

Ph.D. Comprehensive Examinations in School Psychology

Purpose

The doctoral comprehensive examination in school psychology is designed to meet three objectives. These objectives are consistent with the School Psychology program philosophy that focuses on the development of doctoral students within a scientist-practitioner framework.

- **Demonstration of a *breadth* of knowledge in School Psychology.** The comprehensive examination allows students to integrate knowledge in school psychology from their coursework and practicum experiences as well as their own independent readings and experiences.
- **Demonstration of *depth* of knowledge in School Psychology.** The comprehensive examination assists students in the synthesis and critical evaluation of knowledge in school psychology. Students are required to apply knowledge to real and hypothetical situations and synthesize, analyze, and critically evaluate material from coursework, research literature and experiences in school psychology and related domains.
- **Evaluation of competencies in core areas of School Psychology.** The comprehensive examination provides the school psychology area faculty with a cumulative evaluation of each doctoral student. Successful completion of the comprehensive examination provides a demonstration that professional competencies in core areas of school psychology have been attained, consistent with study and learning at the doctoral level.

Components Of The Comprehensive Examination

A. Overview of the Comprehensive Examination

The comprehensive examination in School Psychology consists of preparation for the examination, a written proposal, written presentation (Literature Review Paper and Psycho-educational Case Report) and a final oral examination of the written presentation documents. Details of these components are provided below. It is expected that the case study will be completed in no more than a six-month period at or near the end of the student's formal program course work. Successful completion of the comprehensive examination and oral defense of the dissertation research proposal are the final requirements for admission to candidacy.

B. Expectations & Primary Components of the Comprehensive Examination

- **Overview.** The student will complete a *psycho-educational case* selected in consultation with the student's comprehensive examination committee (described below). The written presentation of the case will consist of two major components: 1) Literature Review Paper and 2) Psycho-educational Case Report. Students may elect to conduct an assessment focused or an intervention focused case. Details of these components are described below.
- **Literature Review Paper.** The literature review paper emphasizes links between relevant research and selected aspects of the case conducted. The particular focus of the case depends on the nature of the referral problem described, but students are free to choose whether the primary emphasis of the literature review component of the comprehensive examination is on intervention or assessment issues relevant to the case. The Literature Review Paper should be a focused critical review paper.

Students are encouraged to identify one aspect of the case and develop a paper around the topic in consultation with the examination committee. The student will be asked questions about the paper at the final oral examination including aspects of the Literature Review Paper that may have informed conceptualization and assessment and intervention procedures for their case.

- ***Options for the Case Report.***

- ***Assessment Focused Case.*** If this option is selected the student will conduct a psycho-educational assessment of an individual referred for assessment due to cognitive, academic, social, emotional, and/or behavioural concerns. The student will conduct the assessment and prepare a concise psycho-educational assessment report including typical sections of a complete psycho-educational assessment report (e.g., referral and background information, description of assessment procedures, results obtained, eligibility and/or diagnosis, and implications for intervention). Specific assessment measures and procedures will vary from case to case and may include standardized norm-referenced measures (e.g. achievement, cognitive, social, emotional, behavioural), informal assessment measures, curriculum-based measures, direct observations, rating scales, interviews, and other measures or procedures relevant to the case. Thus, a variety of techniques may be used, yet the specific measures and procedures should be relevant to the nature of referral questions and focus of the case. The student should also demonstrate their ability to apply B.C. Ministry of Education Special Education Services eligibility and diagnostic procedures¹ as appropriate. Within approximately two weeks of the completion of the written case report the student will present the case at the final oral examination with the examination committee for further discussion of the assessment, including the assessment process, case report, and decisions made. The goal is for students to move beyond the typical assessment to demonstrate their ability to analyze, interpret, and critically evaluate their work with a single client in light of and with links to the review of relevant theory, research, and practice.
- ***Intervention Focused Case.*** If this option is selected the student will conduct a psycho-educational intervention of an individual or small group demonstrating cognitive, academic, social, emotional, and/or behavioural concerns. The student will conduct the intervention and prepare a concise psycho-educational intervention report including typical sections of a complete psycho-educational intervention report (e.g., referral and background information, description of assessment and intervention procedures, results obtained, and recommendations/implications for future interventions). Specific intervention procedures will vary from case to case. The report should include a detailed description of intervention procedures, a rationale for the intervention/consultation strategies attempted/recommended, and a brief presentation of evidence of the strategies' effectiveness, based on the more comprehensive Literature Review Paper analysis and critical evaluation of relevant research, theory, and practice in the area. The assessment measures in an intervention-focused case should provide information directly relevant to intervention. Effectiveness should be clearly documented using an appropriate evaluation design (e.g., single case study design) with pre-post measurement and/or formative assessment of key outcome variables.

