial review. In the event of discordant evaluations between primary and secondary review, a third and final blinded review will be conducted. MSN Comprehensive Examination Committee will assist faculty in securing second or third reviewers with appropriate content area expertise upon the request from AROC Coordinators.
8. Graduate faculty within AROC will verify when students have satisfactorily completed both components of the comprehensive examination and will notify the AROC Coordinator. Each AROC Coordinator will report the results of both components of the comprehensive examination to the MSN Comprehensive Examination Committee no later than the last day of the term in which the examination was completed. The results will include a list of the students who completed each component of the examination and, for each student, whether they passed or failed on their first attempt. For students who failed either or both components of the examination on the first attempt, the document should indicate whether they completed the second attempt and, if so, whether they passed or failed the examination. For students who failed the examination on the second attempt, the remediation plan to be completed

prior to the third attempt will be submitted to MSN Comprehensive Examination Committee for approval. The MSN Comprehensive Examination Committee will inform the Associate Dean for SAAR and the Director of Evaluation of the results of the examination.

9. Notification of pass/fail of the examination or any portion of the examination will be sent to the student, the MSN Comprehensive Examination Committee and the student's advisor by the AROC Coordinator. The MSN Comprehensive Examination Committee will send SAAR and Director of Evaluation a list of students who took the examination and whether or not they passed the examination and on which attempt.

Procedure for Administering MSN Comprehensive Examination 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. The student is responsible for identifying a proctor and location and informing the AROC Coordinator. If the student chooses to use a computer, all internet capability must be disabled.
3. The AROC 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 AROC Coordinator 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 examination)
 - 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 AROC Coordinator or designee will be available to students/proctor on the day of the examination should there be any questions with the examination. (Students are not permitted to ask the proctor questions related to the content of the examination).
6. The completed examination along with supporting documents and flash drives will be mailed back to the AROC 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; 17-18, 18-19