



PhD Program in Health

Comprehensive Research and Examination Guidelines

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Graduate Supervision and Supervisor Responsibilities

Graduate supervision is an important part of training scholars. Positive, respectful, professional, and productive working relationships are paramount to the success of graduate students and their advisors/supervisors. Arrange a consultation meeting with your supervisor to outline the parameters of your graduate supervision in the comprehensive research process. **It is recommended that students use the draft graduate supervision checklist to establish expectations and responsibilities with their graduate supervisor before supervision begins.** Both students and supervisors are to familiarize themselves with the draft policy on Graduate Supervision, as well.

To access the Faculty of Graduate Studies supervision checklist and graduate supervision policy visit [here](#):

Role of the Graduate Program Office

The role of the Graduate Program Office (GPO) in supporting graduate student supervision is a very important one. The GPO is responsible for setting program expectations, ensuring that graduate students have a clear sense of what is expected of them to successfully fulfill their degree requirements in a timely manner. This includes setting up an explicit timeline including all project milestones.

It is the role of the GPO to keep the student informed, on track, to direct the student to relevant offices and procedures as they progress through their degree, and to participate in the resolution of any supervisor-student conflicts. Students are welcomed to discuss scenarios with the Graduate Program Assistant and consult with the **HLTH PHD Guidelines and Forms** [section](#) of the website.

Conflict Resolution Policy

Conflicts should be resolved as close to the source as possible. Students and Supervisors are encouraged to address any issues promptly and informally with the Graduate Program Director. Consult with the Faculty of Graduate Studies policy on [conflict resolution](#).

Guidelines on Comprehensive Examinations¹

Doctoral students in the Graduate Program in Health (HLTH) must complete comprehensive examination requirements prior to commencing their proposal and dissertation in the field of **Health Policy and Equity (HP&E)** or **Health System Management and Health Data Analytics (HSM&HDA)**. Students, within each field, are to successfully complete two Comprehensive Papers and defend them in an oral examination to demonstrate their readiness to undertake independent dissertation research in the doctoral program per the Program Learning Outcomes outlined below.

- i. Depth & breadth of knowledge: Articulate a thorough understanding of theoretical frameworks, debates, key concepts, ideas, empirical research findings and gaps in the topics of interest within the field of health policy and equity OR health system management and health data analytics.
- ii. Research and scholarship: Select from and apply theoretical frameworks and concepts to inform the critical review of related literature in the field of health policy and equity OR health system management and health data analytics.
- iii. Professional capacity/autonomy: Demonstrate autonomous initiative and intellectual independence; Receive and act on constructive feedback on one's own academic work.
- iv. Level of communication skills: Clearly, accurately, and concisely communicate complex ideas, arguments, theoretical frameworks, debates, and critical review of literature in oral, written, chart and diagram formats within field of health policy and equity OR health system management and health data analytics.
- v. Awareness of limits of knowledge: Recognize the limitations of one's own work, training, and discipline, as well as the complexity of knowledge, and of the potential contributions of other interpretations, methods, and disciplines/perspectives.

Selecting Comprehensive Supervisors

Each doctoral student is responsible to submit the **Notification of PhD Comprehensive Paper Supervisors and Timeline form** to the Graduate Program Office (gradhlth@yorku.ca) before they engage in this requirement. All faculty appointed in the Health Graduate Program, including Adjunct Faculty and Professor Emeritus, with Full-status appointments at the Faculty of Graduate Studies, are eligible to supervise comprehensive papers.

1) Format and Structure of Comprehensive Papers:

The Graduate Program in Health defines health broadly as mental, physical, and social well-being. The comprehensive examination requires the doctoral students to engage in written and oral academic inquiry on a topic or problem of interest that extends the bounds of coursework and moves toward the conceptual work of the dissertation.

PhD students in HLTH are required to complete two Comprehensive Papers under the supervision of two faculty members (Comprehensive Supervisory Committee) appointed to the Graduate Program in Health, each of them supervising one comprehensive paper and advising on the other one. Each of the Comprehensive Papers and its oral examination will have an equal weighting, and a single integrated outcome will be

¹ This policy is applied to all students joining the HLTH program in 2023 and onwards until further notice. Those students who started the program before 2023 have the option to adopt this updated version or the version from the year they started the program.

- Stage 1: The student's successful completion of the written papers and approval by supervisors to move to the oral examination (as per Program Learning Outcomes).
- Stage 2: An oral examination that allows for presentation of the papers, and questions, reflections and clarifications as needed to evaluate the student's competence (as per Program Learning Outcomes).

Each comprehensive paper is in essay format and informed by comprehensive and critical reviews of literature conducted by the student. The students are asked to propose questions for each paper using the following overarching framework:

- Comprehensive Paper 1: What are the salient theoretical frameworks and debates in (a) health policy and equity or (b) health system management and health data analytics to examine your topic of interest?
- Comprehensive Paper 2: What are the key concepts, ideas, empirical research findings (qualitative and quantitative) and gaps as they relate to the topic of your interest? In this paper, an appendix must be included that explores various methods that you could use to address research questions in this specific area, examines the debates around these methods and then justifies your choice of the methods ultimately chosen.

For each of the comprehensive papers, students are asked to prepare an outline of the paper (abstract of 500 words) and a preliminary reading list. The students accomplish this by seeking advice from their respective faculty supervisors. The Abstract and Reading List for each of the comprehensive paper are approved by the supervisors and the dates for the submission of written papers (stage 1) and for the oral examination (stage 2) are set.

