

Appendix B: Examination Procedures, Admission to Candidacy, and Advisory Committee Composition Details

Health Communication Ph.D. Proposal

Comprehensive exams are taken after the student has completed a minimum of 39 credit hours (beyond the Master's) including the required core, seminars, and minor coursework.

Comprehensive Exam Procedures

The Ph.D. comprehensive examination is designed to show that students have the abilities necessary to function successfully as independent scholars of health communication. Two classes of abilities are necessary for such success: (1) broad knowledge of the field and (2) specialized knowledge of a chosen area of health communication.

There are three parts to this exam. Part one focuses on general knowledge about health communication and part two focuses on testing for competence in a health communication area of expertise. Part three is the oral defense to be completed after the exam portion is graded by the Advisory Committee.

Part One: General Knowledge in Health Communication:

Criteria. The successful student needs broad-based, on-demand, encyclopedic knowledge of basic issues in the study of health communication. "Basic Issues" include the main theories, methods, literature, philosophies, concepts, and phenomena important in contemporary health communication scholarship.

Examination rationale. This knowledge serves students by (1) enabling them to draw on scholarship outside their own areas of specialization, which capitalizes on the eclecticism of the field and facilitates integration of diverse perspectives on health communication, (2) enhancing their chances for success on the job market, and (3) making students more effective at representing the field to non-members.

Examination procedure. Because of the broad-based nature of this part of the examination, students have a need for guidance from their committee on preparation. This directive does not mean that students should be given questions in advance; rather, students should discuss the above criteria with their committees to get guidance on the kinds of knowledge for which they will be held responsible. The intent of this discussion is to guide their study and help them recognize areas where they may need independent study and/or review of subjects that may be outside the formal scope of their course-work. Therefore, this discussion should begin in earnest as soon as possible after committees are formed and continue throughout students' courses of study.

The actual examination will consist of six to eight questions, prepared by the student's committee, designed to test for competence on the criteria listed above. One - two questions may be from a student's minor area of emphasis. This will be a **closed-book** examination completed during an agreed upon eight-hour time-frame. The expectation is that students will spend approximately one hour answering each question, though they are free to allocate preparation time as they see fit.

Evaluation. The criteria for this part of the examination encompasses knowledge gained over the course of the student’s academic career. For this reason, this portion of the examination should test for **basic competence** in discussing the main issues of the field, not **expertise**. Each answer should be evaluated in terms of whether it is a product the committee would expect from a competent “beginning” health communication scholar writing for one hour on a subject not necessarily in his/her own area of emphasis.

Part Two: Competence in an Area of Expertise in Health Communication

Criteria. The successful student needs thorough knowledge of a chosen area of specialization. This includes in-depth understanding of significant theories and methods, and an understanding of the history, current trends, and future directions in the health communication specialty.

Examination rationale. This knowledge serves students by (1) validating their claims to be specialists in a particular area, (2) insuring that they have a sufficient command of subject matter in their areas to frame their dissertations as original contributions to scholarship, and (3) facilitating interaction with other specialists.

Examination procedure. Because specialists are rarely called upon to make in-depth arguments without resources (articles, books, noted, etc.), this phase of the examination is conducted as a “take-home” examination. Students will answer two questions which should not be revealed in advance of the examination. The content of the questions should be up to the committee; however, it is suggested that they focus on identifying relationships between assumptions, theory, and methods, as well as criticizing programs of research and bodies of knowledge.

Students should be given one question at a time. They should receive the question in the morning and be required to return an answer six to eight hours later. Time elapsing between the first and second question is a matter of negotiation between the student and the committee; however, to prevent protraction of the qualifying process we suggest that both questions be completed within one calendar week.

Evaluation. This part is designed to test for knowledge consistent with a claim of special expertise in a particular area. Each answer should therefore be evaluated in terms of whether it is an answer the committee would expect from a competent “beginning” specialist, writing for four to six hours on a topic germane to his/her area, with full access to personal resources.

Part Three: Oral defense. When the written portion of the exam has been graded, the student will commence the oral exam phase of the process.

