

# 11.99.99.R0.13 Examinations for Graduate Degrees



Revised March 1, 2024  
Next Scheduled Review: March 1, 2029

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## Procedure Summary

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Comprehensive examinations for master's, specialist, and doctoral degree programs assure quality graduate programs. The examinations test the student's knowledge and understanding of a specific field of study.

This procedure outlines the guidelines for master's, specialist, and doctoral degree program examinations.

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## Procedures and Responsibilities

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### 1 ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY FOR THE MASTER'S/SPECIALIST DEGREE

1.1 Enrollment in a graduate course or admission to Graduate School does not assure admission to candidacy for a graduate degree. In order to be admitted to candidacy, the student must meet the following Graduate School and departmental requirements:

#### 1.2 Graduate School Requirements

1.2.1 Full admission to The Graduate School and satisfactory completion of all prerequisite courses and other departmental requirements;

1.2.2 Completion of at least four Texas A&M University-Commerce graduate courses, three of which must be in a major field and applicable to the degree program; and

1.2.3 An overall grade point average of 3.00 or above on all graduate work completed at this university and an overall grade point average of 3.00 or better on all graduate work taken towards the graduate degree program.

#### 1.3 Departmental Qualifying Examinations

The major and/or minor department may require a written and/or oral qualifying examination before granting approval. The examination will be appropriate to the field of study and will entail one or more of the following components: written, oral, creative (artistic), or performance.

A student who fails the qualifying examination may take it a second time only with special approval of the departments involved (major, minor, or both).

#### 1.4 Filing for Candidacy

1.4.1 When the above requirements have been met, the student should petition the major (and minor, if applicable) department for admission to candidacy.

1.4.2 If a department does not require a candidacy examination, the student is automatically admitted to candidacy upon fulfillment of The Graduate School requirements, and no paper work is required of the student or the department.

### 2 FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THE MASTER'S/SPECIALIST DEGREE

2.1 All candidates must satisfactorily pass a comprehensive examination covering all the work within their master's/specialist degree program, including a minor if applicable. In addition, an acceptable defense of the thesis will be required of those students pursuing a thesis. The Final Examination Report for the Master's/Specialist Degree is to be submitted to The Graduate School at least three weeks prior to graduation.

2.2 The student's advisory committee or major department will administer the examination according to established practice in that field. The examination will entail one or more of the following components: written, oral, creative (artistic), performance, or portfolio. The advisory committee will administer the defense of the thesis. A candidate who fails this examination must complete whatever further courses or additional study are stipulated by the advisory committee or by the major department to correct the weaknesses or deficiencies revealed by the examination.

2.3 The student who fails the comprehensive examination may retake the examination when the department deems it appropriate. Should the student fail the examination upon the second attempt, a third and final attempt may be taken only with the recommendation of the Department Head or equivalent and approval of the Dean of the Graduate School.

### 3 DOCTORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION/ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

#### 3.1 Written

3.1.1 The comprehensive examination for the doctoral degree is one of the essential features of the doctoral program and will be administered in all areas of the candidate's program of study. The purpose of the examination is to evaluate the candidate's substantive knowledge, skills in problem-solving techniques, ability to organize material and effectiveness of written expression. Successful completion of the comprehensive examination is required for admission to candidacy.

- 3.1.2 The examination requires analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of knowledge acquired during study for the doctoral degree; consequently, satisfactory performance in course work does not necessarily guarantee successful performance on the comprehensive examination. The written examination will consist of an essay-type or combination essay-objective-type examination and will be given near the completion of the candidate's program of study.
- 3.1.3 A candidate who has satisfied competency requirements in the tools of research and, in the opinion of the advisory committee, is ready for the comprehensive examination may make application to the major department. The candidate's advisory committee or department is responsible for the preparation and administration of the written examination.

## 3.2 Oral

- 3.2.1 The oral portion of the comprehensive examination should be given as soon as possible after the successful completion of the written examination. The purposes of this exam are: (1) to clarify any weaknesses in the written exam, and (2) to evaluate the candidate's knowledge of the field, ability to justify a viewpoint and manner of doing so, effectiveness of overall expression and knowledge of literature of the fields. The exam is open to any questions in the candidate's fields of study, not just to those that were evidently weak in the written examination.
- 3.2.2 The examination will be conducted by the candidate's advisory committee and will be open to all graduate faculty. All committee members are expected to be present and to ensure an adequate evaluation of the candidate's knowledge in the major, minor, and related fields.

## 3.3 Results

- 3.3.1 The comprehensive examination is intended to determine if the candidate is qualified to continue work toward the doctoral degree. Satisfactory performance on both the written and oral examinations indicates that the candidate may continue the program as planned. Less than satisfactory performance on one or more portions of the examination may result in modification of the degree program, repetition of one or more portions of the examination, or termination of candidacy for the doctoral degree.

3.3.2 A doctoral student who does not pass the comprehensive examination(s) may be suspended from the doctoral program; however, upon the recommendation of the advisory committee and with the approval of the Graduate Dean, the student may be permitted to repeat the examinations. In accordance with University Procedure, *13.99.99.R0.39 Graduate Academic Probation, Retention, and Suspension*, a doctoral student who does not pass the comprehensive examination(s) on the second attempt will not be allowed to pursue further study at the doctoral level. This procedure also applies to the final oral examination and dissertation defense.

3.3.3 The chairperson of the candidate's advisory committee will forward the committee's recommendations regarding candidacy to the Dean of the Graduate School who will notify the candidate concerning admission to candidacy.

#### 4 DISSERTATION DEFENSE

4.1 A satisfactory defense is required for the approval of the dissertation and recommendation for graduation. The defense is administered upon recommendation of the candidate's advisory committee after coursework, comprehensive examinations, and dissertation requirements have been fulfilled. It is a rigorous examination of the dissertation.

4.2 It is expected that the entire advisory committee will participate in the examination. The examination is open to all members of the graduate faculty. Visitors may ask questions, but final determination of the student's performance rests with the advisory committee.

#### 5 REQUIREMENTS FOR SIGNATURE OF FINAL EXAMINATION REPORT

5.1 The members of the advisory committee will sign the dissertation and recommend graduation to the Graduate Dean if the candidate has:

5.2 Completed all work assigned by the committee;

5.3 Passed all examinations required by the department, including the dissertation defense;

5.4 Completed a dissertation, which is an independent investigation in the major field, and constitutes a contribution to knowledge; and

5.5 Submitted an abstract which meets the approval of the committee.

5.6 If any of these conditions is not met, the advisory committee may set additional requirements before the dissertation is approved.

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## **Related Statutes, Policies, or Requirements**

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University Procedure [13.99.99.R0.39 Graduate Academic Probation, Retention, and Suspension](#)

Suspends University Procedure *11.04.99.R0.20 Examinations for Graduate Degrees*

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## **Revision History**

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Approved April 11, 2016

Revised September 8, 2016

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## **Contact Office**

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