



PhD (Nursing) Doctoral Candidacy Regulations

Minor Editorial Revisions January 16, 2025

These regulations are effective for students admitted into the PhD (Nursing) program January 2024 onwards.

The University of Calgary [Doctoral Candidacy Regulations](#) (“the Regulations”) govern the conduct of admission to doctoral candidacy at the University of Calgary. This document establishes program specific requirements associated with the conduct of admission to graduate candidacy in the PhD (Nursing) Program under the *Regulations*.

Statement of Purpose

Admission into Candidacy in the Faculty of Nursing PhD Program requires that students have:

- 1) demonstrated abilities to conceptualize, interpret, critique, and synthesize comprehensive, substantive knowledge that derives from qualitative, quantitative, and philosophical/theoretical sources relevant to the practice and discipline of nursing; and
- 2) produced a well-developed plan for their thesis research, a sound proposal with a well-developed research question(s) and demonstrated the potential to pursue and complete original independent research at the doctoral level.

Supervisory Committee Composition

Students must identify a supervisor or supervisors prior to admission to the PhD program. A supervisory committee will be identified within the first six months of the program. The committee membership will be identified by the Supervisor, in collaboration with the student, and approved by the Associate Dean Graduate Programs and Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Normally, the supervisory committee will be comprised of:

- the faculty supervisor
- two other academic members (preferably one from inside the Faculty of Nursing and the other from another Department or Faculty from the University of Calgary or another institution of higher education).

The faculty supervisor, and the supervisory committee, will work closely with the student throughout their program to frame and articulate the focus of their research; provide guidance on the research proposal; support undertaking of the research; and related dissemination of the findings. The committee members will contribute relevant subject matter expertise and/or philosophical/theoretical/ methodological support for the



successful development, implementation, and completion of the research and thesis. Committee members will also engage in the required proposal, Field of Study examinations, and thesis defense.

All students in the PhD (Nursing) Program must successfully fulfill the following requirements to achieve candidacy status (see Appendix A):

1. all course requirements,
2. development and defense of a thesis proposal,
3. submission of application for ethics approval; and
4. Field of Study (FoS) examinations which includes:
 - Written FOS examination
 - Oral FOS examination

Thesis Proposal

The thesis proposal will normally be completed within 18 months following admission to the PhD (Nursing) program and before undertaking the FoS exams. Building on the course work and working with the supervisory committee, the student will complete a thesis proposal. The student is expected to submit early drafts of the proposal to the supervisor first, then to the committee members for further feedback and refinement. The proposal should be presented in a scholarly format, double-spaced and be approximately 20 pages in length (excluding references, figures, and tables). The following proposal format is a useful guideline and non-traditional thesis as outlined by the faculty of graduate studies may also be pursued <https://grad.ucalgary.ca/current-students/thesis-based-students/thesis/non-traditional-thesis>

1. Abstract
2. Statement of the problem
3. Review of literature
4. Philosophical stance or theoretical framework, as appropriate
5. Methodology
6. Ethical considerations
7. Timeline
8. Budget
9. Dissemination plan
10. References

THESIS PROPOSAL ORAL EXAMINATION

With the approval of the supervisor and supervisory committee, the student will submit the completed Thesis Proposal for oral examination. The Thesis Proposal Oral Examination will normally take place by the 20th month after entry into the program. The Thesis Proposal Oral Examination is focused on testing the PhD Student on their preparedness to conduct research



of high and significant quality and novelty in a particular field of study. The student's philosophical, methodological, and critical thinking abilities as well as their enquiry-specific knowledge are also examined. The expectation is that the student will have a clearly defined and well-defended research plan.

Format of the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

The Thesis Proposal Oral Examination should normally not exceed two hours (excluding requested breaks and deliberation time for the Committee members). The student will make a 10- to 20-minute presentation, introducing the reasons for the work, research questions, and the expected contributions derived from the proposed thesis research. This presentation is included in the allotted two-hour period. The presentation is then followed by examiners' questions on the Thesis Proposal.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies (through *My Gradskills*) and the Student Success Centre offer several workshops and resources to help students prepare for such examinations. Students are invited to consult <https://grad.ucalgary.ca/professional-development> and <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success> for complete information on sessions and materials available.

Composition of the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination Committee

The Thesis Proposal Oral Examination Committee is normally composed of the Supervisory Committee and one additional Faculty member who may be internal or external to the Faculty of Nursing, but external to the supervisory committee. This external member is appointed by the Associate Dean Graduate Programs, upon the recommendation of the student's Supervisor. This additional Examination Committee member may also serve on the FOS Examination Committee (see below). The Faculty supervisor will serve as the Chair for the examination.

