

# Hugh Downs School Interdisciplinary PHD Program in Communication

## Comprehensive Exam Process

Before students can begin the dissertation process, including the dissertation proposal defense, they must pass a doctoral comprehensive examination. The comprehensive exam is viewed as a primary milestone in the students' program of study that demonstrates their knowledge of the discipline as well as their potential for conducting high-quality, doctoral-level research.

The comprehensive exam consists of a written component followed by an oral examination. The written component consists of a set of culminating experiences designed through a collaborative student-faculty process. Students and their committee will work together to create an exam tailored to the student's area(s) of specialization, their research plans, and their career goals and objectives. The exam should be built upon the goals and objectives of our exam process (see below), and it should take into account the student's learning style and future career path. Several models have been developed to serve as examples for the exam. In practice, each student will meet with the director of their committee to review the models and determine which model, combination of models, or elaboration on the models, would best 'fit' and serve the needs of their research and academic emphases and espoused goals.

The following procedures should guide the exam process:

1. Students should be in their last year of coursework and have the consent of their chair(s) to be eligible to complete the comprehensive exam experience. Students typically complete the exam in the first semester of their third year in the program. See the [Graduate College Policies and Procedures Handbook](#) and the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication Doctoral Program Handbook for more specific information about administrative requirements associated with the exam process.
2. The responsibility for initiating the comprehensive examination process lies with the doctoral student. Students must inform their committee chair of their intent to complete their comprehensive exam and set up meetings to discuss the set of culminating experiences that will constitute the exam.

3. Students and their exam committees reserve the right to pursue exam processes of their choosing (and must come to a negotiated agreement). Those processes should clearly demonstrate that the student and committee have taken an active role in determining these processes, and that these processes generate learning products that meet the metalevel goals and objectives of the comprehensive exam process.
4. Prior to the start of the exam process, the exam committee and student should carefully discuss metalevel goals and objectives and how they will be interpreted when evaluating the product(s) produced by the comprehensive exam. Upon student submission of the written portion of the exam, if a committee member(s) believes one or more of the responses does not meet expectations, they may provide guidance to the student so the student can generate further evidence and/or revisions that satisfy the guidelines, before the student progresses to the oral examination.
5. Exams will be administered by the student's advisor and the resulting products submitted to the Graduate Secretary.

A question about comprehensive exams will be part of the doctoral student annual review process, encouraging discussions about comps to start early in the students' program and continue until comps are completed.

The revised process will be evaluated over a three-year period (from the 2021/22 academic year until the 2024/25 academic year) to make sure it is meeting the needs of the students and fulfilling the program's goals and objectives for comprehensive exams.

# **Goals and Objectives of Comprehensive Exam Process**

## **Meta-Level Goals**

1. Serve as a culminating experience for students' time in the program and a bridge to their career trajectory.
2. Cultivate an interdisciplinary approach to communication research.
3. Provide a sense of accomplishment for students.
4. Allow students to demonstrate readiness for dissertation work.
5. Contribute to maintaining the high quality of our program.

## Objectives

1. Help students situate themselves theoretically in the field of human communication.
2. Help students integrate and synthesize knowledge in the field.
3. Provide students opportunity to claim expertise in a general area of study and a specific focus of research.
4. Provide students opportunity to demonstrate familiarity with an overall research paradigm(s) and specific methodologies.
5. Provide opportunity for students to articulate knowledge that is expected of a communication scholar.
6. Help students prepare for a variety of presentational & interactive situations (interviews, teaching, presentations, etc.).
7. Prepare students to transition to their dissertation work.

## Sample Models

### Sample Model 1

1. "In-House" questions (8-hours): administered in 'lock-down' mode in which students respond to several 1-2 hour questions without access to resource materials.
2. "At-Home" questions (8-hours): administered in a time-limited format in which students respond to several 2-4 hour questions with access to all resource materials.
3. "At-Home" questions or assignment (8-hours): Various options administered in a time-limited format in which students have access to all resource materials; the most common option includes a pre-prospectus draft, but students sometimes design a training program or course syllabus.

### Sample Model 2

1. Three "at-home" questions are provided to students at the beginning of the semester.
2. Students complete one theory question, one primary content area question, and one methods question.
3. At the end of the semester, they return three 25-page papers and prepare for the oral defense.

## Sample Model 3

1. Students produce three original papers, formatted for submission either to a conference or to a journal.
2. Two of the papers speak to student “content areas” while the third can either speak to a third area or be a full draft of the dissertation prospectus.
3. After 30 days, they return three 25-page papers and prepare for the oral defense.

## Sample Model 4

1. Mock Job interview, giving students an opportunity to orally articulate their theoretical & research perspectives.
2. Write a Handbook-style chapter or set of Encyclopedia articles.
3. Design an NCA pre-conference program that promotes one’s work in the field.

## Sample Model 5

1. Critically assess a sub-disciplinary area of the field with regard to an emerging, interdisciplinary point of connection.
2. Write a popular research article and/or popular cultural criticism for publication in a mass circulated venue.
3. Design a course, including: teaching philosophy, syllabus with description and learning outcomes, reading schedule, sample assignment.

## Sample Model 6

1. One-Day “at home” exam with full access to resources; questions ask students to articulate their theoretical perspective and research orientation.
2. Design and justify a needs assessment of a community-based issue or agenda and connect its components to learned and held skills and knowledge (of the student).
3. Develop a training program that is pedagogically sound and research based.

## Sample Model 7

1. Write a revised course essay, formatted for publication in a disciplinary journal.
2. Critically assess a sub-disciplinary area of the field with regard to an emerging, interdisciplinary point of connection.
3. Design, conduct, and evaluate a community-focused workshop derived from the students’ research.

## Sample Model 8

1. Write an essay that establishes the foundation for activist scholarship.
2. Research and write a case study of a coalitional protest event.
3. Critically assess the protest as a cultural change agent.

## Sample Model 9

1. Write an essay that establishes the foundation for performance as scholarship.
2. Design and stage a performance focused on an important social issue.
3. Critically evaluate the performance and its potential impact on the audience.

## Sample Model 10

1. Construct a portfolio of your best work & outline future research/application program.
2. Write a reflective essay that critically examines your academic journey during your time in the program, including teaching, research, and service dimensions, connecting your journey to appropriate theory and research
3. Write a projective essay in which you (re)imagine you career trajectory, creatively describing the characteristics of a future space you hope to occupy and specifying the theoretical underpinnings of this imagined space.