



Faculty of Social Work Graduate Program Doctoral 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

Candidacy includes coursework, a thesis proposal, a portfolio, a Written Examination, and an Oral Examination. All aspects of this Candidacy process will provide an opportunity for the student to demonstrate both breadth and depth in mastering current knowledge in three core areas: (a) theories informing social work’s mandate regarding particular populations and fields of service, (b) practice methods guiding services and initiatives with particular populations and fields of service, and (c) relevant knowledge-building and research methods and traditions. Breadth refers to a demonstration of a more general and far-ranging knowledge that will be needed as a teacher and consumer of scholarship in the student’s focal area(s); depth refers to a demonstration of the student’s specialized knowledge required to conduct high quality scholarship in their focal area(s). Demonstrating an understanding of the relationship of issues explored to social work’s professional knowledge base and social purpose is a fundamental requirement.

Field of Study Examinations are composed of two elements: Written and Oral. The Written component includes written answers to three questions. The Oral component includes questioning by the Examination Committee of the student’s answers to his/her written component.

B. Candidacy Components

All doctoral students in the Faculty of Social Work Doctoral Program must successfully complete the following Candidacy components within 28 months of commencement of the program:

1. Coursework.
2. Thesis proposal.
3. Portfolio of student’s work in the program.
4. Written Field of Study (FoS) Examination.
5. Oral Field of study (FoS) Examination.

1. COURSEWORK

All course requirements must be completed prior to the FoS Examination (written and oral). The program course requirements are listed in the [graduate calendar](#).

2. THESIS PROPOSAL

The doctoral student constructs a 25-30 page preliminary proposal inclusive of rationale, theoretical and literature overview, methodology, and reference list in the final semester of their coursework during SOWK 721. The thesis proposal is formally constructed subsequent to this course. This proposal is submitted to the student’s supervisor two weeks prior to a meeting that includes the student and the Supervisory Committee. (The thesis proposal must be approved by the committee no later than 3 months prior to the FoS Examination.) The supervisor will disseminate the proposal to all Supervisory

Approved by Faculty of Social Work Council: June 14, 2017; Revised February 15, 2023

Approved by FGS Policy Committee: September 21, 2017; Revisions approved March 15, 2023

Effective Date: September 21, 2017; Revisions effective March 15, 2023



Faculty of Social Work Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

Committee members. This proposal must concisely outline the thesis plan, providing a substantive path as to what the student will study and how the student will do it. Key elements that are required: clearly articulated research focus and question, rationale for the study, a brief review of relevant literature, the proposed research methodology, and plan for dissemination. Grammar and expression must be clear and the writing accords with APA (6th ed.) writing style and professional citation standards. In the meeting, the Supervisory Committee discusses the proposal with the student in order to clarify any questions about the proposal and to decide whether the proposal is acceptable (see key elements above). All Supervisory Committee members must agree that the proposal is acceptable. If it is deficient in any of the required elements, the Committee will specify those deficits and the student will need to continue to work on the proposal and re-submit when the changes have been made. Once the changes have been made, another meeting of the Supervisory Committee will be held to determine if the proposal is acceptable (see Appendix for our internal "PhD Thesis Research proposal Approval Recommendation" form). The student must pass the thesis proposal before he/she can proceed with the other Candidacy components. Because the FoS Examination will take place in the 28th month of the program for the student (or earlier), the thesis proposal must be approved by no later than the 25th month.

3. PORTFOLIO

In preparation for the FoS Examinations (Written and Oral), the student creates a portfolio of her/his work (e.g., list of completed coursework, papers written or other scholarly products created for those courses, conference or workshop presentations, publications created during the program, approved thesis proposal, brief statement of academic priorities and goals, and a preliminary reading list) and submits this to the members of the Supervisory Committee. This reading list normally consists of 7 to 10 double-spaced pages of books, chapters, articles, web-based documents, dissertations, etc. that focus on the substantive areas of research (including methodologies), theory, and practice. These readings are in-depth rather than general or superficial. The purpose of the portfolio is to provide committee members with a solid overview of the student's area of focus in her/his doctoral work from which to create penetrating and generative FoS Examination questions. This is evaluated as a pass when the portfolio is constructed with all the required elements (see above) or as a fail if the portfolio did not include the required elements. Two months prior to the FoS Examination, a portfolio meeting takes place (the Examination questions and dates have not yet been set). An outcome of this meeting is an agreement between the student and the Supervisory Committee as to the knowledge of the student's substantive focus, practice, and research methods that will be mastered and defended through the FoS Examinations. Within two weeks after this meeting, the student's supervisor will itemize a reading list (and provide that list in writing) that the student is expected to read prior to the FoS Examinations (Written and Oral components). The Supervisory Committee will discuss possible Examination questions and the supervisor makes the final decision on the questions for the student.

