

Comprehensive Examination Policy for the Master of Arts in Gerontology (non-thesis option)

Student Guide

Successful completion of a comprehensive exam is a requirement in nearly every master's degree program at EIU. The format and procedures for this program are determined by the gerontology faculty affiliates. Students should refer to the graduate catalog for degree requirements.

A. Applying to Take the Comprehensive Exam

Before taking the comprehensive exam, a graduate student must complete 32 semester hours of coursework or be at the conclusion of his/her final courses for a Master of Arts in gerontology.

During the semester before he/she plans to take the exam, the student must complete a request form. This form, which must be signed by the student and his/her adviser, informs the gerontology program coordinator of the student's intention to take the exam.

The program coordinator sends a letter confirming the date and time of the exam along with each student's eligibility. Exams are scheduled to allow evaluation time prior to The Graduate School's due date to receive results.

Written exams should be viewed as a three-part process:

1. The student selects members of the comprehensive exam committee, which must include the gerontology program coordinator.
2. The student completes the written exam.
3. The student completes the oral exam. The oral exam is based on the written exam and is administered by the student's committee. It is the student's responsibility to schedule the oral exam.

Extreme circumstances may allow a student, with permission of the gerontology program coordinator, to postpone the comprehensive exam the semester it was requested.

Summer graduates planning to take the exam during the Spring semester must apply within the first 10 days of the term.

Students who have failed the exam may be allowed to retake it on the next scheduled exam date. See Section E for information regarding retakes and rewrites.

B. Format and Content of the Comprehensive Exam

Comprehensive exams are intended to encourage students to integrate what they have learned during their graduate studies at EIU; they evaluate students' knowledge of material from all required coursework and relevant current literature.

A student may take the comprehensive exam on a computer. If the exam is handwritten, the student must have the exam typed after immediately turning in a photocopy of the handwritten exam to the gerontology coordinator.

The copy is duplicated and sent to each of the student's committee members, who notify the student's adviser if there are any concerns regarding the exam.

C. Administration and Evaluation of Written and Oral Exams

The written exam is administered once in the Fall semester and once in the Spring. Dates are determined and announced each semester. The exam lasts three hours; time, date and location are arranged.

Before taking the exam, it is the student's responsibility to schedule a two-hour oral exam with his/her chosen committee.

a. Evaluation of Written Exam

Each question stands alone in the evaluation process; the student should not refer to other answers when answering a question.

Members of the student's committee evaluate each exam question independently.

Each question is evaluated on a pass/fail basis. Students must receive passing marks from all committee members. If a student fails his/her written exam, he/she cannot proceed with the oral exam.

Exams are evaluated on accuracy, objectivity, specificity, scope/breadth, organization, relevancy, clarity, documentation, course references and comprehensiveness.

a. Evaluation of the Oral Exam

Oral exam questions may be based on any questions from the written exam, not just those selected by the student. Upon successful completion of the oral exam, the student's committee signs off on two copies of the certificate of knowledge.

One copy is retained for the student's file, while the other is sent to The Graduate School. The student can "pass" or "pass with distinction" and is notified of the results immediately following oral exams.

D. Reporting of Examination Results

The gerontology program coordinator informs The Graduate School chair of the exam results. These results are treated confidentially.

Should a student fail the examination, his/her adviser provides constructive, written critiques of relevant exam items.

E. Retaking or Rewriting the Comprehensive Exam

a. Rewrite

If a student passes three of the four exam questions, graduate faculty may allow the student to rewrite answers to the fourth question during the same semester. This must take place before reports of exam results are due to The Graduate School.

The graduate faculty may request such rewrites when items seem incomplete or unclear, or when the student seems to lack a fundamental grasp of the material. Variations from the original question or more specific questions may be used for the rewrite.

If the student chooses not to rewrite at the designated time, he/she must take the exam during the next semester's comprehensive exam time. The student must reapply for this retake.

b. Retake

Students failing two or more exam questions must retake the entire comprehensive exam on the next scheduled exam date. The student must reapply for the retake. Students failing the exam on their second attempt are dropped from the program.

The student's adviser notifies the student of the exam results.

F. Appeals of Examination Results

If a student fails the examination or a question and its rewrite, he/she may appeal to the gerontology program committee for reconsideration of the exam results. Appeals, which state the grounds on which the appeal is based, must be submitted in written form. The student should discuss these options with his/her adviser.

For questions please contact:

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