

Clinical Comprehensive Exams (revised 12/18/2023)

*****Please review the Graduate Student Handbook for additional details and information. This document is not intended to provide a comprehensive description of the comprehensive exam options and process for the Clinical Psychology Program.***

Comprehensive exams represent an important milestone in your graduate career. The Clinical Program has adopted a comps system that is intended to sample behaviors that reflect your professional development as a clinical scientist. To achieve this end, the comps system is modeled after the kinds of scholarly activities in which you, as a clinical scientist, will engage (manuscript submission, grant applications, job talks, etc.).

The comps system is based on the "manuscript submission model." That is, it is a written test followed by a written response to written critiques of the original answers. An important dimension to this system is the opportunity to get direct and detailed feedback from peer review (i.e., comps raters) as well as an opportunity to respond to this feedback to help clarify your response. This exchange process is an important aspect of scholarly activity that the comps system attempts to emulate.

Students are given a total of two opportunities to successfully pass a comps format. It is important to note that failing twice, regardless of comps format, may result in dismissal from the program. Students may retake comps in the same or a different comprehensive format (i.e., MAP or grant submission). Students are only permitted to switch formats between attempts.

Passing comps and advancing to doctoral candidacy is an important milestone in one's graduate education, and it also offers an opportunity for focused learning and additional preparation for one's professional career. We hope that our comps system helps achieve these goals.

General/Integrative Exam Option

1. Take home exam, with a 65-hour turn-around for two general/integrative questions that is offered twice per year. All students will be given the G/I questions at the same time (Friday at 4:00pm with a deadline of Monday at 9:00am) for that particular semester.
 - a. First Friday of October
 - b. The Friday of the start of Spring Break
2. One of the questions will assess issues in research methods. The other question will require that students integrate knowledge across at least two foundational areas in psychology (i.e., biological, affective, cognitive, developmental, and social) and then apply this integration to the field of clinical science.
3. The Clinical Area Comps Committee (three faculty members) will submit their feedback and ratings to the graduate administrator no later than Wednesday of the

week following the completion of the exam. All feedback and ratings will be distributed to G/I comps raters prior to sending feedback to students. This will be done to allow for discussion of potential issues/concerns with regard to feedback and/or ratings. As soon as the ratings are final for all students, each student will be notified whether they will need to revise one or more of their answers.

4. First Submission

1 = pass (≤ 1.4 average of three raters)

2 = revise and resubmit (> 1.4 average of three raters)

Students who receive an average score between 1.4 and 2 will have the same period of time the following week to revise their answer(s) (Friday at 4:00pm until Monday at 9:00am), regardless of whether one or two answers have to be revised. As with a manuscript resubmission, **students should include a cover letter that briefly summarizes each of the concerns noted by reviewers and the student's response to the concern, including the changes that were made in the revision.** In addition, any changes or new text in the answers themselves should be highlighted.

See below for specifics about the Grading Rubric.

5. Faculty will have one week from the completion of the exam to grade the revised answers.

Second Submission

1 = pass (≤ 1.4 average of three raters)

2 = fail (> 1.4 average of three raters)

6. If either question is failed after the Second Submission, then the student has failed comps and must re-take the next time comps are offered.
7. Students cannot discuss the questions or answers with anyone, anywhere (faculty or students or non-faculty or non-students) during the original 48-hour period or the 48-hour revision period. Students are expected to abide by all relevant ethical principles while taking comprehensive exams. Students' work is expected to be original, with appropriate use of citations and quotations when referring to the work of others. As per university policy, evidence of plagiarism will be treated as a serious infraction of academic honesty, with consequences up to and including dismissal from the program.
8. There is a 10-page maximum for each answer (double spaced, 12-point font, 1" margins). The revised manuscript can be up to 12 pages (double spaced, 12-point font, 1" margins). Citations should be given in the text of the original answer as well as the revised answer, and a reference list should be submitted. The reference list and the cover letter for the revised answers do not count toward the above page limits.

9. The suggested reading list for the general/integrative questions can be considered the following:
 - a. Reading major journals such as Psychological Bulletin, Journal of Clinical and Consulting Psychology, Journal of Psychopathology and Clinical Science (formerly Journal of Abnormal Psychology), Clinical Psychological Science, and the American Psychologist.
 - b. Getting and reviewing syllabi from recent courses that cover the topics described above (#3).
 - c. Reviewing previous G/I questions. Example questions from the last two years will be made available to students.

Major Area Paper (MAP) Option

As an alternative to the G/I or Grant Application options, students may choose to write a Major Area Paper (MAP). The MAP should represent a critical review of at least one area of psychology that has not been reviewed in the last three years.

