

Culminating Experiences Policy (Approved February 3, 2020)

Culminating Experiences Policy

A culminating experience is required for completion of a master's or doctorate degree program. The University recognizes the following types of culminating experiences: Theses, Dissertations, Graduate Projects/Artistic Performances and Comprehensive Examinations. Each graduate program permits one or more of the culminating experiences as described below. Where more than one option is offered, the specific type of culminating experience is identified on the student's formal program.

Thesis/Graduate Project/Dissertation

A Thesis/Dissertation is an original scholarly contribution to the student's field based on a systematic study of a significant problem or issue. Although it may be part of a larger research program, each Thesis is unique and written by a single student. The Thesis typically explains the problem; sets forth the methodology used to address the problem and the limitations of the methodology; reports the results, whether those are an analysis of data or a presentation of theory; and explains the significance of the findings in the context of previous work on the topic.

Graduate Projects/Artistic Performances represent the significant undertaking of a pursuit appropriate to professional fields and fine arts. Graduate Projects/Artistic Performances must represent originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization and a rationale. Graduate Projects/Artistic Performances may be individual or group efforts. Examples of appropriate projects include the development of curriculum, a market research study for an organization, the testing of a therapy on a particular population or the design of an electronic device. In the arts, examples could include a music recital, a music composition, direction of a theatrical performance or a gallery showing of works of art. The results must be described and summarized in a written document with an abstract.

Thesis/Graduate Project/Dissertation Committee Selection: A minimum of three individuals who do not have a conflict of interest with the student, must serve on a student's committee. A conflict of interest is defined as a person who has an economic, sexual, and/or romantic involvement with the student or a member of the student's immediate family that could reasonably be perceived as impairing objectivity.

The chair of the committee must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member of the department or academic degree granting program. The majority of members of the committee must be active members of the department or program. Active members

include all tenured and tenure-track faculty and lecturers affiliated with the department or program—as defined by the graduate coordinator. Faculty participating in the Faculty Early Retirement Program are considered active faculty members and, as such, can serve as either the chair or a committee member. Some departments or programs may have alternate policies approved by the Graduate Studies Committee.

A minority of committee members may be drawn from outside the department or program, either from within or outside of the university. Like all committee members, such outside members must (a) have a graduate degree in a related field, or (b) have extensive experience in the topic, and (c) demonstrate professional recognition through publications, creative activities, reports, papers or membership in a national professional organization and/or working committees in their institution. Individuals from outside the university must submit a CV to, and be approved by, the graduate coordinator of the department or program.

Once you have formed your committee, you will need to register through the [Electronic Thesis and Dissertation \(ETD\)](#) website. A curriculum vitae of a part-time faculty member or off-campus committee member must be uploaded electronically on the ETD website for approval by your committee chair, department graduate coordinator and the Associate Vice President of Graduate Studies.

Some departments or programs, if they choose, may allow students who have received a grade of Report in Progress (RP) in the first semester of their 698 course to enroll in a different culminating experience (e.g., comprehensive examination). See section on “Switching Culminating Experiences” below.

Comprehensive Exam

A comprehensive examination will test the range of subject matter covered in the student’s graduate program. The purpose of the examination is to allow students to demonstrate their ability to integrate content, knowledge, independent thinking and critical analysis. Each master’s program that offers a comprehensive examination option is required to maintain University-approved guidelines for the administration of the examination, and these guidelines are to be available on request. The following regulations apply in all cases:

1. A student must be classified before he or she can be given permission by the department to enroll in a comprehensive exam (697) course.
2. Students become eligible to attempt the examination during the semester in which all required coursework will be completed.
3. Ordinarily, the examination is given at least one month before the end of the semester. Arrangements to enroll and take the examination should be made with the student’s program.
4. If the examination is not passed, the student may register again for the examination course (697) for the semester in which they plan to complete their degree. Alternatively, the student may register for the thesis/graduate project course (698), if allowed by the department or program (consult the department chair or graduate coordinator). These additional units may not be counted as units toward the master’s/doctorate degree.
5. Students may not take the comprehensive examination more than twice.

- a. Students who fail the examination on the first attempt may be required to register for the examination again the next available term.
 - b. Students who fail the first attempt will be required to submit a Course Repeat form to the Office of Graduate Studies with the approval of the graduate coordinator once enrolled for the second attempt.
 - c. The first attempt is defined as the complete comprehensive examination prescribed by the program. The second attempt is defined as retaking the examination on the entire program or, at the discretion of the department, a supplementary examination on any part or parts of the first examination that the student failed.
 - d. Failure of the second attempt of the comprehensive examination results in disqualification from the University.
 - e. The graduate coordinator will file the result of each examination with the Office of Graduate Studies.
 - f. Some departments or programs, if they choose, may allow students who have failed the comprehensive exam (or any part of it) to complete their program by enrolling in and successfully passing another culminating experience (e.g., thesis, dissertation or graduate project). See Switching Culminating Experiences below.
6. **At least three committee members must certify the success or failure of the student in the examination.**

Switching Culminating Experiences

Some departments or programs, if they choose, may allow students to switch from one culminating experience to another. Please check with the graduate program regarding the department policy.

Students who earned a grade of NC or F in their first 697 enrollment may be eligible to switch. Students who earned an NC or F in their second enrollment are not eligible to switch to another culminating experience and will be disqualified from the University.

Students who earned a grade of RP in their first 698 enrollment may be eligible to switch.

Students are only able to switch from one culminating experience to another one time, and only if the department policy allows.