



Psychology Graduate Program Candidacy Requirements

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

A. Statement of Purpose

Admission into candidacy in the Psychology Graduate Program requires that students have knowledge, technical skills, and abilities that are necessary to undertake advanced independent research. Specifically, it requires that students have expert knowledge in the narrow field of their thesis research, as well as a solid foundation in the areas of psychology that is of particular relevance to their specialty program.

B. All doctoral students in the Psychology Graduate Program must successfully complete the following components:

1. All required course work as specified in the [Graduate Calendar](#)
2. Thesis proposal
3. Field of Study (FoS) written and oral examinations

Timelines

Faculty of Graduate Studies requires that doctoral students must complete all candidacy requirements within 28 months after initial registration in the doctoral program. However, the psychology program recommends students complete these requirements within 20 months after registration. Students must complete their course requirements and have their thesis proposals approved prior to submitting the Notice of FoS Examination to the graduate program director. Students are then given 4 months to prepare for their FoS examination. Thus, it is recommended that students complete their minimum course requirements and have their thesis proposals approved within 16 months of the program. All students must complete their minimum course requirements and have their thesis proposals approved within the first 24 months of the program.

Thesis Proposal

FGS candidacy regulations require that in order to be admitted to candidacy, the student must successfully complete a written thesis proposal that is approved by the Supervisory Committee (see [Academic Regulations - Admission to Candidacy](#)).

All Ph.D. students must submit a thesis proposal describing the planned project for the Ph.D. thesis to the members of their Supervisory Committee. This proposal is meant to outline the direction of the thesis research. Feedback from the Supervisory Committee will help to shape the student’s research program. The thesis proposal provides the student an opportunity to receive valuable feedback from the committee. Students must consult with their Supervisors before submitting their proposal document to the Supervisory Committee for evaluation. The thesis proposal should include a review of literature sufficient to ensure the student is knowledgeable in the area of the thesis, research question(s), as well as detailed methodology outlining proposed experiments, and proposed data analyses. The thesis



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proposal must clearly explain the rationale, methodology, and planned analyses of the study. The document may be up to 30 pages in length (excluding references).

Normally, within 2 weeks after the submission of the thesis proposal to the Supervisory Committee, the Supervisory Committee meeting is scheduled.

Approval of Thesis Proposal

Approval of the thesis proposal takes place via a Supervisory Committee meeting. In this meeting, the student provides a brief synopsis of proposal and the Supervisory Committee discusses the proposal with the student. After the discussion, the student leaves the room and the Supervisory Committee decides whether the written thesis proposal can be approved, considering all of the following: (1) theoretical and methodological rigor, (2) feasibility, (3) contributions of the proposed research to the field, and (4) written quality of the proposal document. Unanimous approval from the committee must be obtained for the student to proceed to the next phase of the proposed research (e.g., seeking ethics approval for the proposed research and beginning data collection).

Every effort should be made to reach a unanimous recommendation on the Thesis Proposal. Once the Thesis Proposal is approved, the student has completed the Thesis Proposal component of the candidacy requirements.

Following the meeting, the Supervisor informs the student about the outcome of the proposal thesis and sends a memo indicating the outcome to the Graduate Program Director (and copies to the student and the Supervisory Committee members). Approval can be granted with minor revisions to the proposed research, and the nature of the revisions should be outlined in the supervisor's memo.

If unanimous approval is not obtained from the Supervisory Committee, the student must prepare a revised proposal document, addressing the concerns raised by the Supervisory Committee. After consultation with the Supervisor, the student can resubmit the revised thesis proposal to the Supervisory Committee no sooner than two months but not later than 6 months of the original proposal submission date. The Supervisory Committee should make its decision about the revised proposal no later than 3 weeks after the re-submission. It is the Supervisor's responsibility to arrange the Supervisory Committee meeting in a timely fashion. This decision will be made at a Supervisory Committee meeting. The Supervisor must inform the Graduate Program Director and the student about the Supervisory Committee's decision using the same procedure outlined above.

If the revised Thesis Proposal is not accepted, the student will be required to withdraw from the program. According to FGS regulations, a second failure on any candidacy component 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.



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Appeals

If the outcome of any component of the Candidacy Requirements relating to the Thesis Proposal or Field of Study Examinations is a fail, the student has the right to appeal the decision. Students must 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 (FoS) Examinations

In the Psychology Program, the Field of Study Examinations are designed to determine the preparedness of the student to do research of high quality in their particular fields of study. There are two components to the FoS examination in Psychology: **a written and an oral component**, evaluated separately. The examination is designed to assess the background knowledge of students in their discipline as well as some selected areas beyond each student's immediate research area, i.e., the broader field covered by their specialty program.