These documents (i.e., approved Abstract and Reading List) and the scheduled dates are submitted to the Graduate Program Office (gradhlth@yorku.ca) with the **Notification of Comprehensive Paper Supervisors and Timeline Form**. The graduate program office will obtain the Graduate Program Director's approval.

The student then begins an independent review of literature to complete the two papers. Each of the comprehensive papers are essays of 20-25 pages (double spaced) exclusive of a table of contents, abstract, and references. Comprehensive Paper 2 must also include an appendix of an additional 5-10 pages (double spaced). We strongly recommend that students complete the comprehensive papers sequentially (rather than concurrently).

2) Academic Milestone and Scheduling:

Doctoral students in HLTH first complete their required course work, normally by end of term 2 or 3. They initiate their work for the comprehensive examination by securing their comprehensive supervisors; identifying their topic of interest; preparing a plan to answer the proposed questions; developing a reading list; and submitting the Abstract and Reading List, approved by the comprehensive supervisors, to the Graduate Program Office for approval, normally in term 4. Once these papers are prepared by a student, the oral examination on these papers will take place by **Year 2 (Term Six)**, excluding exceptional circumstances.

Scheduling of the oral examination occurs when the comprehensive supervisors deem the work to meet academic standards and is set by the student and supervisors in consultation with the Graduate Program Office. Scheduling information will ordinarily be provided to students and participating faculty no less than 20 business days in advance of the oral exam. If an examination must be rescheduled, students and all faculty members

involved will normally be informed no later than 5 business days prior to the examination date.

Students are encouraged to begin planning and preparing for their comprehensive requirements well before HLTH deadlines.

3) Accessibility and Accommodations:

HLTH is committed to equity, diversity and inclusion for student access and accommodations. Students requiring accommodations to fulfill comprehensive requirements are urged to have a discussion with the Graduate Program Director prior to or when they meet to review their first annual PhD Progress Report on Academic Progress, and their comprehensive supervisors once they are secured. In addition, the student accessibility services office at the university may be consulted.

4) Evaluation & Outcomes:

The Comprehensive Examination Committee includes two supervisors who are responsible for evaluating the student. The comprehensive examination is composed of two parts: written (stage 1) and oral (stage 2). The oral comprehensive examination will preliminarily be scheduled when the supervisors approve the abstracts and reading lists. The date will be confirmed to proceed when the supervisors approve both written components.

At stage 1, the written essays will be evaluated by the supervisors for student's competence per specified Program Learning Outcomes in the chosen field. The supervisors will recommend either **1) proceeding with the scheduled oral examination or 2) a single set of revisions** to incorporate provided feedback, normally completed over one month's time. Upon re-submission, if the papers do not meet the Program Learning Outcomes, the supervisors will inform the Graduate Program Director, and this will result in student's withdrawal from the program. In case of no re-submission of the revised papers within one month, the supervisors will inform the Graduate Program Director, and this will result in student's withdrawal from the program for lack of meeting the academic program milestones. On evaluation report for stage 1 will be submitted by the comprehensive supervisors using **Stage 1 FORM** to the Graduate Program Office (gradhlth@yorku.ca), for the program's record.

At stage 2, the Oral Examination will take place to assess the content of the papers and the oral examination. This closed exam is approximately two hours long and scheduled when the abstract and reading lists are approved and confirmed to proceed when the faculty supervisors have approved the written papers. Prior to scheduling the oral exam, the student will send copies of their approved papers to the Graduate Program Director. At the oral examination, the student is to first present a 10–15-minute overview of Comprehensive Paper 1 that is followed by a round of questions by the examination committee. The examination of Comprehensive paper 2 then follows the same process. Students are required to show competence in their chosen fields in relation to the questions posed for each paper, to demonstrate competence with the Program Learning Outcomes specified above.

The oral exam will be chaired by the GPD or representative (non-voting). The comprehensive requirement is assessed by the supervisors using one of the following categories: **pass; pass with specified revision(s); pass with major revision(s); or fail**. If there is a split vote in the oral exam, the Graduate Program Director or designate will confer with faculty supervisors and cast the deciding vote. The signed **Stage 2 FORM** will be submitted to the Graduate Program Office (gradhlth@yorku.ca) by the exam chair. "Specified revisions" normally refers to correction of typos and/or minor clarifications. "Major revisions" normally refers to the areas of comprehensive paper(s) where competence during the oral exam was not exhibited. Students who receive a rating of "pass with specified revisions" must fulfill all the conditions satisfactorily within 1 week of the exam date. Students who receive a rating of "pass with major revisions" must satisfactorily incorporate clearly laid out revisions within 1 month of the exam date. The

revised written document(s) need final approval by the respective comprehensive supervisor(s) and advisor(s), who notify the Graduate Program Office. A rating of "fail" in oral examination will result in the student's withdrawal from the program. Successful completion of the oral exam qualifies students to begin the dissertation proposal. Upon successful completion of the oral comprehensive examination, the student will submit final e-copies of both comprehensive papers to the Graduate Program Office (gradhlth@yorku.ca), for the program's record.

5) Procedures for Updating Comprehensive Examination Requirements:

The policies and procedures for Comprehensive Examinations will be updated/revised in case of identification of a need, such as improvements in students' progress, alignment with FGS policies and procedures, and/or recommendations in the cyclical program review.

Appendix 1: Cover Page for Comprehensive Exam Paper

[TITLE]

[Student Name]

Supervisor: [Name]

Advisor: [Name]

Comprehensive Examination Paper [1 or 2] submitted to the Graduate Program in Health in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctoral of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Health
York University
Toronto, Ontario
M3J 1P3

[Month, Date, Year]