

Departmental Comprehensive Examination policies:

The form of comprehensive examinations vary between degree level, program, and concentration. Consult with your advisor, committee, and program for specific information.

Masters Degrees:

Note that B.S./M.S. students apply to shift into the accelerated (B.S./M.S.) program and have a matriculation date, which is their first semester in the M.S. program, typically in the Fall of their fourth (Senior) academic year. That date starts their M.S. program.

a) Written comprehensive examinations need to be submitted by the end of the second semester in the program. The oral defense is expected to occur two to four weeks after submitting the written exam, no longer than 6 months. If the comps are not taken on this timescale, in the absence of extenuating circumstances, less than satisfactory progress will be documented on the next academic progress report.

b) Students who do not pass the examination the first time or fail to take it on schedule will have a chance to re-take it within 6 months. Failure to pass the re-take or to take the examination within 6 months is grounds for a student to be shifted to the M.S. with a project or to be dismissed from the program.

c) Students who are not making satisfactory progress or are in the M.S./Project track are of lower priority for assignment as a teaching assistant (TA) and may lose funding.

Ph.D. Degrees:

a) Written comprehensive examinations need to be submitted by before the start of the fifth semester in the program (see program-specific deadlines). The oral defense is expected to occur two to four weeks after submitting the written exam, no longer than 6 months. Students will be informed of comprehensive examination policies at the first committee meeting (end of second semester) and the committee and student will discuss their plans for the comprehensive examination timing and content at that meeting. If the comps are not taken on this timescale, in the absence of extenuating circumstances, less than satisfactory progress will be noted on the next academic progress report and it will be considered that they didn't pass their first attempt, with the effective date of that report.

b) Students who do not pass the examination the first time will have a chance to re-take it within 6 months. Failure to pass the examination within 6 months is grounds for a student to be dismissed from the Ph.D. program. Students who are dismissed from the Ph.D. program because of failing the comprehensive examinations will be offered the chance to shift to the M.S. program, where they will have one chance within 6 months of shifting programs to pass the M.S. comprehensive examination.

c) Students who are not making satisfactory progress are of lower priority for assignment as a teaching assistant (TA) and may lose funding.

Current policies, which were adopted on 2026-April-14

Notes to advisors:

- At the first committee meeting, comps policies should be discussed with the student and those discussions should be documented in the text boxes.
- For MS students, if written comps were not taken by the date of the first committee meeting, a comps due date should be agreed upon and written into the annual report form.
- If the committee sees extenuating circumstances, such as time spent on research, writing / submitting a manuscript, health issues, *etc.*, they can delay deadlines. They should describe these circumstances and set new deadlines in the text boxes on the annual report form.
- The M.S. comps are meant to be a simple check that the student has a research plan so they can have an effective path from there.
- If a student is in the M.S. Project track, the comps should describe their intended project research plan. M.S. Project students need to take 6 more credits of coursework than M.S. Thesis students, so more attention should be paid to their coursework plans to assure timely completion.