

Alabama A & M University

Department of Social Work, Psychology and Counseling

Comprehensive Exam Manual

About the Manual

This manual is a compilation of philosophy, policies, procedures and requirements for the comprehensive exam experience. It is intended for use by students as they consider application to sit for the exam.

Although this manual contains the most pertinent information students will need, students should also be familiar with the Graduate School policies. Faculty and staff of the programs are readily available to students for guidance and prepared to assist them in monitoring their progress toward achieving degree requirements. The Department of Social Work, Psychology and Counseling reserves the right to add, delete, or modify all and any provisions in this manual.

Introduction and Purpose

This document defines the purposes, requirements, and procedures for comprehensive examination for students in the master's program in Social Work, Psychology, and Counseling. A comprehensive examination is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, show critical and independent thinking, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter.

The purposes of the examination are (a) to fulfill the requirements of the Graduate School for administration of a comprehensive examination for master's students, and (b) to evaluate the students' level of mastery of the subject matter. Student will be given objective questions that test the depth of the level of knowledge gained in the core/foundation subject areas and specific concentration. ***Students are permitted to take the examination up to three times.*** If a student is unable to pass the examination after three attempts, the ***Graduate School*** will disqualify them from the program of study and the degree will not be awarded. Thus the examination is seen by the Department and the University as the culmination of the student's educational process.

The comprehensive examination is administered as a closed book, proctored exam. It requires an in-depth knowledge and understanding of principles, theories, and concepts that guide the student's respective discipline. The comprehensive exam is intended to be as defined in the dictionary "comprehensive," "covering completely or broadly." The student must demonstrate an in-depth and broad understanding of the field of study and its guiding principles. ***The comprehensive examination requires broad preparation in the field of study and includes questions requiring critical thinking.***

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to take the written comprehensive examination students must meet ***ALL*** of the following criteria by the deadline date:

1. Complete at least 24 hours
2. Have a cumulative 3.0 GPA
3. Have no incomplete grades
4. Have no more than one C
5. No grades of D or F
6. Have filed a written request through the ***Graduate School*** to take the exam.
7. Based on the graduate school policy, a student must be enrolled in at least 1.0 credit hour the same semester they plan to take the examination (***see pages 28-29 in the School of Graduate Studies Handbook***)

ELIGIBILITY LIST

A student must be in good academic standing to take the Comprehensive Exam. An academic audit is completed by the Graduate School to determine each applicant’s eligibility to sit for the examination. ***The School of Graduate Studies must clear the student first.*** All requests to take the Comprehensive Exam will receive a written or email response, indicating eligibility to take the exam. Students who do not receive an email indicating eligibility, it means:

- a. Student is doing a thesis
- b. Student has not met one or more eligibility criteria
- c. An error has occurred

Students who are left off the list, placed under the wrong concentration, or do plan to take the examination should contact the Program Coordinator immediately.

EXAMINATION FORMAT

The examination is a multiple choice four-hour exam focusing on Foundation/Core courses and the student’s concentration areas (see chart below).

<i>Department of Social Work, Psychology and Counseling</i>				
Social Work (Foundation)		Psychology (Core)		
Mental Health	Family/Child Services	Rehabilitation	Counseling	Clinical Psychology

In Social Work the total exam consists of two hundred objective questions; 100 questions from the Foundation and 100 questions based on the student’s concentration. In Psychology and Counseling the total exam consists of two hundred and fifty objective questions; 150 in the Core Area and 100 questions based on the student’s specialization.

EXAMINATION SCHEDULE

The Comprehensive Examination is administered in the Fall, Spring and summer semesters of each academic year. ***In accordance with Graduate School policy, students who fail the exam must sit out a semester before retaking the examination.*** Each time the exam is repeated, a new application must be filed with the Graduate School. Appropriate fees, do apply. In addition, ***students must be registered for at least one (1) credit hour in the semester for which the exam is repeated.***

DATE	COMPREHENSIVE EXAM TIME LINE
	Application for Comprehensive Exam submitted electronically to the Graduate School. Form located on the Graduate School Website

	Graduate School Conducts Program of Study Audit. Eligibility Criteria Must be Met
	Eligibility List Emailed to Coordinators via Graduate School
	Students notified of Eligibility by Academic Advisor
	Preparatory Workshops and Study Sessions (optional)
	Examination Administered
	Results are Emailed to Students via the Graduate School
	<i>Students who fail the exam should contact their academic advisor to discuss plans for retake.</i>

SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS

Students are encouraged to prepare binders of review material from lecture handouts, assigned readings, and other sources in anticipation for exam review. Course textbooks can also be of great use in this process, thus students are encouraged to retain copies of course textbooks. Further, once a student has applied to take the exam and given clearance by the Graduate School, the student will be granted access to a study guide and practice questions.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Special testing arrangements are available for students identified through Student Disability Services (SDS). Students requiring these arrangements must contact SDS and go through the appropriate procedures.

