PhD IN POPULATION HEALTH

POP9998: COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION GUIDELINES

Prerequisites: successful completion of the three core courses of the program; POP 8910, POP8920 and POP8930. Students should have been exposed to both quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

The comprehensive examination will be offered once a year, normally in the fall and to be completed in the second year of the program. Your first registration to the comprehensive examination begins in the summer of year 1. This period is devoted to the exam preparation. You must also register for the fall session of year 2, the official examination period.

Students completing the exam will submit to the program office a summary of approximately 100 words on their thesis proposal topic in the beginning of the summer, year 1. The program office is responsible to request the summary.

The objective of the program is to prepare graduates with the skills needed to:

- Generate new knowledge for, and thus advance the science of population health.
- Undertake transdisciplinary analyses of complex population health problems.
- Apply rigorous scientific methods to studies of population health.
- Function as effective members of transdisciplinary research and implementation teams.

On program completion graduates are expected to have acquired analytic, research and behavioral skills to:

- Assemble, synthesize and analyze complex data from diverse sources to provide a comprehensive description of a population health problem and its causes or determinants.
- Draw valid conclusions from multiple sources of evidence to formulate clear and appropriate recommendations for research, practice and/or policy.
- Demonstrate insight as to the ways in which various disciplines may contribute to the analysis of complex population health issues.
- Demonstrate a repertoire of research skills applicable to population health problems in one or more domains for the framework.
- Demonstrate advanced use of research skills appropriate to the in-depth study of a population health issue in one domain of the framework.
- Articulate strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research methods for investigating different types of population health problems.
- Perform in-depth analyses of, and describe interactions among, one or more of the following: determinants of health, intervention components, or intersectoral policies.
- Effectively contribute as a member of a transdisciplinary team.
- Appropriately summarize complex ideas and research findings for policy-makers and health professionals.

Students are expected to demonstrate a breadth of knowledge in the field of population health (as defined by the PhD program framework). Your mastery of this breadth of knowledge is evaluated through two distinct mechanisms: a set of questions and an oral defense of your answers to them.
The specific objectives for the comprehensive exams are:

- To assess your knowledge and application of core competencies in the field of population health.
- To assess your ability to select, critique, interpret and synthesize relevant data and quality evidence to address population health problems.
- To determine your ability to articulate and defend orally your written responses to questions pertaining to population health issues.
- To assess your competence as a critical consumer of interdisciplinary qualitative and quantitative research in the field of population health.

Comprehensive exams have been designed based on the following principles:

- Several domains of competence will be evaluated: a) core competencies in the field of population health, b) problem-solving and critical analysis of population health issues requiring intervention and c) ability to formulate and orally defend written answers to specific sets of questions.
- In order to test the breadth of your knowledge in the field of population health, problems selected for the comprehensive exam will be independent of your thesis topic.
- Examining juries will be comprised of an interdisciplinary team of faculty.

The two evaluation mechanisms used for comprehensive examinations are:

- A population health scenario and a set of questions;
- An oral defense of written responses.

A deadline of three weeks is granted to answer the written component. The dates of the scenario and questions; hand-in of your written responses; confirmation if you pass to the oral component and the date of your oral presentation will be sent by email to your @uottawa account. You will be asked to confirm receipt of this.

Part I – Written component

A population health scenario and a set of questions (provided in both French and English) which are developed by the professors teaching in the program, jury members and the program director. These are designed to assess fundamental competencies for the field of population health. These questions will focus on the learning objectives of the core courses (scientific paradigms, investigative methods and population health interventions) and the five core knowledge areas of the program.

Throughout this period it is not permitted to consult with your thesis director or co-director (if applicable) or any members of the examination jury about your answers to the questions or your oral argument. These exams are based on your individual efforts.

Your answers should use a maximum of 4 pages in 1.5 spacing, one-inch margins all around; 12 point-font per question (excluding references and appendix). References and appendices must not exceed 12 pages. You may write them in English or in French, but only one language must be used throughout. Quotations should follow the guidelines for the University rules on plagiarism www.uOttawa.ca/plagiarism.pdf.

On submission day you will submit three hard copies of your paper to the program office by 16:00. No late submissions will be accepted. Late submissions will result in a failing grade on the exam and the student will have to take the exam in the late winter/early spring of the following year. Submissions by email or by fax are not accepted.

Grading – Written component

Following the submission of the written answers you will receive a grade of satisfactory (S) or not satisfactory (NS). A satisfactory grade permits you to proceed to the oral component. If you receive a not satisfactory grade you will not be permitted to do the oral component but you will be allowed to do the complete comprehensive examination one more time on a subsequent date. Please refer to the FGPS General Regulations, E. Examinations and Grading, section 3. The NS grade will be recorded. You will be provided written feedback. A new scenario and jury committee would be developed for
Part II – Oral component

You will have 20 minutes to make a formal and polished oral presentation of your written answers with a maximum of 15 slides. A 20 to 30 minute period of questioning by the examining jury will follow. You may choose your preferred language (English or French) in answering the questions asked during the oral presentation.

Grading – Oral component

Following the oral component you will receive a grade satisfactory or not satisfactory. A satisfactory grade confirms that you have successfully passed the comprehensive exam. If you receive a not satisfactory grade you will be allowed to do the complete comprehensive examination (written and oral) one more time with a new scenario and jury committee. The NS grade will be recorded. The program office will confirm the grade by email in the following week using your @uOttawa account. You will reply to the email to confirmation that you have read the email.

We encourage the jury members to provide comments on the written and oral examination once the examination is complete. If comments are received, they will be sent to you by email and the jury members will not be identified. It is also possible that a jury member ask to meet with you to discuss the examination.

The membership of the jury is determined as follows:

- There will be one set of jury members. The jury will be composed of two members and the chair (director of the program). The members will be drawn from at least one of the core courses and the other member either from the program committee or from the list of professors associated with the program.
- The jury will be chaired by the program director, except if he/she is your thesis director or co-director (if applicable). In such case, the jury will be chaired by a faculty member.
- Your thesis director and co-director (if applicable) may not sit on the jury nor be present for the examination.
- Jury members will be from two different disciplines and from two different faculties.
- For each component of the exam, there will be one jury member with a qualitative research background and a second jury member with a quantitative research background.
- One jury member will have active language ability in French; the other will have active language ability in English. Both will have passive language ability in the other official language (as defined by the University of Ottawa).
- The chair of the jury will cast the deciding vote where the two voting jury members are unable to agree on a satisfactory or not satisfactory verdict.

Students must pass the written and oral components of the comprehensive exam. In the case of a failure a student may be permitted to repeat it once. The student will be given a new scenario.

All Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies regulations regarding comprehensive exams apply.

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