Composition of the FoS Examination Committee

Written Component

The FoS Examination Committee consists of the Supervisory Committee plus two additional members recommended to the Graduate Program Director by the supervisor. The student must never be involved in any aspects of exam arrangements. The supervisor will provide information about the proposed members of the examining committee so that the Graduate Program Director shall ensure to the best of their ability that no conflict of interest exists between the student or the Supervisor and the additional members of the examination committee according to FGS [regulations](#) (*Thesis Examinations - Internal and External Examiners*). One of the two non-Supervisory Committee members must be external to the Department if an external member is not already included in the Supervisory Committee. Please note: adjunct faculty members whose primary affiliation are outside the Psychology Department are considered external to the Department. The Supervisor, who is a voting member, will chair the evaluation meeting.

Oral Component

The same FoS Examination committee for the Written Component serves on the FoS Oral Examination Committee, plus the addition of a Neutral Chair, who is a member of the academic staff appointed by the Graduate Program Director, and chairs the examination. The Neutral Chair is non-voting.

Process of the FoS Examination Timelines

The notice of the FoS Examination must be submitted to the Graduate Program Director at least **two weeks** prior to the start of the Written Component. The notice should include the date of the meeting to evaluate the Written Component and the date of the Oral Examination. Typically the Oral Examination will be scheduled within two weeks of the meeting to evaluate the Written Component. The notice of FoS examination will be completed by the Supervisor and requires the signature of the student.



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It is the Supervisor's responsibility to arrange a convenient time and place for the meetings to evaluate the Written Component and the Oral Examination. Evaluation of the Written Component should take place 1 week after the examination answers are submitted to the Examination Committee. The Oral Examination should take place approximately 1-2 weeks after the FoS Written Component is evaluated. In the event of a 'fail' on the Written Component, the Oral Examination will not take place.

FoS Examination Components

There are two independent components that are assessed in the FoS Examinations. First is the written work, and second is performance in the oral.

In the FoS **Written Component**, the following two sources form the basis for the evaluation: (1) reading list, and (2) written questions (see details below). It is the Supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the reading list is available to all FoS committee members.

- (1) A reading list, recommended to be no more than 1500 pages in total, is created by the student's Supervisory Committee. The reading list will be given to the student normally within 1 month following the approval of their thesis proposal and completion of their required coursework. The Supervisory Committee creates this list based on discussions in a meeting of the Supervisory Committee or in electronic communications among its members. The student will have a total of 4 months to complete the required reading and the written portion of the examination. Typically, the readings are broadly related to the student's research area. That is, a student in I/O will be assigned readings in that area, a student in Social/Theory will be assigned readings associated with that area, and a student in Brain and Cognition will have readings assigned from that area.
- (2) The Supervisory Committee creates three written questions/topics based on the reading list. Responses to the questions/topics, in addition to the readings, will form the basis for the oral examination (see below). The student's written answers to these questions/topics could take the form of a critical review paper, or a research proposal. The decision of which format the written answers will take is made in conjunction with the student. No more than three questions/topics can be asked of the student, and the combined length of all the written answers must be no longer than 30 double-spaced pages in total (word-processed, 12 point font, reference list extra). After 3 months of receiving the reading list, the student will be provided with the questions/topics and given 3 weeks to complete the written answers. It is the student's responsibility to submit her/his written answers to all examining committee members at that time. The examining committee will have 1 week to evaluate the Written Component.
- (3) The written answers and reading list will form the basis for the oral component of the examination (see below). Thus, evaluation of the Written Component will be based on whether the student (a) adequately and appropriately responded to all aspects of the questions/topics, (b) synthesized and integrated information from the reading list, and (c) demonstrates the understanding of key issues and the ability to evaluate these issues.



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Examiners' Evaluation: Written Component. In a meeting, each examiner will submit to the Supervisor their vote (pass/fail) on the Written Component of the FoS examination. The initial recommendation is non-binding. All question(s)/topic(s) are evaluated as a whole. That is, a single "pass" or "fail" for the overall written response is given. The initial vote provides the committee with a frame of reference on which to base a discussion of the student's written performance. Discussion of the Written Component will then take place. At the end of the discussion, the committee members again vote. If the student receives 1 negative vote or less, the submission passes. The Supervisor informs the student and the GPD of the decision. If the student passes, he/she will go on to complete the scheduled Oral Examination.

