



FROST CENTRE FOR CANADIAN  
STUDIES AND INDIGENOUS STUDIES

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### *Guidelines for Chairs of Comprehensive Exams*

Under normal circumstances PhD comprehensive fields are examined in the following manner:

- 1) A field supervisor, preferably in consultation with the two other committee members, sets exam questions, to be answered in a four-hour examination period.
- 2) The candidate's written exam is to be provided to all committee members at least one week in advance of the date set for the oral examination. The supervisor then contacts the other two people to make sure that the written exam is good enough to proceed to an oral. If it is not – i.e., if it is a clear fail, then the student fails the exam. (See *PhD guidelines*).
- 3) The oral exam is generally to be conducted within a two hour period.
- 4) At the beginning of the oral exam, the Chair will ask the student to leave the room for a few minutes so that the committee can discuss the exam on their own (and go over procedures if they wish).
- 5) The candidate will be questioned by the three committee members, with the supervisor questioning last. A supplementary round of questions is common. Each person should take about 15-20 minutes for their questions.
- 4) After the completion of questioning the candidate is asked to leave the room, while the committee discusses whether the performance is a pass with distinction, a satisfactory pass, or a failure.
- 5) A student who fails a comprehensive examination will be permitted one re-examination. Any student who fails a second comprehensive examination (either the initial examination and its re-examination, or the initial examination in both of the two fields) will be withdrawn from the program.
- 6) The role of the Chair is to oversee the examination, to see that the proceedings are fair to all parties, to be responsible for the completion of all paper work associated with the official file of the examination, and to offer a final report on the examination to the Graduate School. The Chair does not vote on the candidate's performance in the exam. The Chair has no involvement in the formal questioning of the student.