4. WRITTEN FIELD OF STUDY (FoS) EXAMINATION

a. Scheduling of Written Examination

The student will meet with her/his Supervisory Committee two months before the Examination (at the Portfolio Meeting) to establish specific goals and timetables for the FoS Examinations. The portfolio and



Faculty of Social Work Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

the thesis proposal must be successfully completed prior to the student moving on to the FoS Examinations. The student's Supervisor must receive, sign, and return the *Notice of FoS Oral Examination* to the Graduate Program Administrator for processing 8-10 weeks prior to the Oral Examination date. This form sets the Examination process into formal motion, given that the Written Examination must precede the Oral Examination.

b. Composition of Written Examination Committee

The FoS Examination Committee consists of the Supervisory Committee members plus two additional members (one external to the Faculty of Social Work) approved by the Graduate Program Director. The Committee composition will be formally established at least 6 weeks prior to the Written Examination. The supervisor submits the *Approval of External Examiner* form (along with an up-to-date curriculum vitae of the External Examiner if the said examiner is external to the University of Calgary) to the Graduate Program Administrator. The same members will also serve on the Oral Examination Committee.

c. Format of Written Examination

The FoS Written Examination is a take-home examination. Examination questions are determined by the Supervisor and given to the student 5 weeks before the Oral Examination. The student is given two questions that are focused on theory, two focused on research, and two focused on practice. From these six questions, the student selects one from each category to answer. Each paper should be 20-25 pages in length (excluding references), using 12-font type, and double-spacing. Features of the answers should include concise addressing of all aspects of the questions, a demonstration of in-depth understanding of the questions, and an integrative understanding of how the targeted issues relate to the field of social work. Grammar and expression should be excellent. Students have 3 weeks to prepare their responses. It is the student's responsibility to send the electronic copy of the responses to each member of the examination committee at the 3-week deadline, which will be at least **two weeks before** the Oral Examination date. The email must be copied to Student Services. Once the student has the questions (and until the Oral Examination is completed), it is expected that no one will help the student formulate any answers to the questions.

d. Process/Evaluation of Written Examination

Examiners will evaluate the Written Examination independently and not comment to the student or other examiners or supervisor(s) about the Written Examination prior to the Oral Examination. Examiners will compose a report that outlines their evaluation of the Written Examination (all three answers are evaluated together) and submit it to the Neutral Chair one week prior to the commencement of the Oral Examination. The Written Examination must be passed on its own merit, as is also the case with the Oral Examination. If there is no more than one vote for "fail" on the Written Examination, it is a "pass." If there are two or more votes for "fail," the Candidacy Examination is failed. The Supervisor will be notified by the Neutral Chair and the Oral Examination part of the Candidacy Examination will be cancelled.

Within five working days of a failed Written Examination, the Neutral Chair must submit a written report of the Examination procedures to the Graduate Program Director and each examiner must provide a



Faculty of Social Work Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

confidential written report to the Graduate Program Director explaining the reasons for her/his vote and copy it to the student's supervisor. After consultation with the supervisor, the Graduate Program Director then summarizes the essential points to the student, copied to the supervisor.

In the event of a failed Written Examination, within ten working days, the supervisor will meet with the student and provide the student with clear guidance to help the student prepare for a retake. These guidelines must be clear and detailed to assure that the student understands what is required. The student may request convening a meeting of the Supervisory Committee for purposes of reviewing the reasons for the failure and the requirements for a successful retake. The retake will be comprised of the same questions as those that comprised the original Written Examination.

Only one retake of a Written Examination will be permitted. The retake must occur 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 (no more than one negative vote) or fail. A recommendation of fail requires that, within five working days, each examiner must submit a confidential report to the Graduate Program Director and the supervisor, detailing the reasons for her/his vote. Within five working days, the Neutral Chair must also submit a written report of the examination procedures to the Graduate Program Director. If the GPD upholds the recommendation to fail, the student will be required to withdraw from the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

e. Appeal of Failed Written Examination

This is the same appeal process as described under the Oral FoS Examination section.

