

Appendix G **General Examination**

Purpose of the General Examination:

The General Examination is a comprehensive examination within the student's major area of concentration. Its purpose is to ensure that the student:

- Has grasped foundational concepts in clinical psychology;
- Is able to integrate and apply knowledge acquired through coursework and reading;
- Has acquired a competent knowledge base of the literature, methods, applications, and emerging issues in a chosen specialized area;
- Can express ideas in a clear and articulate manner.

Format of the General Examination:

The General Examination involves completion of a scholarly, substantive written paper.

The paper should be an integrative synthesis of research, with the goal of addressing a specific topic within the student's area of interest. Depending on the topic selected, the paper can be either an evaluative review of research in a particular area or an integration of diverse literature to support or advance an idea.

Topics for the written paper should be drawn from the broad areas of clinical psychology, including: psychopathology, psychotherapy, diagnosis and assessment, behavioral medicine, neuropsychology, cognitive and affective neuroscience, and developmental psychopathology. Students must select topics that can be adequately addressed in a 20-30 page written paper (not including references or tables/figures; 12 point font and double-spaced). It is expected that students will pick topics within their area of interest; however, topics should not be overly redundant with the master's thesis or coursework papers. Rather, addressing the topic should push the student to expand their knowledge base within a broader area of growing expertise. Examples of topics are provided on the final page of this handout. Students are encouraged to look at recent issues of *Psychological Bulletin*, *Annual Review of Psychology*, or *Clinical Psychology Review* for examples of the scope, format, and style of the paper.

The body of the paper should describe key concepts in the area, provide critical assessments of the existing research, and discuss important issues that have not yet been addressed or resolved. Although the review of literature does not need to be exhaustive in cases where the topic is broad or has a long history of study, it should provide the reader with an adequate understanding of the historical context and relevance of the topic. In addition, attention should be given to social, cognitive, and biological factors, to the extent that these areas are applicable to the specific topic.

All papers also must address the following four critical areas.

1. Methodological Issues
2. Ethical Issues
3. Cultural Issues
4. Clinical Implications

Students may elect to address these critical areas throughout the body of the paper or as an explicit subtopic (i.e., a designated section of the paper). The way in which these critical areas are addressed will vary by topic. For example, for a student writing about Early Identification of Autism, methodological issues may be interwoven throughout the narrative of the paper, whereas another critical area (e.g., ethical issues) may need to be addressed in a subsection because it cannot be as readily integrated throughout the text.

Eligibility to take the General Examination:

Students must meet the following milestones before they are eligible to take the General Examination:

1. Completion of all core clinical courses (typically complete by the end of the second year)
2. No standing incompletes in any classes
3. Successful progress towards completing master's thesis

It is expected that most students will take general exams in the summer after the second year, although exceptions may occur in individual circumstances (i.e., waiting until the following summer). Although students may opt to wait to take the exam, they are not eligible to schedule the dissertation prospectus defense (a requirement for internship application), apply for the doctoral candidate pay grade raise, or apply for travel funds until the exam has been passed. In addition, successful completion of the general exam will be considered in decisions about clerkship eligibility each year.

The Exam Period:

The exam will be given during each summer session. Students who plan to take the general exam in the next exam period should begin to work with their advisor to pick a topic early in the spring semester. A General Examination Topic Approval form must be approved at a faculty meeting in mid-April (dates will be provided to eligible students early in the Spring semester). A copy of this form is provided in the final page of the handout. The selection of a topic that has appropriate breadth (i.e., not too narrow or broad) is essential for successful completion of the assignment. Thus, students should begin the process of topic selection early in conjunction with faculty mentors.

After the topic is approved at the faculty meeting, a committee of three faculty members (the advisor and two other members selected by the faculty) will be selected as the student's exam committee. Faculty members will typically not be the same as the students master's or dissertation committee. Students will have the summer months to complete the written paper. All papers will be due by a specific date in late August; this date will be provided to students when the topic is approved. *Barring extenuating circumstances that are approved by the faculty, students who begin the exam period but do not hand in a paper by the stated deadline must wait for the following summer to begin the process again.* In other words, papers will NOT be accepted after the deadline.