¹ This will typically involve using the most current edition of the DSM

Preparing for the Comprehensive Examination

A. Identifying an Examination Chair and Clinical Supervisor for the Comprehensive Examination.

One member of the core school psychology faculty will serve as chair of the examination committee. The examination chair is typically the advisor or research supervisor of the student. Most often, the examination chair also serves as the clinical supervisor for the exam. If, given the focus of the exam and case the advisor/research supervisor is not the best person to provide clinical supervision for the exam, the examination chair and advisor/research supervisor will work with the student to identify an appropriate clinical supervisor for the exam. If there is an outside the core faculty clinical supervisor, they must work closely with the examination chair to ensure the process outlined in this document is followed recognizing this is a comprehensive examination case and not a typical clinical case. This includes sharing this document with the clinical supervisor (or any committee member outside of the SCPS faculty).

B. Comprehensive Examination Committee

The comprehensive examination committee will consist of three faculty members, selected by the student in consultation with the comprehensive examination chair of the committee, at least two of whom are members of the School Psychology faculty. As indicated above the chair must be a core member of the School Psychology program faculty, and at least one committee member must serve as the clinical supervisor for the exam. An additional committee member from the field who is approved by the two School Psychology faculty members on the committee may also be included as a fourth committee member. However, there should always be three members of the committee with academic appointments.

C. Identifying a Case.

The student, working closely with their comprehensive examination chair and clinical supervisor, will explore options for locating a case. There are a number of possibilities for identifying a case that include, but are not limited to: 1) a case from their specialty placement, 2) a referral to the Psycho-educational Research and Training Centre (PRTC), or 3) a referral from other sources such as a faculty member or a school district.

Given the timing of the comprehensive examination and the doctoral specialty practicum, students are encouraged to explore options for a case while on practicum or have discussed with their advisor early in the process. While either the student or the examination chair and/or clinical supervisor (or another faculty member) may identify the case, the exam chair and/or clinical supervisor should have some initial contact with the client's legal guardian to review the expectations for the exam and case. This will include a discussion of the persons involved with the case, duration of the experience, fees, issues of confidentiality, supervision, etc. ***before the student begins the formal intake process for the case.*** This discussion will contribute to the parent/guardian having "informed" consent for the student's work with the identified client. If the clinical supervisor for the case is not a member of the core SCPS faculty they should meet early in the process with the doctoral student and the examination chair to clarify the process and roles.

D. Preparatory Meetings.

The student should meet with their comprehensive exam chair ***early*** in the process to help identify a case and select the examination committee. Based on those discussions there may be a need for informal discussions in person or via email with members of the

committee to help focus the examination proposal. This portion of the process will vary with the needs of the case, the graduate student, the supervisor, and committee. Students will also typically meet, at least briefly, with the client/guardian (or other relevant participants in the process) of the case to help identify and better clarify the reason for referral in the case of an assessment or target area in the case of an intervention. When a delay is anticipated between the time of referral and the proposal meeting, the student, with the approval of the exam chair and clinical supervisor, may initiate the formal assessment and/or intervention process prior to the proposal meeting. The student should not get too far into the work on the case (assessment or intervention) until the proposal proposal is approved by the full committee at or following the proposal meeting.

E. Potential Case Study Focus and Literature Review Topics.

A list of recent case foci and literature review topics are listed on the UBC school psychology website: <http://ecps.educ.ubc.ca/school-psychology/scps-forms-documents/>.

The Comprehensive Examination Proposal

A. Components of the Proposal.

The expected focus of the case should be clearly described in a brief written proposal to the student's comprehensive examination committee. The student will work closely with the examination chair and clinical supervisor to prepare a written proposal, and the examination chair will review the proposal for approval prior to sending it to the committee. The proposal will have two main sections: 1) Proposed Review of Literature focus and 2) Case focus. It is anticipated that the length of the exam proposal will be approximately 4 to 6 pages total and will be distributed to the committee approximately 2 weeks before the Proposal Meeting. Note that while some preliminary work with the client may occur before the proposal meeting such as a parent intake or initial meeting with the student, with consultation with the supervisor to better understand how to frame the proposal, the graduate student should not begin significant assessment or intervention work on the case until after the committee has met and reviewed the proposal.

- **Proposed Literature Review.** It is recognized that it may be difficult to determine the specific focus of the literature review until the graduate student is more involved in the case. However, students are encouraged to reflect on their case in its early phases and identify a relevant area of focus for the paper. It is anticipated that the paper will ideally enhance some aspect of the case but also provide direction for future practice and research.
- **Proposed Case.** In their proposal for the case component the student will provide an overview of the reason for referral, case progress and information collected by the time of the proposal meeting, proposed assessment and/or intervention procedures with brief rationale, and potential follow up procedures.

