

## PRELIMINARY AND FINAL EXAMINATIONS

The PhD is a research-oriented degree. In the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health (KCH), the PhD is also advisor-driven, that is, doctoral students are admitted only when there is a designated faculty member who serves as their advisor. Thus, the doctoral student and her/his advisor work closely together throughout the student's program of study. In addition to formal coursework, the Graduate College requires all PhD students to complete two major examinations: (1) the Preliminary Examination, which is signified by the successful completion of all course and language requirements; and (2) the Final Examination, which constitutes the public defense of a completed dissertation. The purpose of the Preliminary Examination is to assess the student's readiness for commencing dissertation research. The purpose of the Final Examination is to assess whether the student has made a sound and substantial contribution to knowledge and is accordingly worthy of being granted a PhD. What follows is the specific information for doctoral students and faculty relative to these examinations in KCH.

### I. Specific Information Related to Preliminary and Final Examinations

#### The Preliminary Examination

The purpose of the Preliminary Examination is to assess the doctoral student's readiness for commencing dissertation research.

Prior to scheduling the Preliminary Examination, a doctoral student should have successfully completed all course and language requirements, with the exception of thesis hours (599).

The Preliminary Examination consists of three related, but distinct parts: Written Exam, Oral Exam, and Dissertation Proposal.

The date of the Oral portion of the exam constitutes the official date of the examination.

#### ***Preparing for the Preliminary Examination***

The doctoral student is encouraged to discuss the process of the Preliminary Examination with his/her advisor and well in advance of scheduling the exam. There are different paths through the Preliminary Examination that are primarily at the discretion of the advisor. One path involves the Preliminary Examination being successfully completed *prior to* a proposal of a dissertation project. Another path involves the proposal of the dissertation project as part of the exam itself. The discussion of how the process will unfold should take place between the student and advisor before the student begins the process of preparing.

Once the process has been delineated, the student should contact the members of the Preliminary Examination Committee (see section on ***Dissertation and Doctoral Examination Committees*** below) well in advance of the Preliminary Examination (e.g., 3-6 months before) and request guidance on what she/he should be expected to prepare for regarding the exam. This may include suggestions on areas of knowledge to become familiar with, the provision of an extensive reading list (which may include book chapters, articles, course content, etc.), and may include example questions. This information will be the basis for the student's preparation for taking the written portion of the Preliminary Examination. Doctoral students are also encouraged to provide a written copy of the dissertation proposal to the committee prior to commencing the Preliminary Examination if that is the process the student and advisor have agreed upon.

#### **Format**

The Preliminary Examination is administered in multiple parts: (a) an initial written examination; (b) an oral examination; and (c) the proposal of the dissertation. The date of the oral examination constitutes the official date of the examination. The faculty advisor (i.e., chair of committee) will inform the Department Graduate Office of the dates for the examination and the Department Graduate Office will then request a ***Preliminary Examination Result (PER)*** form from the Graduate College. This will be forwarded to the chair of the committee.

- The written portion of the examination should evaluate the student's: (1) general understanding of the disciplinary and professional aspects of kinesiology or community health; (2) knowledge of the

literature and theoretical perspectives in the student's major area of study; and/or (3) knowledge of the methodological perspectives and research techniques in the student's major area of study. If the dissertation proposal is included as part of the Preliminary Examination process, the student should also demonstrate the ability to integrate 1, 2 and 3 in the design, preparation, implementation, and defense of a dissertation proposal. The manner in which this knowledge is determined can vary (e.g., number of questions, length of time allowed to answer questions, amount of accessibility to source materials, etc.), but should be agreed upon by the committee and clearly communicated to the student by the advisor prior to the examination taking place.

- The oral portion of the examination involves two parts. Part I focuses on follow-up questions related to written exam responses that committee members believe require further clarification. Such questions should reflect an in-depth assessment of the student's understanding of any part of the written examination that was evaluated as failing to convey adequate understanding or viewed as not providing a satisfactory answer. When appropriate, it is allowable for in-depth assessment to occur during the proposal of the dissertation study (see Part II). Each member of the committee must be provided an opportunity to examine the student thoroughly. The result of the written and oral examination should be communicated to the student.
- Part II of the oral examination could be immediately following Part I, or it could occur on a separate day altogether (this should be established ahead of time by the student and her/his advisor and agreed upon by the committee). The focus of this portion of the examination is on the student's proposed dissertation topic. All committee members must be satisfied that the student has a solid knowledge of the research literature and research methods related to the dissertation topic along with the scholarly abilities to satisfactorily complete a sound and substantial dissertation. At the conclusion of this portion of the examination, the student and the committee will have an agreed upon dissertation plan for the student to execute.
- The specific format and rules (e.g., closed-book, time allowed for written responses, etc.) of Preliminary Examinations are determined by the faculty advisor. However, the format and rules must be clearly communicated to the student in advance. Once the examination is completed, the student must be promptly notified about examination result.
- All voting members of the committee must participate in the oral examination, the deliberation, and determination of the results of the oral examination.
- ***No audio or video recording of the examination or deliberation may be made without the express permission of the student and all members of the committee.***

