



## DOCTORAL CANDIDACY ASSESSMENT

### Process and Guidelines

#### 1. Purpose

Students must successfully pass the Doctoral Candidacy Assessment (formerly known as the Comprehensive Exam) to advance in the program and become PhD candidates. To pass the assessment, the student must have demonstrated all three learning outcomes as per College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' *Policies and Procedures Section 6.2*:

- An adequate grasp of the current state of knowledge in the intended field of research.
- The potential ability to conduct advanced original research independently using relevant methods.
- The ability to communicate in ways appropriate to the field of research and practice.

Previously, outputs from the Comprehensive Exam were not allowed in the student's final thesis. However, as of May 1, 2024, CGPS guidelines now include the following statement: "The format and substance of the work for the candidacy assessment should be designed, to the greatest extent possible, to become a useful constitutive and formative part of the candidate's doctoral research and dissertation."

In the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition, the Candidacy Assessment consists of three components:

- A written review paper
- A presentation outlining a novel research study
- An oral examination defending the proposed research plan and review paper

#### 2. Process and Timeline

The process should be initiated within **10 to 12 months** of the student starting their PhD program and must be completed within the first **24 months** of their studies.

If circumstances beyond the student's control, such as family, medical, or other emergency, delay the course of the Candidacy Assessment, this must be discussed with the advisory committee and approved by the Office of the Associate Dean, Research, Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs (the Graduate Office) as early as possible. Students requiring formal accommodations based on a prohibited ground(s) are encouraged to register with Access and Equity Services.

##### 2.1 Initiation of the candidacy assessment process

- The process begins when the student prepares a one-page proposal for a written review paper that includes the title and objectives. The supervisor and advisory committee members can be consulted for assistance and feedback during development of this proposal. Refer also to Section 4.1. in this document for whom can and cannot be consulted during the assessment period.
- The student organizes an advisory committee meeting to approve the written paper topic. At least **one week** before this meeting, the student must email the proposal to the committee and Graduate Office.

- Students are encouraged to also submit a completed *Research Progress Meeting Yearly Update Form* (found under 'Current Students' on the College website) with their summary so the meeting can simultaneously count as the annual advisory committee meeting. The minutes will state that it served as a dual-purpose meeting.

## **2.2 Preliminary Meeting (8-12 Weeks Before Expected Oral Exam)**

During the preliminary meeting (led by the chair), the following tasks must be completed:

- The student provides an update on their overall progress in the PhD program (if appropriate).
- The committee discusses the review paper topic and provides approval for the student to continue to the next step. Any amendments after the meeting can be approved by the committee with an email vote.
- The chair reviews the scoring rubrics (for the written review paper and presentation) for the student and committee's reference (found under 'Current Students' on the College website).
- The committee establishes a deadline for the oral exam, to be held 2-3 months after the preliminary meeting. Note that the written review paper must be circulated by the student at least 2 weeks before the oral exam.
- Minutes will be circulated by the Graduate Office within two weeks of the preliminary meeting, along with a timeline for the exam.

Note. The meeting must be attended by all advisory committee members. The preliminary meeting cannot proceed if two advisory committee members are absent. If one member is absent, the student and supervisor must meet with them afterward to review the discussion points and obtain approval to go ahead with writing the review paper.

## **2.3 Dissemination of Review Paper and Research Proposal Summary**

At least **two weeks** prior to the oral exam, the student will submit two documents to the advisory committee and the Graduate Office: a) the written review paper; and b) details of their 20-minute research proposal presentation, including title and a 100-word summary. The presentation will be advertised to all members of the college.

## **2.4 Oral Examination**

The oral exam lasts approximately 2-3 hours, starting with a 20-minute presentation of the research study open to the public. Following the public presentation, the chair allows for a brief question period from the audience (approx. 5 minutes). Following the public question period, the chair will ask the general audience to leave before beginning the formal examination.

The oral exam consists of three rounds of questions by the committee:

Round 1 focuses on the research study presentation.

Round 2 focuses on the written review paper.

Round 3 addresses any remaining issues.

- Committee members have 10-15 minutes for questions per round, with an additional 5-10 minutes in the third round, if needed. Members may pass if satisfied. The student may request a 15-minute break at any time.
- All advisory committee members must attend either in-person or remotely. If a member cannot participate, an alternate faculty member with relevant expertise must be appointed to meet the

committee quorum. This alternate must be from outside the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition. The alternate must be approved by the committee before the exam and will have full voting privileges.

### 3. Assessment Components

Attainment of the learning outcomes is assessed through the written review paper and oral presentation of the research study, including their respective oral defences, using the standardized scoring rubrics found under 'Current Students' on the College website. To successfully achieve PhD candidacy, the student must receive an outcome of "Pass" or "Conditional Pass" in both components of the examination.

#### 3.1 Expectations of the Written Review Paper

The student's knowledge of their research area will be partly assessed through a written review article prepared for submission to a specific peer-reviewed journal. The paper should provide an in-depth analysis of topics related to the student's PhD dissertation.

**Plagiarism will result in an automatic failure of the Candidacy Assessment.** Supervisors may provide guidance during the development of the review paper. However, the final product must reflect the student's own work, and they are responsible for all sections of the paper.

The paper must follow the format required by the selected journal and should demonstrate strong potential for publication, understanding that revisions may be necessary after the Candidacy Exam. Typically, the paper will be 1,500 to 3,000 words, but longer articles may be acceptable based on journal requirements.

