

Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination

1. Overview of the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination

The oral defense of the dissertation proposal serves as the comprehensive examination.

The dissertation proposal offers students the opportunity to engage in an academic inquiry that focuses the conceptual work of their PhD program within the field of Language, Culture, and Teaching. The proposal draws from the students' course work, their reading in the literature relevant to or touching on their dissertation topic, and their discussions with their supervisor and supervisory committee.

Prior to the beginning of the process, candidates must choose a willing supervisor and, in conjunction with the supervisor, select two other graduate faculty who agree to be part of the supervisory committee (which acts as the examining committee for the dissertation proposal/comprehensive examination).

Typically, the public defense of the examination is held within six months of, and no more than one year, from the end of the candidate's course work.

Completion of the written proposal, approval of the dissertation proposal by the supervisory committee, and the public defense of the dissertation proposal, qualifies the candidate to proceed with their dissertation research if the research does not involve human participants. If human participants are involved in the research, York's HPRC must first approve the research before the candidate can proceed with the research.

2. Role of the supervisory committee

The supervisory committee guides the student throughout the dissertation /comprehensive process and is the key arbitrator for the proposal/comprehensive prior to the oral examination.

- Each member of the committee is expected to meet with the student to discuss the proposal prior to the oral examination.
- The supervisory committee must agree that the dissertation proposal/comprehensive is appropriate to the dissertation topic and is ready to be examined. Following the dissertation proposal/comprehensive exam each member must sign a form attesting to the approval of the proposal (TD1) which will accompany the dissertation proposal.
- Once approved, the proposal is submitted to the graduate program office for graduate program director approval, then on to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for final approval.

If the research involves human participants, the student must also fill out the TD2 and TD3 forms and TD4 form (if appropriate). The Faculty of Graduate Studies will then forward the appropriate forms to York University's Human Participants Research Sub-Committee (HPRC) for approval.

3. Form of the proposal

A successful dissertation proposal is a working document that clearly outlines the nature of the dissertation topic, the scope of the problem studied, the research design and the methodology. Given the topical diversity in educational research, theory, and technological expression, the length of the proposal

must be determined by the supervisory committee and by the students' substantive area of research or theory.

- 1) The dissertation proposal is expected to show evidence of:
- 2) Clarity in defining the nature of the scope and problems of the proposed dissertation
- 3) Clarity in the justification for taking up the selected problem
- 4) Placement of the selected topic in relation to a field of thought
- 5) A bibliography of works cited and a secondary bibliography of works to be consulted
- 6) A comment on the theoretical fields to be drawn upon for the dissertation
- 7) A discussion of the methodology to be used and the research design (as appropriate)

Text-based proposals are expected to be typewritten, double spaced, and formatted consistently. They must contain an abstract and, preferably, a table of contents. Proposals that draw from other technologies must be accompanied by a text-based document. Typically, the proposal will include some mode of expression of the following:

- 1) Cover page (supervisory committee membership)
- 2) Title page (working title)
- 3) Abstract/summary of the project.
- 4) Description of the problem and its significance to academic scholarship.
- 5) Discussion of literature (textual or digital) relevant to the project
- 6) Description of the research design and methodology. If a theoretical study is proposed, a discussion of theories engaged. If a non-traditional study using new media is proposed, a discussion of the theories and technologies engaged.
- 7) Suggested timeline for and feasibility of the work.
- 8) Working bibliography of literature and/or technologies reviewed and to be reviewed.
- 9) If human subjects are involved, a consent form and completed ethical review is attached as addenda.

4. Timeline for submission of the dissertation proposal/comprehensive examination

The proposal must be submitted and approved not less than six months prior to the date set for the dissertation defense. (Faculty of Graduate Studies regulation)

5. The Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination

The Oral Examination is held, typically, six months after and no more than one year from the end of the candidate's coursework. The Oral Examination will be approximately two hours.

The purpose of the oral examination is to ensure that, in the opinion of the supervisory committee, the student is prepared to proceed with their dissertation research. The oral examination, as an educational event, can be expected to generate new insights and opportunities that may be advanced within the dissertation research.

The oral examination is a public academic event. At the discretion of the Chair of the examining committee, faculty members, graduate students and others may attend oral examinations. They may, at the discretion of the Chair, participate in the questioning. Only members of the examining committee may be present for the evaluation and for the vote at the conclusion of an oral exam.

a) Evaluation of the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination.

The evaluation of the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination occurs in two stages. First, the written portion of the proposal is evaluated by the Supervisory Committee in terms of its readiness to go forward as the basis of an Oral Examination.

The categories for evaluation are:

- Candidate can proceed to Oral Examination
- The proposal is in need of revision before Candidate proceeds to Oral Examination

In the event that members of the Supervisory Committee decide that the Proposal is in need of revision, the revisions must be specified. Once the revisions are completed to the satisfaction of the Supervisory Committee, the candidate proceeds to the Oral Examination.

b) The oral examination.

The Supervisor will serve as the Chair of the oral examination. The Chair discusses with committee members the approximate duration of the exam, the duration of the opening statement by the candidate (if any), and the general procedures governing questioning. The Chair determines when questioning has been exhausted. Once this has been determined, the Chair of the Examination Committee asks the candidate to leave the room so that the Committee can discuss the candidate's examination performance. The Chair of the Examination Committee reads the categories (see below) governing the examination and leads a discussion of the candidate's performance. Once the Committee has agreed upon the category into which the candidate's written and oral performance falls, the Chair completes the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination Report and then invites the candidate back into the examination room where the results of the exam are reported by the Chair.

The Oral Examination is an evaluation of the proposal submitted for the Oral Examination and the candidate's discussion of the proposal at the Oral Examination. The categories for evaluation are:

- (a) Pass,
- (b) Pass with Conditions, and
- (c) Unsatisfactory

A "Pass" indicates that the candidate has completed a satisfactory proposal and Oral Examination. A "Pass with Conditions" indicates that additional work is necessary in order for the candidate to Pass. The Examination Committee will specify in writing the work required to complete the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination process. In the case that the Proposal at the oral examination receives a "Pass with Conditions", only the Supervisor needs to review and approve the requested revisions.

Examinations assessed as “Pass with Conditions” may, at the discretion of the Supervisory Committee, revert to an “Unsatisfactory” rating if the condition(s) are not fulfilled. Candidates who receive an “Unsatisfactory” rating on the Examination have one opportunity to re-take the oral Examination within 12 months of the original Examination. Candidates who receive an “Unsatisfactory” rating for the second oral Examination will be required to withdraw from the program.

The Committee notifies the candidate orally of the result of the Examination at the end of the oral examination. The Examination report must be submitted immediately to the Graduate Program Office. The Graduate Program Assistant files the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination Report in the office. The candidate is required to submit 1 copy of the approved Dissertation Proposal (plus the appropriate cover page (TD1) and forms for ethics if using human participants) to the Graduate Program Office which will be forwarded to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for their approval.

Filing examination results

The Supervisor/Chair of the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination must submit the Dissertation Proposal/Comprehensive Examination Report with the Graduate Program Office immediately following the conclusion of the exam.