## Results

Decisions of the Preliminary Examination committee must be unanimous and are recorded on the ***Preliminary Examination Result*** form. The committee may make one of three decisions:

- **Pass the candidate.**
- **Fail the candidate.** The exam committee may, but is not required to, grant the student another opportunity to take the examination after completing additional course work, independent study, or research, as recommended by the committee. However, if a second attempt is given, a new committee must be appointed by the Graduate College. The new committee may, but does not have to, consist of the same members as the original committee.
- **Defer the decision.** If this option is chosen:
  - the same committee must re-examine the student,
  - the second exam must occur within 180 calendar days of the date of first exam, and
  - the outcome of the second exam must be Pass or Fail.

After a Fail result, a student will only be allowed to take the preliminary examination one additional time while working toward the completion of any one program of study.

The **Preliminary Examination Result (PER)** form verifies that the student has completed the examination, regardless of the outcome. All voting members must record their vote and the results of the examination must be recorded with the Graduate College on one form. The unit's executive officer or authorized person must affirm the accuracy of the result. The result of the examination is communicated to the student and to the Graduate College as soon as possible after the conclusion of the exam. The result must be received by the Graduate College no later than 180 days after the appointment of the committee. Examination result decisions are maintained by the Graduate College.

**Second preliminary exam.** If more than five (5) years elapse after a doctoral student's Preliminary Examination and the Final Examination has not yet taken place, the student is required to demonstrate that their broad knowledge of the field is current by passing a second preliminary examination (see [Chapter 6.2 of the Graduate College Handbook](#) for details; <https://go.grad.illinois.edu/handbook>).

## The Final Examination (Defense)

The purpose of the Final Examination is to assess whether the student has made a sound and substantial contribution to knowledge and is accordingly worthy of being granted a PhD.

The Final Examination consists of a public, oral examination, which constitutes the public defense of a completed dissertation project.

### Format

- Students must adhere to KCH procedures and requirements.
- The student, with the approval of the chairperson and/or director of the dissertation, submits the final draft of the dissertation to each committee member in either paper or electronic format, depending on committee member preference. Each committee member must be provided a minimum of two (2) weeks to review and evaluate the final draft of the dissertation **before** the Final Examination.
- The examination consists of a public, oral examination followed with a closed-door deliberation by the committee. The student is informed of the result immediately following the deliberation.
  - The examination should proceed in an orderly fashion with the student first being provided the opportunity to summarize his/her research. Each committee member then must be provided ample time to examine the student. At the discretion of the chairperson, visitors may be asked to leave the room following the candidate's oral presentation and prior to questions from the committee. They *may* also be permitted to address questions to the candidate, but this is not required.
  - Upon completion of the examination, the student and any visitors are requested to leave the room. The committee then convenes to deliberate and reach a decision regarding the acceptance or rejection of the dissertation.
  - Finally, the student is asked to return to the room and is informed of the decision of the committee by the chairperson.
- All voting members of the committee must participate for the entire duration of the Final Examination, the deliberation, and determination of the result.
- The final draft of the dissertation is defined as the version to be submitted to the Dean of the Graduate College (i.e., deposited). This version must include any revisions required by the committee.
- ***No audio or video recording of the examination or deliberation may be made without the express permission of the student and all members of the committee.***

### Results

The decision of the Final Examination committee is recorded on the **Final Examination Result** form. The voting members of the committee must make one of two decisions:

- **Pass the candidate.** The candidate passes the Final Examination if the Director(s) of Research vote pass and no more than one of the remaining Committee members votes fail. The Committee will indicate on the **Final Examination Result** form if revisions are required. The Committee will sign the **Thesis/Dissertation Approval** form following the examination and after the completion of any required revisions.
- **Fail the candidate.** The candidate fails the Final Examination if a Director of Research votes fail or if two or more Committee members vote fail. A program may, but is not required to, grant the student an opportunity to retake the examination after completing additional research or writing, as recommended by the committee. However, a new committee must be appointed by the Graduate College. The new committee may, but does not have to, consist of the same members as the original committee.

After a fail result a student will only be allowed to take the Final Examination one additional time while working toward the completion of any one program of study.