Admission To Candidacy

After the student has passed both the written and oral portions of the Comprehensive Examinations, then s/he will write and defend a dissertation prospectus in an area of health communication in which the student demonstrates expertise. The defense will take place with the student’s Advisory Committee and will be oral in nature. Once the student successfully completes the oral defense, s/he will be admitted to candidacy.

Prior to admission to candidacy, it is expected that the student will have completed a mixture of academic experiences, including formal course work, participation in doctoral seminars, research with faculty, and independent research, that are related to the topic of the dissertation and lead up to the dissertation. It also is expected that students will have been exposed to both quantitative and qualitative methods of research prior to admission to candidacy.

No dissertation hours may be taken prior to admission to candidacy; however, students may take as many of their research hours prior to candidacy as they wish. Following the semester in which students are admitted to candidacy, they must enroll in dissertation credit hours.

Dissertation Guidelines

Procedure for Dissertations:

The dissertation will consist of a fully documented written analysis of a problem which extends the knowledge and/or theoretical framework of the field, and reflects the student's creativity and competence in independent, interdisciplinary research using an appropriate research methodology. Prior to conducting the research for the dissertation, each student must submit a dissertation proposal that is defended orally and approved by the student's Dissertation Research Committee.

The writing of the dissertation must conform to standards established by the Graduate School. When the dissertation is completed to the satisfaction of the Dissertation Research Committee, an oral examination in defense of the dissertation is scheduled by the student's advisor in accordance with Graduate School procedures. The oral examination is public and conducted by the Dissertation Research Committee; a majority of the votes cast by the members of the Dissertation Research Committee is necessary to "Pass". The student is required to make any corrections or alterations in the final product which are recommended by the Committee, and it is the responsibility of the student's advisor to ensure that all changes are completed. Students are required to have copies of their dissertation bound for the University Library. In addition, it is expected that the advisor will be provided with a bound copy like those for the Library and other Committee members will be given copies (these could be either hard bound or spiral bound).

A student taking the final oral examination in defense of the dissertation must be registered for a minimum of one hour of dissertation credit during the semester or summer session in which the examination is administered. A student taking an examination when the Campus is not in session must be registered for the semester or summer session immediately preceding the examination. Finally, if a student's dissertation is to be submitted for publication, the guidelines developed by the Ethics Committee of the American Psychological Association provide the suggestions that can be followed in deciding on the appropriate credit to give the advisor or other members of the committee with respect to authorship.

General Guidelines for Advisor and Advisory Committee:

The advisor is an important component of a student's graduate education. The advisor not only counsels the student on the selection of courses and guides the writing of the dissertation, but also directs the student in outside reading and serves as the student's major contact with the Department and the field of health communication.

The Director of the Graduate Program in Communication Studies will assign temporary advisors to all new Ph.D. students to assist the student in the selection of courses for the first semester. By the end of the first year, the student should identify a principal advisor (i.e., the chair of the Advisory Committee) for their Ph.D. program. Since students will not have classes with all potential advisors early in their coursework, they should make an effort to meet all faculty with health communication interest during their first semester in residence.

The research interests of the faculty should be described in a document. The “ideal” advisor is a faculty member who actively conducts research in the student’s area of emphasis, is competent in the method to be used in the dissertation, and with whom the student feels comfortable working. Advisors must be selected from those approved to direct dissertations by the Graduate School.

The Advisory Committee consists of a chair and at least two other members. The chair of the Advisory Committee, who serves as the student’s principal advisor, must be knowledgeable in the student’s area of concentration, must have an active and visible (i.e. publications) research agenda, showing evidence of data-based research or exceptional creativity in the field, and have systematic experience in providing graduate training as demonstrated by service on master’s thesis committees and/or doctoral dissertation committees. The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to guide the student through the completion of the Program of Study and the Comprehensive Examinations. Members of the Advisory Committee typically, but not necessarily, serve as members of the Dissertation Research Committee.

Changing the membership of the advisory committee (including the advisor) is permitted for good and sufficient reasons (e.g., changing the topic of the dissertation). Requests for change are processed on an individual basis by the Director (following the procedures for original appointment) and the Graduate School.