WHAT NOT TO BRING

Students are not to bring cell phones or electronic devices. There will be a clock in the room to assist students with monitoring their time. In addition the proctor will alert the students of the time periodically.

NO SHOWS

The policy on students who miss the examination is:

- a. If the student is ill on examination day, the student must notify the Department by calling the main telephone number to inform the office staff directly or their academic advisor. The student must bring a letter from a doctor verifying the illness to be eligible to take the examination on the second administration as the first attempt.

- b. Students who have an unanticipated event or emergency of a serious nature that prevents them from taking the examination, must call the Department main office and follow the procedures outlined above. In addition, the student must contact the Department as early as possible to request an exemption before the exam. The student must present a justification and documentation that includes: (1) a description of the event that caused the student to miss the exam, (2) a justification of why the event was unanticipated and necessitated missing the exam, (3) present a satisfactory reason for why there was no contact with the Department prior to the exam. Based on the evidence presented, the *Academic Review Committee* will determine whether or not the student is eligible to take the exam on the second examination as a first attempt.
- c. Students who do not meet the conditions in a and b, or the Department decides based on evidence presented that the student's reason for missing the exam was not justified, must wait the following semester to take the exam. Students should follow the procedures outlined in this document in order to take the exam.

ASSESSMENT OF THE EXAM

The examination is computerized. It will be graded by the computer and grades sent to the graduate office as prescribed by their office. All students are required to take and pass the Comprehensive Exam with a grade of 70% or better.

PROCEDURES FOR EXAM FAILURES

Students who fail the Comprehensive Exam in their first attempt will be allowed to take the exam a second time. *NOTE: If a student passes one part of the examination and fails the other will only need to take the part they failed (i.e. if student fails the foundation/core area and passed the concentration area they will only need to take the foundation/core area again or if student fails the concentration area and passes the foundation/core area they will only need to take the concentration area again). If the student fails both parts of the exam they must take the entire Comprehensive Exam.*

SECOND EXAMINATION PROCEDURE

Procedures duplicate the conditions of the first examination process. All the expectations of the first examination apply. A different examination may be given. The different examinations, however, reflect the same set of knowledge and skills requirements as the initial examination.

THIRD EXAMINATION PROCESS

If a student fails the examination a second time a meeting must be scheduled with the *Academic Review Committee*. At this meeting a review of the issues and processes up to that point is made. No student is allowed to sit for the examination for a third time until a written plan of action is developed and implemented to address the deficit areas or skills identified. The *Academic Review Committee* must approve the written plan of action. *No student will be permitted to take the comprehensive exam after failing the third attempt. Subsequently, the student is dismissed from the program (see page 6 in the School of Graduate Studies Handbook).*

NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Results of the exam will be emailed to students by the Graduate School. If a problem arises in the notification process, students should contact their academic advisor.

EXAMINATION REVIEW – FAILING GRADE

Students will be provided a chart highlighting the number of incorrect items for each section of the examination within 30 days by the Comprehensive Exam Coordinators of each program area in the department (Social Work and Psychology). The purpose is not to re-grade the exam, but is intended to provide guidance regarding the topic areas. The faculty member will not go over specific items in the exam nor will he/she allow the student to read the items. The aim is to help the student understand areas in which the student demonstrated weakness as a means of helping the student prepare to retake the examination.

APPEALING A FAILING GRADE

If a student sits for the exam, the grade will stand, unless the student can demonstrate either of the following conditions: (1) A student may believe that procedures outlined in this document have not been followed by the Department, and (2) It is the student's responsibility to present evidence that this is the case. The study guide will be available in the program offices.

APPLICABLE FORMS

The application form for the Comprehensive Examination is available at the site:

Other Forms

Comprehensive Exam Study Guide – Social Work