The committee will evaluate the paper using the *Candidacy Assessment Written Paper Scoring Rubric* found under 'Current Students' on the College website, and assign one of the following outcomes:

- Pass (Exceptional or Proficient): The paper and its defense meet expectations for the learning outcomes for PhD candidacy.
- Conditional Pass (Developing): The paper and its defense meet expectations but has issues that must be addressed. The student will email a revised draft for re-assessment after the exam.
- Fail (Insufficient): The paper and its defense do not meet expectations for PhD candidacy. The student must retake this component (see section 3.4 below).

#### 3.2 Expectations of the Research Proposal Presentation

The 20-minute oral presentation should describe a novel research study related to the same general area as the written review paper. Students are not required to obtain permission for their research proposal topic. However, it is recommended that they discuss preliminary ideas with their committee to help clarify the focus of their presentation. While the research proposal cannot address an existing PhD objective, the student may identify related research questions or propose alternative research methods for their PhD research questions.

The committee will evaluate the presentation using the *Candidacy Assessment Oral Presentation Scoring Rubric* found under 'Current Students' on the College website, and assign one of the following scores:

- Pass (Exceptional or Proficient): The presentation and its defense meet expectations for the learning outcomes for PhD candidacy.
- Conditional Pass (Developing): The presentation and its defense meet expectations, but minor issues must be addressed as set by the committee (e.g., assignment, interview, reading, or revisions).
- Fail (Insufficient): The presentation and its defense do not meet expectations for PhD candidacy. The student must retake this component (see section 3.5).

### **3.3 Overall Evaluation**

After the oral exam, the chair will lead an in-camera discussion with the advisory committee, after excusing the student from the room. The committee will reach consensus scores for the written review paper and the oral presentation, including their respective oral defense. If consensus cannot be reached, a majority vote will determine these final assessment scores. To advance as a PhD candidate, students must receive a “Pass” (scoring Proficient or Exceptional) or “Conditional Pass” (scoring Developing) on the written and oral components.

If the written or oral components do not meet the expectations required for PhD candidacy, resulting in a “Fail” (scoring Insufficient), the student will have six months to address the identified areas and retake the component that did not meet the standards. Students are allowed two attempts to pass the Candidacy Assessment. If the retake assessment also results in a “Fail,” the student will be required to withdraw from the PhD program.

### **3.4 Retake of the Written Review Paper**

For the retake, the student must develop a new 1-page summary for approval by the advisory committee before beginning a new 3-month writing period. The student may choose the same topic; however, an entirely new paper must be prepared. The final review paper must be submitted within six months of the summary’s approval. After submission, the student will undergo an oral assessment focused solely on the new review paper. The defense will be closed to the public.

### **3.5 Retake of the Research Presentation**

For the retake, the process will follow the same format as the original exam, except the presentation and defence will be closed to the public. Whether the same topic may be used for the retake will be at the discretion of the advisory committee.

## **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Student**

- Familiarize with the Candidacy Assessment process, procedures, and scoring rubrics.
- Initiate steps to schedule the preliminary meeting.
- Complete all assessment components within the set timelines, using only permitted resources.
- Ensure all submitted work adheres to academic integrity standards.

### **Supervisor**

- Ensure the student begins the process within the timelines expected for PhD students. Ensure the student is aware of the Candidacy Assessment process and timelines.
- Review the learning outcomes with the student.
- Understand the Candidacy Assessment process, procedures, and scoring rubrics.

- Identify the student's strengths and address their areas for improvement.
- Discuss relevant readings and propose 1-2 possible paper topics to present to the committee.
- Determine a proposed timeline for the Candidacy Assessment to present to the committee.
- Clarify any questions from the student, advising on permitted feedback and adherence to academic integrity standards.
- Fairly evaluate if learning outcomes are met.

#### Advisory Committee Chair

- Understand and consistently follow the Candidacy Assessment process and procedures.
- Ensure the appropriate scheduling of meetings.
- Follow the standard agenda for meetings.
- Communicate the evaluation to the student in sufficient detail to understand their strengths and areas for improvement, with support from the supervisor and other committee members.
- Ensure that due process is followed if differences of opinion arise during evaluation.

#### Advisory Committee Members

- Review the proposed paper topic(s), timelines, and written review article.
- Fairly evaluate if learning outcomes have been met.
- Carefully review the written paper and presentation abstract before the oral exam.
- Respond to questions about the 1-page summary for the written paper before the preliminary meeting.

#### Graduate Office

- Distribute the Candidacy Assessment materials to committee members.
- Book meeting rooms and advertise open presentation.
- Distribute timelines and minutes within two weeks of the preliminary meeting.
- Distribute minutes and materials following advisory committee meetings.

### 4.1 Academic Conduct

Students must review and understand the University of Saskatchewan's *Student Academic Misconduct Regulations* accessible through the Governance Office website. All work must be the student's own, and honesty and integrity are expected. A copy of the final written paper will be kept in the student's file.

During the Candidacy Assessment, students may seek guidance from their advisory committee while developing the written review paper. However, any consultation, discussion, or feedback on the content of the written paper or oral presentation from others, including students, staff, or faculty, is strictly prohibited during the assessment period. Students may receive help with English writing from non-content experts at Library's Writing Centre, but they must inform the Graduate Office of this for recording purposes. This information will not be shared with the advisory committee.

### 4.2 Appeals

Students should refer to *Procedures for Student Appeals in Academic Matters* on the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies website.