

Non Thesis Option: Comprehensive Exam Guidelines

Introduction:

Students pursuing a non-thesis option will take comprehensive examinations after they have completed 21 credits. The same University regulations that apply to a thesis defense also apply to comprehensive exams. The student must be in good academic standing (see <https://web.uri.edu/graduate-manual/scholastic-standing/#section1020>).

- (1) The Master's comprehensive exam in the Department of Communication Studies contains a written exam and an oral exam. The student will be examined in three content areas from interpersonal communication, public discourse, organizational communication, media communication, public relations/strategic communication, sports media, science & environmental communication, and health communication.
- (2) The student should identify a graduate faculty member within the Department of Communication Studies to be his or her major professor, and work with the major professor to establish a comprehensive exam committee. Traditional MA students should do this in their third semester and ABM students should do this as early as possible in their second semester.
- (3) The committee typically consists of three graduate faculty members, each member responsible for one content area.
- (4) There are a total of 4 questions in the written exam, typically with two questions from the major professor covering one content area and one question from each of the remaining committee members covering one content area. It is suggested that the two non-major committee members propose two questions for one content area, and the student chooses one from each area.
- (5) The student should solicit and collect study guides and parameters of the questions from each member of the committee. The study guide should be a list of foundational books and academic articles in one of the areas of concentration. It is expected that students will build a synthetic knowledge of each area, and be able to build bridges between key concepts, theories, and issues within each area. The study guide is not simply a reading list from a graduate syllabus. It is designed to be a more comprehensive review of the academic, scholarly and/or professional writing in that area. It is the major professor's responsibility to compile all the exam questions for the student and send them to the department's graduate administrator two days before the scheduled written exam.
- (6) The major professor and the student set dates and times for the written exam as specified by the graduate director (usually the second week of March). The major professor will discuss with the student which questions are for day 1 and which are for day 2. It is usually a total of 8 hours split over two consecutive days (e.g., March 7th and 8th, 10:00 am - 2:00 pm).
- (7) The department's graduate administrator will give the student the questions and collect the student's responses on the exam dates. All written exams are closed-book/notes/internet (no cell phones). All written exams will be taken on campus using a computer without internet access, provided by the COM department. After the exam is completed, the student's responses will be emailed to the committee members for review.
- (8) Members of the committee will inform the student's major professor of their evaluations of the student's answers to their questions within three (3) business days along with their

comments by using the COM Studies Comprehensive Written Examination Results form ([available here](#)). Within five (5) business days, the student will be informed of the results of the written examination

(9) A student who fails the written examination may be permitted one re-examination in the part or parts failed if re-examination is recommended by the committee and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. A second examination, if permitted, may be taken only after a minimum of two weeks has passed to allow for additional student preparation. In all cases, a second examination must take place before one year has elapsed. Students failing a re-examination in a master's degree program will not have the opportunity to complete a thesis-based or non-thesis-based master's degree in that program. (<https://web.uri.edu/graduate-manual/degree-requirements/#section7453>)

(10) An oral defense may take place ten (10) business days after the written exam is completed, provided that the student passes the written exam according to the committee's review. The date of the oral exam shall be scheduled no less than two days before the deadline established by the graduate school for submission of the results of the comprehensive examination to that office. This deadline may be found online. The duration of the oral defense is usually 1.5 -2 hours. According to the graduate school manual, "with oral examinations or portfolios, the student shall be notified as soon as the examining committee completes deliberations." (<https://web.uri.edu/graduate-manual/degree-requirements/#section770>). The oral defense committee should comprise the same members as the written exam committee.

(11) Upon a successful oral defense, the comprehensive exam committee should fill out a "[Results on Non-Thesis Master's Comprehensive Examination](#)" form; the form can be found <https://web.uri.edu/graduate-school/forms/>.

(12) A student who fails the oral examination may be permitted one re-examination in the part or parts failed if re-examination is recommended by the examining committee and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. The second examination may be taken only after an interval of two weeks has passed, but before one year has elapsed. Students failing a re-examination in a master's degree program will not have the opportunity to complete a thesis-based or non-thesis-based master's degree in that program. (see <https://web.uri.edu/graduate-manual/degree-requirements/#section770>) (7.74.)

(13) If the results of the student's comprehensive exam are not submitted to the graduate school by the deadline set for that semester's graduates (e.g., May graduates), the student's graduation will be postponed (e.g., August or December) and the student should enroll in CRG999 if he or she has completed all requirements except for making up grades of Incomplete, taking the Master's comprehensive exam, or submitting the final version of a research project, thesis or dissertation.