B. Proposal Meeting.

The student will distribute the proposal to exam committee members approximately 2 weeks in advance of the meeting. The committee will meet with the student for approximately one hour to discuss the proposal and approve the proposed plan for the Review of Literature and Case. Once approved the exam chair will complete the Comprehensive Examination Proposal Approval Form (see SCPS website at <http://ecps.educ.ubc.ca/school-psychology/scps-forms-documents/>) with signatures of all members of the committee and the student. The Comprehensive Examination Approval Form will be placed in the student's file with the SCPS Graduate Secretary. The Approval

Form will serve as a record of the approval to move forward with the review paper and case and specify conditions (if any). If there is a need for any significant changes while the student is conducting the case or completing the Review of the Literature, the student should discuss the changes with their exam chair to develop a revised plan and seek approval from the exam committee. Amendments or changes may be done in a meeting or more informally via email discussions with the exam committee following a plan and timeline agreed upon by all members of the exam committee (including the student). Following approval of the proposal by the committee, the student will complete the Case and Review of the Literature over a period of approximately 6 months. Note that the case and the paper go together. There is one proposal meeting that addresses both components of the comprehensive examination.

The final comprehensive examination document will include the Review of Literature and references, and the Case Report. It is expected that the Review of Literature document will follow APA style guidelines. The Case Report will follow a format consistent with previous training and supported by the supervisory committee.

Conducting the Case

A. Supervision

As graduate students in psychology, students are expected to follow appropriate legal and ethical guidelines in completing their Case. ***Students are expected to have regular (at minimum bi-weekly) on-going, face-to-face supervision with their clinical supervisor for the duration of the case.*** If the clinical supervisor is different from the chair of the examination committee, the chair of the examination committee should also be given regular updates as the case moves forward. Because this is a comprehensive examination the primary objective of the supervision meetings is to keep the supervisor informed and up to date on the case. The student at this level should expect to conduct the case with minimal direct supervision and direction from the exam chair and clinical supervisor; however, ethics of the profession dictate that the clinical supervisor maintains responsibility for the case and actions of the student and may take a more direct role in supervision and provision of services when deemed necessary. As such the clinical supervisor must have regular supervision meetings as highlighted above. Additionally, ethics of the profession may require the clinical supervisor to have at least some direct, face-to-face contact with the client during the course of the case. Students must maintain detailed case notes and logs for supervision. These logs and case notes should be available to the exam committee at the time of the final oral exam, following proper legal and ethical procedure to ensure client confidentiality of notes.

In some situations it may be necessary to appoint a field-based clinical supervisor outside of the university to provide clinical supervision the case. When this occurs that person is typically invited to serve on the exam committee. Any outside clinical supervisor should be a registered psychologist. It is the responsibility of the examination chair to communicate the nature of supervision and their level involvement in the case with the field-based clinical supervisor.

B. Graduate Student Registration with the PRTC

If the graduate student needs to access materials, purchase protocols, book testing rooms, they must be registered with the PRTC the term they are doing the case. Once a Case Opening Form is filed with the PRTC secretary, an account for protocols can be set up by the PRTC staff. The completed Consent Form should be included in the PRTC file as soon as it is available.

C. Costs

There is typically no fee charged for the case. Costs for protocols and other materials are typically paid for by the graduate student unless other arrangements are made. This should be discussed with the examination chair and as needed with the clinical supervisor.

D. Sharing Results with the Client

The exam chair and clinical supervisor, in collaboration with the student, will determine when it is appropriate to discuss results and release the Case Report to the client. Results are often not shared with the client/guardian/relevant parties until the case is completed and reviewed by the examination committee. However, in situations where there is a pressing need to share results, the student may, with the approval of the exam chair and clinical supervisor, release results prior to the formal Oral Examination. The written case report is reviewed by the examination committee and discussed at the oral examination. Revisions to the Case Report may be required. After the Case Report is approved by the supervisor(s), a written copy of the report may be distributed to the client. This may involve an additional meeting with the client (in the case of a child). The client/guardian may also request the results be shared at a meeting with the school or other agencies. No written copy of the Case Report should be distributed until it is approved and signed by the case clinical supervisor (and other committee members, if applicable) and approved by the examination chair.

The oral examination is not intended to delay the distribution of the Case Report beyond typical case timelines; when there is a significant delay between the completion of case activities and the oral examination, the exam chair and clinical supervisor may approve the distribution of the Case Report prior to the formal exam. In this scenario, the student and exam chair are encouraged to informally consult the examination committee prior to distributing the Case Report.