The **Final Examination Result (FER)** form verifies that the student has completed the examination, regardless of the outcome. The results of an examination must be recorded with the Graduate College on one form. All voting members must record their vote. The unit's executive officer or authorized person must affirm the accuracy of the result. The result of the examination is communicated to the student and to the Graduate College as soon as possible after the conclusion of the exam. The result must be received by the Graduate College no later than 180 days after the appointment of the committee. Examination result decisions are maintained by the Graduate College.

## II. Specific Information on Dissertation and Doctoral Examination Committees

### Dissertation Committee

The Dissertation Committee does not need to be formally appointed or approved by the Graduate College. In KCH it is usually comprised of the same members who serve on the Preliminary and Final Examination Committees. The purpose of the Dissertation Committee is to advise the student with her/his dissertation research and effectively monitor the student's progress with that research. Because the Preliminary Examination in KCH may include the presentation of a proposal for the dissertation research, the Dissertation Committee membership may be substantially the same as the Preliminary and Final Examination committees, but the Dissertation Committee is normally the same as the Final Examination Committee. There is no time limit on the duration of service of the Dissertation Committee, other than the length of time the student is allowed to complete the degree.

### Preliminary and Final Examination Committees

**Committee appointment process.** Both the Preliminary and Final Examinations are conducted by a committee appointed by the Dean of the Graduate College upon recommendation of the appropriate Associate Head for Graduate Studies (for either Community Health or Kinesiology). The committee must be appointed **before** the exam takes place. The Graduate College strongly recommends submission of the form for **Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee** at least three (3) weeks in advance of the exam date.

Once a committee has been appointed it remains active for 180 days or until a Pass or Fail result is submitted to the Graduate College (an exception occurs in the case of a Defer result, see below). Any revisions to the membership of an active committee must be approved by the Graduate College in advance of the examination.

If the examination did not take place within 180 calendar days after the date on which the Graduate College appointed the committee, the committee is dissolved and a new committee must be appointed before the

examination occurs. The newly appointed committee may, but is not required to, consist of the same members as the dissolved committee.

## **Preliminary Examination Committee**

The Doctoral student, in consultation with their Graduate Faculty advisor (who most often will serve as the Director of Research and Dissertation Committee Chair/Chairperson), will develop a Preliminary Examination Committee.

This Preliminary Examination Committee must consist of at least four voting members, three of whom must be members of the UIUC Graduate Faculty (e.g., tenured or tenure-track professors) and at least two must be tenured, Illinois faculty. This committee must be approved, appointed, and registered by the Graduate College, preferably at least 3-weeks before the Preliminary Examination. The Chair is responsible for submitting the ***Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee*** to the KCH Graduate Office. Note, the Chair must be a member of the Graduate Faculty. At the department's discretion, a co-chair may be appointed. If appointed, a co-chair must meet all the requirements that apply to the chair. If there are more than four voting members on the committee, at least half of the voting members must be members of the UIUC Graduate Faculty. The tenure requirement can be met by term members of the Graduate Faculty who retired or resigned with tenure for a period following their resignation or retirement, according to the Policy on Graduate Faculty Membership (See **Part II, Chapter 1 of the Graduate College Handbook** for details; <https://go.grad.illinois.edu/handbook>). Individuals especially qualified to participate in a particular examination, from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign or another institution, may be appointed to the committee. A brief description of the individual's qualifications should be included on the ***Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee*** form (Note: neither the Graduate College nor the Department defray any expenses such appointments may incur).

Once a committee has been appointed it remains active for 180 days or until a Pass or Fail result is submitted to the Graduate College. Any revisions to the membership of an active committee must be approved by the Graduate College in advance of the examination. If the examination did not take place within 180 calendar days after the date on which the Graduate College appointed the committee, the committee is dissolved and a new committee must be appointed before the examination occurs. The newly appointed committee may, but is not required to, consist of the same members as the dissolved committee.

All voting members of the committee must participate in the oral examination, the deliberation, and determination of the results of the Preliminary Examination.

**Role of the committee chair.** The Preliminary Examination committee must have a chair. The Chair is responsible for convening the committee, conducting the examination, ensuring all members can participate fully, communicating any required revisions to the student, and submitting the appropriate forms to the KCH Graduate Office for submission to the Graduate College.

### **Summary of Preliminary Examination Membership Requirements**

- The Preliminary Examination Committee must include at least four voting members, at least three of whom must be members of the UIUC Graduate Faculty, and at least two of whom must also be tenured at the Urbana-Champaign campus.
- The Chair must be a member of the UIUC Graduate Faculty. At the department's discretion, a co-chair may be appointed. If appointed, a co-chair must meet all the requirements that apply to the chair.
- If there are more than four voting members on the committee, at least half of the voting members must be members of the UIUC Graduate Faculty.
- The tenure requirement can be met by term members of the Graduate Faculty who retired or resigned with tenure for a period following their resignation or retirement, according to the Policy on Graduate Faculty Membership (See **Part II, Chapter 1 of the Graduate College Handbook** for details; <https://go.grad.illinois.edu/handbook>).