Scheduling of the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

Once a student is prepared for the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination, it is the supervisor's responsibility to schedule the date and time of the exam, ensuring availability of all examination committee members. Once a date and time has been established, the supervisor completes the graduate service request form to schedule the exam at least six weeks before the exam. The exam is then approved by the Associate Dean Graduate Programs and then officially scheduled by the nursing graduate office.

<https://nursing.ucalgary.ca/current-students/graduate/undergraduate-and-graduate-programs-office/graduate-service-requests>



The Supervisor circulates the Thesis Proposal to all members of the Examination Committee at least three weeks before the Oral Examination. An electronic copy will be forwarded to the GPO for placement in the student's file.

Process of the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

Questions, which are usually asked in rounds, will be based on the student's ability to defend their research plan. Examiners are expected to ask clear and succinct questions. The student will be given reasonable time to answer and should feel free to ask for questions to be repeated or rephrased. If the student has understood the question and cannot answer, the examiner should pass to another question and not attempt to extract an answer by prolonged interrogation or by leading the student. The Neutral Chair (supervisor) will ensure these guidelines are followed during the exam. At the end of the examination, the student is asked to withdraw from the room. Before any discussion of the student's performance, each examiner must provide a non-binding recommendation (pass/fail) of the student's performance on the oral examination by secret ballot shared with the Neutral Chair (supervisor). This procedure provides the committee members with a frame of reference upon which to base a full discussion of the student's overall examination performance. The final vote, which is provided orally, is taken after the Committee's discussion.

The student will be evaluated on the following criteria:

1. preparedness to conduct high quality research and depth of knowledge in the specific field,
2. clarity of presentation; and
3. ability to orally describe and defend the following:
 - originality of research contribution
 - philosophical foundations of the research (as appropriate)
 - soundness of research methodology
 - relevance of research contribution; and
 - feasibility in the broader field of enquiry

Passing the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

Every effort should be made to reach a unanimous recommendation regarding the student's performance on the oral examination. Should the outcome of the final vote include at most one negative vote, the student will pass.

Failing the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

Should the outcome include two or more negative votes, the committee's recommendation to the Associate Dean Graduate Programs should be *fail*. If the final vote is a fail, an assessment of the student's oral performance as well as suggestions for improvement should



be conveyed in writing to the student within five days of the exam.
In the case of a fail the following must be completed:

- **The Chair** must inform the Student of the Committee's recommendation immediately following the vote of the examination committee. The Chair will submit the final recommendation of fail as well as a written report to the Associate Dean Graduate Programs within one working day of the completion of the examination.
- **The Examiners** write brief memos to the Associate Dean Graduate Programs explaining the reasons for their votes and submit them within five working days from the date of the examination.
- **The Associate Dean Graduate Programs** may uphold the fail in the case of a clear fail. If the Associate Dean Graduate Programs upholds the fail, after consultation with the Supervisor, the Associate Dean Graduate Programs then summarizes the essential points from the memos to the Student, copied to the Supervisor, within five days of the exam.

If the Student fails the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination, they will be supported by the supervisor and supervisory committee to address knowledge/understanding deficits that lead to the determination of failure. They will do so by addressing the concerns raised by the Examiners in their reports and summarized by the Associate Dean Graduate Programs in a memo that accompanies the *Notice of a Failed Thesis Proposal Oral Examination Component*.

Retakes

Only one retake of the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination will be permitted. The retake must take place no sooner than two months and no later than six months from the date of the first examination. Normally, the composition of the committee will remain the same. In reporting the results of the second examination, the committee will be limited to recommending either a pass (i.e., no more than one negative vote) or a fail. A recommendation of *fail* requires that, within five working days:

- **Each Examiner** must submit a confidential written report to the Associate Dean Graduate Programs, copied to the Supervisor, detailing the reasons for their vote.
- **The Chair** must also submit a written report of the examination procedures to the Associate Dean Graduate Programs.

If the Associate Dean Graduate Programs upholds the recommendation of *fail*, the student will be required to withdraw from the Faculty of Graduate Studies. The graduate program



must send the *Recommendation of Required Withdrawal from Graduate Program for Failure to Maintain Academic Progress* and supporting documents to gpofom@ucalgary.ca.

Appeal of Failed Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

In the case of a failed Thesis Proposal Oral Examination, the student has the right to appeal directly to the Faculty of Graduate Studies following the procedures described in the *Graduate Calendar* under [Academic Regulations – Appeals – Appeals Against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings](#).

FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION

Format of the Written and Oral Field of Study Examinations

The Field of Study (FOS) examination tests a PhD student's knowledge of a field or fields related, but not identical to their research. The FOS examination encourages the student to develop both breadth and depth of knowledge within a given field or fields of enquiry. As content experts the student will provide the supervisory committee with a list of five potential questions they would like to answer for their written FOS exam, which are based on an approved Reading List. The supervisory committee will use these proposed questions to form three written FOS questions, of which the student will respond to two questions over the period of 21 days. The oral FOS examination, which is also based on the same Reading List, tests a PhD student's ability to respond orally to questions that extend beyond (i.e., are different from) those on the written FOS examination. Also, students will be prepared to respond orally to the question that they chose not to address in writing (note above that students are to respond in writing to two of the three questions provided). The oral examination requires that the student articulates their responses in a clear and concise manner and that they evaluate the results of previous research and rely on the relevant philosophy (as appropriate), theories, methods, and results (from the Reading List) to substantiate arguments.

Reading List

It is the responsibility of the student, in consultation with the Supervisor, to assemble a Reading List prior to scheduling the FOS exam. The Reading List, which should be assembled to ensure that students have both breadth and depth of knowledge in at least one, but no more than three, subject areas (including primary works, theory, methodology, and implementation, when appropriate), will normally contain approximately 40-50 entries (i.e., books, chapters in books, and journal articles). The Reading List is submitted in the final form to and approved (via email) by the members of the Supervisory Committee within two weeks of submission to the Supervisory Committee. Should there be a lack of consensus about the content of the Reading List, the Supervisor will make the final decision.



Composition of the FOS Examination Committee

The FOS examination committee will consist of:

1. The Student's Supervisory Committee,
2. one additional member from within the Faculty of Nursing,
3. and one member external to the Faculty of Nursing (and may be the same as for the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination). The external member is appointed by the Associate Dean Graduate Programs, after reviewing the recommendation from the Student's Supervisor.

A member of the academic staff appointed by the Associate Dean Graduate Programs serves as the Neutral Chair of both the Written and Oral FOS examination. The Neutral Chair is not a member of the examining committee and is non-voting.

Scheduling of the FOS Examination

The FOS Examination requirement must normally be fulfilled during the first 24 months after entry into the program, except when unforeseen circumstances prevent the student from meeting the program requirements. Once a student is prepared for the FOS Examination, the Supervisor must complete the FOS Timeline form, including the dates, times, and committee members, and send it to the Graduate Program Office (GPO) at least 6 weeks before the proposed date. The GPO will arrange a room or Zoom link for the exam.

The Supervisor is responsible for establishing the appropriate times for the FOS Examinations. Although the Written and Oral FOS Examinations take place separately, the scheduling of both examinations will take place at the same time. The Oral FOS examination should be scheduled to take place no more than one week after the vote on the Written FOS examination. The Oral FOS Examination will only proceed if the student has passed the Written FOS Examination.

WRITTEN FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION

Upon initiation by the Supervisor, the student as content expert, will provide the supervisory committee with a list of five potential questions they would like to answer for their written FOS exam, which are based on an approved Reading List. The members of the Supervisory Committee will use these questions to craft three questions related to the approved Reading List. The questions should require students to synthesize substantive knowledge, apply philosophy and theory (as appropriate), and/or demonstrate understanding of methodologies. Upon receiving the questions, students will have 21 calendar days to submit two written, publication quality essay-style responses (approximately 20 pages each (12-



point font) excluding references, figures, and tables), to two of the three questions.

The Examination Committee will have up to two weeks to read and evaluate the essays based on the following criteria:

- clarity and organization in responding to the question that was posed; and
- ability to evaluate the results of previous research, quality improvement, etc. and apply the relevant theories, methods, and results to substantiate arguments.

At the end of this period, they will submit constructive written feedback on the student's written performance as well as a recommendation (pass/fail) on the Written FOS Examination to the Neutral Chair via email.

Outcomes of the Written Field of Study Examination

If all examiners vote pass on the Written FOS Examination, or at most one fail vote, the student will pass the Written FOS Examination and move forward to the Oral FOS Examination. A student who does not pass the Written FOS Examination will not move forward to the Oral FOS examination and will have the opportunity to retake the Written FOS Examination as outlined below. The Associate Dean Graduate Programs will share the results of the Written FOS Examination along with feedback provided by Examination Committee members with the student and their supervisor within two days of receiving the result and committee feedback.