The paper is meant to reflect the student's ability to review and integrate relevant research and to organize and express ideas. Consequently, it is expected that students will

work independently during the exam period. Faculty will not read copies of the paper (including preliminary drafts or sample passages) prior to the paper deadline, although students can seek out other sources of support (e.g., the Writing Center) and may discuss specific challenges that arise or request suggested readings with faculty on the General Examination committee.

Passing the General Examination:

The written product will be graded by the three faculty members of the General Examination committee for that student. Papers will be scored on the following criteria:

1. *Content*: The selected topic is adequately addressed in the review and/or synthesis of existing research.
2. *Critical Thinking*: The paper provides evidence of the student's ability to think in an evaluative, organized and integrative manner.
3. *Writing*: The paper is written in a clear, organized, and effective manner, is free of grammatical errors, and is written in APA style.

Four Critical Areas: All papers must also address the four critical areas below. For some topics, a certain critical area (e.g., cultural, ethical) may not be readily evident in the literature; however, the potential applicability, relevance, and implications of this area should still be addressed by the student.

4. *Methodological Issues*: The paper adequately addresses critical methodological issues relevant to topic area.
5. *Ethical Issues*: The paper adequately addresses ethical and professional issues relevant to topic area.
6. *Cultural Issues*: The paper adequately addresses cultural issues relevant to topic area.
7. *Clinical Implications*: The paper adequately addresses clinical implications of the topic area.

For each of the seven criteria (1-7 above), students will be scored using the following scale:

- 1 = Major revisions needed
- 2 = Some revisions needed
- 3 = Minor revisions needed
- 4 = Few/No revisions needed

Scores from the three members of the committee will be averaged within each of the seven areas. A score above 2.50 for each topic area is considered passing. In other words, students must pass ALL seven areas to pass the general exam. If the student does not receive a passing grade for a specific criterion, he/she will be given the opportunity to revise the paper to address the specific area (or areas). Students will be provided with feedback about the area in which they did not pass to assist in the revision process. Students will be given the opportunity to do two revisions in the one-year period

following the exam deadline. After that time, they will receive a failing grade on the General Examination and will not be able to continue in the program.

Once the student has successfully passed the General Exam, the Report on the General Examination for the Doctoral Degree form must be submitted to the Registrar's Office with a copy to the department Graduate Program Coordinator.

GENERAL EXAMINATION TOPIC APPROVAL FORM

1. Paper Topic:
2. Give a 3-4 sentence description of what the paper will address.

3. Provide 2-3 citations of existing research relevant to this topic. In finding these citations, you should also ensure that no reviews of your topic have been published recently.

4. Give a 3-4 sentence description of how this topic will “stretch” you (i.e., how will it expand your current areas of expertise).

Approved by Faculty: _____ on _____
(Faculty advisor signature) (date)

General Exam Committee Members: _____

Final Paper Due Date: _____

Examples of Paper Topics

Students are encouraged to look in review journals (*Psychological Bulletin*, *Annual Review of Psychology*, *Clinical Psychology Review*) for examples of topics. Students should select topics that broaden their knowledge within an area of expertise but are not overly redundant with topics on which they have already written extensively. The topic area should have sufficient depth and breadth that it can be adequately addressed in a 30-40 page paper, but be narrow enough so as to be manageable in terms of reviewing relevant literature. Students are responsible for making sure their topics has not been recently reviewed in major journals, and also should not pick topics that overlap too much with previous topics of students in the program.

The Role of Peers in the Development and Course of Depression in Adolescence

Asperger's Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism: Review of Evidence for Distinct Disorders

How do Psychological Resources Affect Health Outcomes? Three Possible Mechanisms of Influence

The Integration of Familial and Cognitive Factors in the Development of Anxiety in Children

Challenges in the Assessment and Diagnosis of Childhood Bipolar Disorder

The Measurement of Religion and Spirituality in Clinical Research

Therapeutic Alliance: How Do We Measure It and Why Does It Matter?

Behavioral Health Interventions for Individuals with Serious Mental Illness: A Review of Recent Models

Efficacy and Effectiveness of Mother-Infant Dyadic Therapies

A Review of Research on the Effects of Environmental Deprivation on Language Development

Hypnosis and Clinical Pain

The Effects of Community Violence on Adolescence: A Review of Research in the Last Decade

Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Mood Disorders: Prevalence, Causes, and Consequences