- A committee member(s) may be appointed to the committee from another institution if they bring a special degree of expertise or qualification. Such individuals (along with a brief description of their qualifications) should be included on the ***Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee*** form.
- Upon departmental request, the Dean of the Graduate College may also appoint non-voting members to doctoral committees. Non-voting members do not need to be present at the examination. Non-voting members may be appointed, but are rare on Preliminary Examination committees.

## Final Examination Committee

The Doctoral student, in consultation with their Graduate Faculty advisor (who most often will serve as the Director of Research and Dissertation Committee Chair/Chairperson), will develop a Final Examination Committee (note that this is often the same group as the Preliminary Examination committee).

The Final Examination Committee must consist of at least four voting members; three of these members must be members of the UIUC Graduate Faculty (e.g., tenured or tenure-track professors) and at least two must be tenured, Illinois faculty. If there are more than four voting members on the committee, at least half of the voting members must be members of the UIUC Graduate Faculty. The tenure requirement can be met by term members of the Graduate Faculty who retired or resigned with tenure for a period following their resignation or retirement, according to the Policy on Graduate Faculty Membership (See [Part II, Chapter 1 of the Graduate College Handbook](#) for details; <https://go.grad.illinois.edu/handbook>). This committee must be approved, appointed, and registered by the Graduate College before the Final Examination. The Chair is responsible for submitting the ***Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee*** to the KCH Graduate Office ***if the Final Examination Committee differs from the Preliminary Examination Committee***. Note, the Chair must be a member of the Graduate Faculty. At the department's discretion, a co-chair may be appointed. If appointed, a co-chair must meet all the requirements that apply to the chair. For the Final Examination Committee, the student's Graduate Faculty advisor (i.e., director of research) need not be the chair of the committee. Co-directors of research are acceptable. Individuals especially qualified to participate in the Final Examination, from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign or another institution, may be appointed to the committee. A brief description of the individual's qualifications should be included on the ***Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee*** form (Note: neither the Graduate College nor the Department defray any expenses such appointments may incur).

### Summary of Final Examination Membership Requirements

- Committee members should be chosen for their expertise in the student's research area but may also be chosen to give diversity in viewpoint, methodology, or academic discipline.
- Membership of the Final Examination committee should be agreed upon by the student in consultation with her/his advisor (e.g., by including members from more than one sub-discipline within the department, from other departments, or from other institutions).

**Role of the committee chair.** The Final Examination committee must have a chair. The Chair is responsible for convening the committee, conducting the examination, ensuring all members can participate fully, communicating any required revisions to the student, and submitting the appropriate forms to the KCH Graduate Office for submission to the Graduate College.

**Remote participation.** Synchronous remote participation by the student or committee member(s) is permitted on Preliminary and Final Examination committees under the following conditions:

- Technology must allow all participants to communicate throughout the examination and to access all materials presented. Video technology is encouraged for remote committee members and required for a student participating remotely.
- The chair (or co-chair) and at least one additional voting member must be physically present in the examination room on campus. The chair is responsible for coordinating the use of any technology, for

recessing the examination if technical problems prevent full participation, and for making arrangements to resume the examination promptly.

- In extraordinary circumstances, the student can petition to participate remotely. Approval must be received from all members of the committee. The Graduate College strongly encourages the student to participate in person.

**Inclusion of non-Graduate Faculty members.** A request may be made for inclusion of non-Graduate Faculty members as voting members of the committee. Such individuals could be selected if they make a significant contribution, particularly regarding the dissertation research project. These individuals must be approved in advance by the Dean of the Graduate College. To request the approval of a non-Graduate Faculty member to serve as a voting member, a curriculum vitae for the individual and a justification from the chair of the committee must accompany the ***Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee***. Non-Graduate Faculty voting members must have earned a terminal degree in their field of study and must have demonstrated expertise that qualifies them to judge the quality of the student’s research and its contribution to the field. Each voting member must be well-positioned to vote independently and must be free from conflicts of interest. Additional guidance for nominating external members is available on the Graduate College website.

### Summary Table of Doctoral and Doctoral Examination Committees

	Graduate College Appointment & Approval Required	Minimum Voting Members Required	Minimum Graduate Faculty Members Required	Minimum Tenured Illinois Faculty Members Required
Preliminary Examination Committee	Yes	4	3 (Chair must be member of Graduate Faculty)	2
Dissertation Committee	Not required by the Graduate College			
Final Examination (Defense) Committee	Yes	4	3 (Chair must be member of Graduate Faculty)	2