

**UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF NURSING**

**ACADEMIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE
GRADUATE PROGRAM**

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

ORIGINALDATE: **JANUARY 1995**

LAST REVIEWED/REVISED: **APRIL 2025**

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 that 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 (ARCO)/major Coordinator () 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 a second master's degree seeking and post-professional certificate program student is made by the ARCO/major 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 include 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 ARCO/major Coordinator in consultation with graduate faculty in the areas of concentration. Each ARCO/major 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 step must be done once and only again if the 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 ARCO/major 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 an 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 ARCO/major 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 ARCO/major Coordinator, 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 components 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 Online for Onsite, Online, and Distance Education Students

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 ARCO Coordinators who will then notify students in the ARCO/major 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 ARCO/major 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 ARCO/major Coordinator. If the requested accommodation(s) is(are) feasible, the ARCO/major 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. ARCO/major 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. 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. All students will sit for the MSN Comprehensive Examination on the same day using the online Learning Management System. 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.
6. The completed examinations will be accessible to the respective ARCO/major Coordinators for distribution for grading. A review of each examination will be completed by graduate faculty within each ARCO/major. A second 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 reviewers, a third and final 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 ARCO/major Coordinators.
7. Graduate faculty within ARCO/major will verify when students have satisfactorily completed both components of the comprehensive examination and will notify the ARCO/major Coordinator. Each ARCO/major 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 Graduate Clinical Education and the Assistant Dean for Data Analytics and Evaluation of the results of the examination.
8. 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 ARCO Coordinator. The

MSN Comprehensive Examination Committee will send Student Affairs and Assistant Dean for Data Analytics and Evaluation a list of students who took the examination and whether or not they passed the examination, and on which attempt.

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, 24-25