Preparing the Review of the Literature Paper

The Review of Literature Paper emphasizes links between relevant research and selected aspects of the case conducted. As highlighted above the particular focus of the Review of the Literature depends on the nature of the referral problem described. Students are free to choose whether the primary emphasis of the Review of Literature component of the comprehensive examination is on intervention or assessment issues relevant to the case. The Review of Literature Paper should be a focused critical review of the literature. There are different types of literature reviews and students are encouraged to discuss an appropriate type of literature for their paper with the comprehensive examination committee. Students should identify one aspect of their Case and develop a paper around the topic in consultation with their examination chair and committee. For samples and suggestions of what to include in such a paper and how to organize the review, students are encouraged to look at review papers in journals such as *Psychological Bulletin* or *Review of Education Research* for ideas on format and typical length. While the length of the paper will vary with the topic, students are encouraged to keep their reviews focused and concise with a typical Review of the Literature paper between 25 and 30 double-spaced pages including references. The paper should be written consistent with the current *American Psychological Association Publication/Style Manual*, including attention to guidelines for self-plagiarism (e.g., “the core of the new document must constitute an original contribution to knowledge,” p. 16). The Review of Literature should be novel and not substantially overlap with prior course assignments or student theses.

Final Oral Examination for the Comprehensive Evaluation

A. Overview.

The comprehensive examination chair will schedule at date for the final oral examination for the comprehensive examination with the student and members of the examination committee. This meeting will typically occur within two weeks following submission of the Case Report and the Review of the Literature. The final oral examination for the comprehensive examination is scheduled for two hours and typically begins with a brief presentation of the Case by the doctoral student. The examination committee then has an opportunity to ask questions and engage the student in a discussion of the written Case Report as well as the oral presentation and defense by the student and the Review of the Literature paper. Following the oral examination the student will be asked to leave the room while the examination committee meets in camera to render a pass/fail decision regarding the comprehensive examination, based on the criteria stated below. The student is then invited back into the room and examination committee provides feedback to the student including the results of their decision.

B. Evaluation

Each member of the examination committee will evaluate the exam as either pass or fail, on the basis of the following criteria, as appropriate for a given case:

- Demonstration of in-depth understanding of the chosen area(s) of focus and related knowledge and skills
- Evidence of knowledge of and competence in ethical and legal bases of professional practice
- Demonstration of knowledge and competence in skills relevant to the area under study
- Demonstration of the ability to identify and critically analyze literatures to address a significant question or issue within School Psychology
- Demonstration of ability to link and integrate theory/research and application/practice
- Evidence of the ability to utilize multiple frameworks to understand the origins and development problems and their resolution in individuals and systems
- Evidence of ability to consider multiple points of view both in the study of problems and the presentation of results
- Demonstration of high standards of written communication, with clear and concise written presentation utilizing APA style where relevant as well as clear and concise oral presentation.

For the comprehensive examination to be deemed a “pass”, at least two of the three committee members must support a decision of competency, based on the criteria identified above (in the case of a four member committee at least 3 of the 4 must support a decision of “pass”). In the event that the comprehensive examination is not deemed a “pass”, the examination committee will recommend a supplementary procedure and establish a time line for completion. The committee may recommend *revisions* to the document, with or without re-examination, or the committee may recommend *further inquiry* on the part of the student, with preparation of a revised document (re-write), normally with a written and oral re-examination. A re-examination will normally follow the same procedures as the initial comprehensive examination, but may be abbreviated with consensus agreement of the student and members of the examination committee. Only one re-write is permitted.

If the student’s revision/further inquiry are not acceptable (using the criteria highlighted above) the result will be a “fail” grade for the comprehensive examination. Since

successful completion of the comprehensive examination is a program requirement, students who are assigned a "fail" grade on the comprehensive examination will be required to withdraw from the program. Appeals of examination results should follow the appeal procedure identified in the university calendar as "Senate Appeals on Academic Standing".

Final Documentation

Upon successful completion of the comprehensive examination the examination chair completes the Comprehensive Examination Completion Form and all members of the examination committee sign the form. A copy of the Examination Completion Form along with the Review of the Literature Paper should be placed in the doctoral students file with the SCPS Graduate Secretary. A final copy of the signed report, as well as consent and release forms (if applicable) should be placed on file within the PRTC (unless other arrangements have been made in the case of a client not seem as a part of the PRTC and a the report should not be on PRTC letterhead) and a copy is provided to the client/guardian. The doctoral student and the examination chair should also keep copies of the completed Case report and Review of the Literature paper.