5. ORAL FIELD OF STUDY (FoS) EXAMINATION

a. Scheduling of Oral Examination

See section above on scheduling of the Written Examination. The Examining Committee will have one week to read the student's responses to the three questions before the Oral Examination.

b. Composition of Oral Examination Committee

Same composition as the Written Examination Committee.

c. Format of Oral Examination

The purpose of the Oral Examination is to provide Committee members and the student opportunity to further explore the student's written responses in the Written Examination.

The Oral Examination is conducted by a Neutral Chair who is a member of the Faculty of Social Work academic staff but not a member of the Examining Committee. The Neutral Chair is not an examiner and does not participate in the evaluation of the examination.

The Oral Examination includes up to two hours of questioning plus additional time for deliberations. No one other than a member of the Examination Committee is allowed to question the student. All



Faculty of Social Work Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

examiners (including the supervisor) pose questions to the student in a series of rounds of questions. Questions to the student should be clear and succinct. The student should be given a 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 student must provide oral answers that reveal an in-depth understanding of all parts of the questions, demonstrates an ability to formulate coherent and reflective answers, and reveals that the student can synthesize material from professional literature into the specific questions posed. The Neutral Chair should guard against any tendency of the examiners to interact with each other instead of concentrating on the examination of the student. The Neutral Chair must stop the Examination if one of the examiners needs to leave the room and will reconvene the Examination when all examiners are present.

d. Process/Evaluation of Oral Examination

At the end of the Oral Examination, the student is asked to leave the room. Before any discussion of the student's oral performance, each examiner (including the supervisor) must identify by a secret ballot which recommendation (pass/fail) she/he favours for the Oral Examination. This procedure provides a beginning frame from which to conduct a full discussion of the student's performance. After the discussion, a final vote (not a secret ballot) is taken—each examiner records a recommendation of pass or fail on the official Faculty of Graduate Studies *Recommendation of Candidacy Admission* form for the Oral Examination. Every effort should be made to reach a unanimous recommendation. The Neutral Chair informs the student of the Committee's recommendation immediately following the vote of the FoS Examination Committee. The Neutral Chair will record the final recommendation of pass or fail on the *Report of FoS Oral Examination* form which must be then given to the Graduate Program Administrator, who ensures that it is signed by the Graduate Program Director. The Neutral Chair also sends a memo to the Graduate Program Director about the process and the outcome. The Graduate Program Director reviews all the evaluations (pass and fail) and notes from the Neutral Chair about the process of the Examination.

Should the outcome of the final vote include no more than one vote to "fail" on the Oral Examination, the student will pass. Should the outcome include two or more failing votes, the Committee's recommendation to the Graduate Program Director will be a "fail" for the Oral Examination. The Graduate Program Director reviews the failing vote and may consult the Faculty of Graduate Studies in the process of deciding whether or not to uphold the failing vote. Should the Graduate Program Director uphold the recommendation of "fail," the student will be allowed a retake of the Candidacy Examination. If the Oral FoS Examination is failed, the Oral component needs to be re-done (not the Written).

Within five working days of a failed Oral Examination, the Neutral Chair must submit a written report of the Examination procedures to the Graduate Program Director. Within five working days of the Examination, each examiner must provide a confidential written report to the Graduate Program Director explaining the reasons for her/his vote and copy it to the student's supervisor. After



Faculty of Social Work Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

consultation with the supervisor, the Graduate Program Director then summarizes the essential points to the student, copied to the supervisor.

In the event of a failed Oral Examination, within ten working days, the supervisor will meet with the student and provide the student with clear guidance to help the student prepare for a retake. These guidelines must be clear and detailed to assure that the student understands what is required. The student may request convening a meeting of the Supervisory Committee for purposes of reviewing the reasons for the failure and the requirements for a successful retake.

Only one retake of a Oral Examination will be permitted. The retake must occur no sooner than two months and no later than six months from the date of the first Oral 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 (no more than one negative vote) or fail. A recommendation of fail requires that, within five working days, each examiner must submit a confidential report to the Graduate Program Director and the supervisor, detailing the reasons for her/his vote. Within five working days, the Neutral Chair must also submit a written report of the examination procedures to the Graduate Program Director. If the GPD upholds the recommendation to fail, the student will be required to withdraw from the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

e. Appeal of Failed Oral Examination

If the outcome of any component of the Candidacy Requirements relating to the Thesis Proposal or the Field of Study is a fail, the student has the right to appeal the decision to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Procedures for appeal are described in the Graduate Calendar under [Academic Regulations](#).