Oral Component: The Oral Component proceeds in a second meeting following the evaluation of the Written Component. It will only proceed if the written work has received a pass from the Examination Committee at the evaluation meeting. The Oral Component is comprised of rounds of questions to the student from each member of the examination committee. The reading list and the written answer form the basis for questioning in the Oral Component of the examination. The student's performance will be evaluated using the following criteria: 1) accurately answers questions, 2) clarifies concerns in the written document, and 3) demonstrates knowledge of the readings and content area.

Structure of FoS Oral Examination

Length of Examination. The examination should not exceed two hours. This does not include the deliberation time of the Committee.

Examiners' Questioning. No one other than a member of the Examination Committee is allowed to question the student. All examiners should be given an equal opportunity to question the student during the early part of the examination, e.g., by rounds of questioning.

Questions to the student should be clear and succinct. The student should be given reasonable time to answer. 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 should guard against any tendency of examiners to interact with each other instead of concentrating on the examination of the student.

The Neutral Chair must stop the exam if one of the examiners needs to leave the room and will reconvene the exam when all examiners are present.

Official Examiners' Discussion: Oral Component. At the end of the FoS oral examination, the student is asked to withdraw from the room. Before any discussion of the student's performance, each examiner must declare an initial recommendation (pass/fail), using a blind ballot, which is non-binding. The Neutral Chair collects the individual ratings and declares the results of the "straw poll" to the committee. This provides the committee with a frame of reference on which to base a discussion of the student's performance. At the end of the discussion, the committee members again vote. If the student receives 1 negative vote or less, she/he passes the examination.



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Outcomes of the FoS Examination

Committee's recommendations are made separately for the Written and Oral Components. Every effort should be made to reach a unanimous recommendation for each component. Following each of the deliberations, each examiner must record a recommendation of pass or fail for each component on the official Report of FoS Oral Examination form. That is, following the deliberation of the Written Component, examiners will record their recommendation on the Examination Form. This form will be brought to the Oral exam. After the Oral exam, the examiners will record their recommendation for the Oral Component. Should the outcome of the final vote for a component include no more than one negative vote, the student will pass for that component. Three outcomes are possible for the FoS Examination (see below).

a) Passing both the Written and Oral components.

b) Failing the Written component only: If the written component receives a fail then student will be required to retake and pass the Written Component of the FoS examination before they can undertake the Oral Examination. The Supervisory Committee must provide specific instructions for a re-take of the FoS written examination, including new/revised questions to be addressed using the same set of readings, no sooner than 2 months of the student receiving the fail and no later than 6 months. The Supervisor will review the retake procedure with the student. It is the student's responsibility to submit her/his written answers to all Examining Committee Members no later than 3 weeks after receiving the the revised written assignment . Another meeting will be scheduled within 1 week of the examining committee receiving the written answers to vote and discuss whether the written component will receive a pass or fail. The student only has one opportunity to retake the written component. If the student fails a second time, he/she will be asked to withdraw from the program. If the student passes, then the Oral Examination will take place within 2 weeks. Scheduling of the re-take written examination and the subsequent oral examination follows the same procedure as stated above for the first round.

c) Passing the Written examination but failing the Oral component only: The student will not complete the written component again. The written materials completed for the first oral examination will be used in the retake examination. The student only has one opportunity to retake the oral component. If the student fails the oral component a second time, he/she will be required to withdraw from the program. The oral examination must be scheduled no sooner than 2 months and no later than 6 months upon receiving a fail.

In the case of a student failing any or all components of the FoS examination, the Chair (Supervisor for the Written, Neutral for the Oral) will write a brief memo detailing the procedures of the exam, and *each examiner* will write a brief memo to the Graduate Program Director explaining the reasons for his/her vote. This should be submitted within five working days from the examination date.

The Graduate Program must send a *Notice of a Failed Candidacy Component* to the student within ten working days from the examination date.



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Retake of the FoS Examination

The student will be allowed one retake of the FoS Written and one retake of the Oral Examination (see chart below). The retake may take place no sooner than 2 months and no later than 6 months from the date of the first scheduled FoS 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 Graduate Program Director, copied to the Supervisor, detailing the reasons for his/her vote.
- The Chair (Supervisor for the Written, Neutral for the Oral) must also submit a written report of the examination procedures to the Graduate Program Director.

If the Graduate Program Director 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 gpoform@ucalgary.ca.

Appeal of the Failed FoS Examination

In the case of a failed FoS examination, students have the right to appeal. Students must 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](#).

ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

Once a student has successfully completed all Candidacy Requirements, the graduate program must update the student's record, generate the Recommendation for Admission to Candidacy form and submit it to the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

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Flowchart with Timelines for the FoS Examinations

