

THOMAS JEFFERSON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE PROGRAM IN NEUROSCIENCE
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION GUIDELINES

Each student takes the comprehensive exam by the end of his/her second year of enrollment in the graduate program. To initiate the process and define the student's subjects of interest, he/she submits a one-page abstract of his/her intended thesis work to the Curriculum Committee (typically, by the end of Spring I of the second year of study). This Committee uses this information and the student's academic transcript to determine the composition of the Comprehensive Examination Committee in consultation with the Program Director. The Comprehensive Examination Committee is composed of three individuals who are standing faculty members in the College of Graduate Studies, and is ultimately approved by the Dean. The student's Research Advisor is excluded from the Comprehensive Examination Committee. If the exam is not scheduled to be completed by the end of September of the third year, the student must petition the Program Director and Executive Committee for an extension the first day of the Fall Semester.

The comprehensive exam has both oral and written portions, and is comprised of three questions submitted to the student by the chair of the Examination Committee two weeks prior to the oral exam. Copies of these questions are also sent to the Curriculum Committee and the Director of the Program. Each member of the Comprehensive Examination Committee prepares one question according to the criteria outlined below:

- Knowledge base in the field of neuroscience. It examines the student's ability to synthesize and apply basic principles of biological structure and function.
- Critical thinking. It examines the student's ability to critically evaluate the literature and extract the relevant information.
- Knowledge and application of the scientific method. It examines the student's ability to generate sound hypotheses, design experiments and evaluate the results.

A given question may concern one or all of the criteria. One week prior to the oral exam, the student submits the written answers to the chair of the Examination Committee. The total length of this document should be no longer than eight pages (single space; 11 point Arial; 1" margins all around). The three members of the Examination Committee and the Director of the Program (as a moderator) attend the oral component of the exam; and the Examination Committee employs the student's written answers as a framework to conduct further questioning that specifically evaluates the areas outlined above. The exam may begin with a brief verbal exposition of the exam's answers by the student. Typically, the expected duration of the exam is 90 min.

Once the exam is completed and after deliberation by the Examination Committee, the student is notified of the outcome immediately: Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. The student can take the comprehensive exam twice. That is, if the student fails on the first attempt, he/she can be re-tested and receive new questions; or he/she may receive a

Conditional Pass and do remedial work to be determined and evaluated by the Exam Committee. There is no second Conditional Pass; the outcome of the second attempt is Pass or Fail only. Failing the comprehensive exam twice results in dismissal from the program. Upon successful completion of the comprehensive examination, the student officially becomes a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. During the remainder of his/her tenure as a graduate student, the candidate's time is devoted primarily toward completion of the research thesis.

CONCERNING THE ROLE OF THE ADVISOR:

The Comprehensive Exam (CE) is a test of the student's individual ability to pursue advanced studies in Neuroscience. Therefore, the student must be solely responsible for the preparation of the written and oral portions of the exam. During the CE processes, the student may:

- Contact the chair of the CE Committee to request clarification regarding possible ambiguities in the exam questions.
- Contact the chair of the Curriculum Committee to request clarification regarding the CE process.
- Conduct a "mock exam" and receive feedback from peers before receiving the Comprehensive Exam questions (optional).

Before the CE committee sends the exam questions to the student, the student and his/her thesis advisor must sign this statement to acknowledge their understanding of the CE process and the roles of advisor, faculty and peers. After receiving the questions from the CE committee the student may not request help from peers, the thesis advisor or other faculty to answer the CE questions. After turning in the written answers and before the oral exam, answers may not be read or corrected by peers, the advisor or other faculty.

TIME FRAME FOR RECTIFYING FAILURES:

A student who fails the Comprehensive Exam is expected to retake it and pass no later than three months after the first attempt. The original exam committee will submit new questions and retest the student. Before receiving the new questions, the student may conduct a "mock exam" (optional).

EXTENSIONS OF THE DEADLINES

A student who is unable to comply with the deadlines must petition the Committee for Student Affairs for an extension. Extensions will be granted only for verifiable extenuating circumstances such as illness or serious personal situations.

GRADUATE STUDENT

I, _____ have read, understood, and will adhere to the
(print name)
Graduate Program in Neuroscience Comprehensive Examination Guidelines specified in
this document.

(signature)

(date)

THESIS ADVISOR

I, _____ have read, understood, and will adhere to the
(print name)
Graduate Program in Neuroscience Comprehensive Examination Guidelines specified in
this document.

(signature)

(date)