1. A minimum of three clinical faculty on the doctoral committee (including the major professor) must approval this option. The major professor should first contact the clinical faculty on the student's doctoral committee to discuss whether the student is an appropriate candidate for the MAP option.
2. Once approved, the student will provide the three clinical faculty on the doctoral committee with a one-page written proposal for the MAP, which should include a brief rationale and specific aims for the MAP. This written proposal will be discussed with the clinical faculty on the doctoral committee. The three clinical faculty members on the doctoral committee will then help the student develop a plan to complete the MAP.
3. The MAP must demonstrate integration of knowledge across two or more foundational areas in psychology (i.e., biological, affective, cognitive, developmental, and social) and then apply this integration to content concentration in clinical psychology.
4. Students may only discuss conceptual issues related to the MAP with their major professors and any other faculty. Faculty may not discuss or coach students on issues surrounding the actual writing of the paper. The major professor should not see a written product until it is submitted to the committee; however, students may consult with the major professor on the outline of the paper.
5. Once students complete the MAP, they should submit it to the three clinical faculty members on their dissertation committee for grading based on the grading rubric below.

- 1 = pass (≤ 1.4 average of three raters)
- 2 = revise and resubmit (> 1.4 average of three raters)

6. The MAP is not expected to be ready for formal submission for publication, but rather a solid draft to be used in evaluating student competencies consistent with the comprehensive exam process.

Grant Application Option

As an alternative to the G/I and MAP options, students may choose to complete a grant application/proposal. Recommended grant mechanisms include F31, F32, and all K awards, as these tend to be the most universally applicable for graduate students; however, other mechanisms will be considered when appropriate. The selected grant mechanism must include a research strategy section, including significance and innovation sections, and must be a minimum of 6 single-spaced pages in addition to a References section.

1. A minimum of three clinical faculty members on the doctoral committee (including your major professor) must approve this option. Your major professor should first contact the other clinical faculty on the doctoral committee (before you do) to discuss whether you would be an appropriate candidate for the Grant option.
2. Once approved, you will provide the three clinical faculty members on the doctoral committee with a written proposal for the Grant Application, which often takes the form of a specific aims page. This written proposal will be discussed with the three clinical faculty on the doctoral committee. The three clinical faculty members on the doctoral committee will then help you develop a plan of action to complete the Grant Application.
3. Applications must be integrative across two or more psychology domains: cognition, affect, biology, development, and/or social. Note that this integration should be included in the conceptualization of the problem regardless of grant mechanism chosen (significance and/or innovation) and may or may not be included in the primary aims/research design.
4. You may discuss with your major professor and any other faculty only conceptual issues related to the project. Your major professor and other faculty members may not discuss or coach you on issues related to actual writing of the application. Your major professor should not see a written product until submitted to the committee; however, you may consult with your major professor on the outline of the application.
5. Once the student completes the grant application, the student should submit it to the three clinical faculty members on their dissertation committee for grading based on the grading rubric below.

- 1 = pass (≤ 1.4 average of three raters)

2 = revise and resubmit (> 1.4 average of three raters)

6. The application is not expected to be ready for formal submission to a grant funding agency, but rather a solid draft to be used in evaluating student competencies consistent with the comprehensive exam process.

Grading Rubric for All Comprehensive Exam Options

	Score of 1 (Adequate Response with Minor to Moderate Weaknesses)	Score of 2 (Incomplete Response with Fundamental Flaws)
Content Completeness	The student adequately addresses all components of the question/MAP/grant (e.g., aims, hypotheses, justification, method).	The student addresses only a subset of all essential components of the question/MAP/grant, or significant portions are left unattended.
Depth of Analysis	The response/product demonstrates a good understanding of the subject matter, with relevant examples and clear, linear reasoning.	The response/product lacks depth and may resort to surface-level descriptions and justification for research. Critical analysis is missing, and the student may rely heavily on general statements without backing them up with relevant examples or clear reasoning.
Clarity	The response/product is well-structured and logically organized. Transitions between ideas are smooth.	The response/product may be disjointed or lack a logical flow; challenging to follow the narrative of the answer.
Evidence-Based	Where relevant, the student cites appropriate research, including foundational studies, experimental research, and theoretical work.	The student rarely cites other work, or the work they cite is not relevant to the question/MAP/Grant.
Weaknesses	The response/product only has minor or moderate weaknesses, if any, in responses to the four areas above (scores of one check all the “boxes”). There might be areas where further elaboration would improve the response/product. Some minor details might be missing or not fully explored, but these omissions do not fundamentally undermine the overall quality of the response/product.	There are fundamental misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the question or topic in the MAP/grant. The response/product may include glaring inaccuracies, stray off-topic (i.e., filler), or miss important details. There’s a clear and pressing need for further elaboration, correction, and depth that undermines the overall quality of the response/product (scores fail to check all the “boxes”).