Retakes of Written Field of Study Examination

After the first failed Written FOS exam, the student will be entitled to retake the exam no sooner than two months and no later than six months from the date of the first examination. A second failure on the Written FOS Examination requires the student to withdraw from the program. The graduate program must send the *Recommendation of Required Withdrawal from Graduate Program for Failure to Maintain Academic Progress* to gpoform@ucalgary.ca.

ORAL FIELD OF STUDY EXAMINATION

The Oral FOS examination should be scheduled to take place no more than one week after the vote on the Written FOS examination and will only proceed if the student has passed the Written FOS Examination. The Neutral Chair, who is not a member of the examining committee and is non-voting will oversee the Oral FOS Examination. Questions, which are usually asked in rounds, will be based on written papers. The oral FOS examination tests a PhD student's ability to respond orally to questions that are related to the third question to which they did not respond in writing and questions that extend beyond (i.e., are different from) those on the written FOS examination.

The oral FOS examination should not exceed two hours (excluding requested breaks and deliberation time for the Committee members). Examiners are expected to ask clear and



succinct questions. The student will be given reasonable time to answer and should feel free to ask for questions to be repeated or rephrased. If the student has understood the question and cannot answer, the examiner should pass to another question and not attempt to extract an answer by prolonged interrogation or by leading the student. The Neutral Chair will ensure these guidelines are followed during the exam. At the end of the examination, the student is asked to withdraw from the room. Before any discussion of the student's performance, each examiner must provide a non-binding recommendation (pass/fail) of the student's performance on the oral examination by secret ballot submitted to the Neutral Chair. This procedure provides the committee members with a frame of reference upon which to base a full discussion of the student's overall examination performance. The final vote, which is provided orally, is taken after the Committee's discussion. Performance on the Oral FOS Examination will be judged on the student's ability to:

- clearly and concisely respond to the questions posed; and
- summarize and critique relevant previous research from the student's reading list.

Outcomes of Oral Field of Study Examination

Every effort should be made to reach a unanimous recommendation. Should the outcome of the final vote include at most one negative vote, the student will pass. Should the outcome include two or more negative votes, the committee's recommendation to the Associate Dean Graduate Programs will be *fail*. In the case of a fail the following must be completed:

- **The Neutral Chair** must inform the Student of the Committee's recommendation immediately following the vote of the examination committee. The Neutral Chair will submit the final recommendation of fail as well as a written report to the Associate Dean Graduate Programs within one working day of the completion of the examination.
- **The Examiners** write brief memos to the Associate Dean Graduate Programs explaining the reasons for their votes and submit these memos within five working days from the date of the examination.
- **The Associate Dean Graduate Programs** may uphold the fail in the case of a clear fail or refer to FGS for decision in the case of an unclear fail. If the Associate Dean Graduate Programs upholds the fail, after consultation with the Supervisor, they then summarize the essential points from the memos to the student, copied to the Supervisor and Faculty of Graduate Studies (gpoform@ucalgary.ca).
- **The Graduate Program** must send the *Notice of a Failed Candidacy Component* to the student within ten working days from the date of the examination. The *Notice* and the post-exam memos must be kept in the student's file. If there is an appeal, the *Notice* and supporting documents must be submitted to Faculty of Graduate Studies (gpoform@ucalgary.ca).

Note: In instance of a potential conflict of interest such as when the Associate Dean Graduate Programs is a member of the examining committee, the Dean or a designate will substitute



for the Associate Dean Graduate Programs.

Retakes of Oral Field of Study Examination

After the first failed oral FOS exam, the student will be entitled to retake the exam no sooner than two months and no later than six months from the date of the first examination. A second failure on the Oral FOS Examination requires the student to withdraw from the program. The graduate program must send the *Recommendation of Required Withdrawal from Graduate Program for Failure to Maintain Academic Progress* to gpoform@ucalgary.ca.

Appeal of Failed Field of Study Examination Results

In the case of a failed oral FOS examination, the student has the right to appeal directly to the Faculty of Graduate Studies following the procedures described in the *Graduate Calendar* under [Academic Regulations – Appeals – Appeals Against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings](#).

2024.04.16 – Masters, PhD Subcommittee – review.
2024.05.29 - Masters, PhD Subcommittee – approved.
2024.05.30 - Graduate Program Committee – approved.
2024.06.20 - Nursing Council – approved.
2023.11.19 Faculty of Graduate Studies – approved.

Appendix A
Faculty of Nursing
PhD Nursing Candidacy Examination Process Flowchart and Timeline
Evaluative Milestones

