

**HEALTH RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Ph.D. PROGRAM
FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES
GRADUATE PROGRAMS**

**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
PURPOSE AND PROCEDURE**

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

COMPREHENSIVE MANUAL
HEALTH RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Ph.D. LEVEL

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DISCLAIMER

This manual is intended to guide faculty and students through the procedures of the Comprehensive Examination. It is not a code of conduct or a precise legal document and, therefore, it must be understood by all that minor variations in the details, timing and manner in which the various steps are addressed or completed may occur and should be acceptable to all parties.

It is incumbent on the student to avail himself or herself of the described procedures. If any of the steps are not taken, the responsibility rests with the student and such omissions cannot be used as a basis for an Appeal against a decision of the Examining Committee. Any inquiries about these procedures are to be directed to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations (BCE) or the Administrative Assistant at extension 27718 or 26236.

Any disagreement or misunderstanding over the interpretation of specific points should be referred to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations and, if resolution is not achieved, to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (Health Sciences) who will make a final decision.

PREAMBLE

McMaster has a long tradition of innovation in health education, one that the Health Research Methodology Program has embraced. We seek to provide our students with a comprehensive, methodologically rigorous and respectful interdisciplinary environment for learning, and to create intellectual leaders capable of addressing age-old and emerging problems in diverse areas of health research (e.g., clinical epidemiology, biostatistics, health service research, population and public health, health technology assessment and other health related fields).

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The Health Research Methodology (HRM) Ph.D. Program seeks to provide an educational experience that produces researchers with appropriate skills to contribute to understanding the production, protection and restoration of health in individuals, patient groups or populations, by the application of appropriate research methodology.

The comprehensive examination process within the HRM Ph.D. Program aims to assess the ability of students to integrate ideas that reflect the current state of knowledge in the five HRM fields (clinical epidemiology, biostatistics, health services research, population and public health and health technology assessment), and other areas of Health Research Methodology, as appropriate.

Candidates are expected to provide reasoned arguments to support their interpretation of the areas under study and to demonstrate their ability to use the information they have acquired. Students must pass the examination before being permitted to progress to the preparation of a research thesis.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Any degree of academic dishonesty or plagiarism in the written part of the Comprehensive Examination is unacceptable ([see Graduate Calendar, section 6.1](#)). Any material taken word for word from the published work of others must be presented in quotation marks and referenced appropriately. It is not permissible to take the essential structure and ideas of a review article and merely paraphrase them. The source of diagrams and figures taken from the published literature must be acknowledged. The content of the written reports should represent the student's own analysis of the research literature in the student's own words.

If academic dishonesty is suspected on the written portion of the examination the Examination Chair will be notified and the matter will be pursued through the Academic Integrity Policy of the University. The student will not be permitted to proceed to oral examination until the allegation of dishonesty is satisfactorily resolved.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

THE BOARD OF COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS (BCE)

The Board of Comprehensive Examinations (BCE) consists of at least three experienced HRM graduate faculty. Board members are appointed for staggered three-year terms by the Faculty of Health Sciences, Graduate Policy & Curriculum Committee. The Chair is appointed by the Assistant Dean - HRM. The Seminar Coordinator(s), Assistant Dean - HRM and the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (Health Sciences) are ex-officio members. Kathryn Bennett is assumed the BCE Chair role in January of 2012.

COMPREHENSIVE SEMINAR COORDINATOR

Kathryn Bennett, kbennett@mcmaster.ca

Member(s) of HRM graduate faculty will serve as Seminar Coordinator(s) responsible for coordinating the Ph.D. Seminar.

COMPREHENSIVE SEMINAR PRESENTER

An HRM graduate faculty member who serves as a resource person and content expert in each core seminar session. On occasion, a post-comprehensive Ph.D. student will serve as a presenter in non-core sessions (i.e., non-examinable sessions)

INDEPENDENT STUDY SUPERVISOR

A member of HRM graduate faculty, authorized to be an Independent Study Supervisor, not the student's thesis supervisor, but may be a member of the supervisory committee (NB. Only one of the Independent Study Supervisor or the Member-at-large may sit on the student's supervisory committee). This person supervises the Independent Study component of the comprehensives and attends the oral defence.

MEMBER-AT-LARGE

A member of HRM graduate faculty, authorized to be a Member-at-Large, not the student's thesis supervisor, but may be a member of the supervisory committee (NB. Only one of the Independent Study Supervisor or the Member-at-large may sit on the student's supervisory committee). This person aids in the evaluation of the Independent Study component of the comprehensives and attends the oral defence, but should not be expected to play a supervisory role.

DISSERTATION SUPERVISOR

This person is a member of HRM graduate faculty. This person cannot serve as the student's Independent Study Supervisor or the Member-at-large.

ASSISTANT DEAN

The Health Research Methodology Graduate Program is under the leadership of an experienced Graduate Faculty member, who is the Assistant Dean - HRM.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

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The administrative assistant is the person responsible for the administrative functioning of the HRM Program.

AIM AND CONTENT OF THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

The comprehensive examination process has two educational components: (1) a Ph.D. seminar of approximately 20 sessions, providing students with the opportunity to engage broadly in interdisciplinary learning, and (2) an Independent Study, involving part time work over 10 months, to allow students to demonstrate their competence in an area of specialization. The Ph.D. Seminar addresses the student's need to demonstrate breadth of learning, and the Independent Study empowers the student to demonstrate their depth of specialization.

Full time students will complete both components of the exam in the second year of their Ph.D. studies. Part time students may elect to spread the comprehensive examination process over years 2 and 3, completing the Ph.D. Seminar and Independent Studies in alternate years, as appropriate. Part time students may also complete both components of the exam in the third year of their Ph.D. studies.

The timing of the comprehensive examination process for part-time students will be determined in consultation and agreement between the student and his/her Ph.D. supervisor and Ph.D. supervisory committee.

Students may complete the comprehensive examinations on a schedule different from the routine only in unique circumstances and following the limits described in the section of this document entitled "Timing of the examination."

The Comprehensive examination is graded like a course, with an overall mark that sums the grades assigned for all portions of the comprehensive process. Successful completion of both major components of the exam (the Ph.D. Seminar and Independent Study) is required to pass (B- or above), with a final grade of pass (B- to A) or pass with distinction (A+) determined as a summary grade. The comprehensive examination process involves multiple faculty in grading each student for multiple discrete elements of the examination. These attributes improve the reliability of the evaluation process.

The comprehensive examination process as a whole will be coordinated by the Board of Comprehensive Examinations. The Ph.D. Seminar will be coordinated by one or two faculty members, with individual Seminar presentations developed by individual faculty presenters, in consultation with the Seminar coordinators and the Board of Comprehensive Examinations. Students are responsible for coordinating their Independent Study, in consultation with their dissertation supervisor (and supervisory committee, where appropriate). Students will help to identify a faculty member to supervise the Independent Study, and a Member-at-large to aid in its

evaluation.

Ph.D. SEMINAR

The seminar consists of approximately eighteen - twenty sessions including, core content (i.e., examinable content). Each of these core sessions will provide students with a historical, conceptual, theoretical or philosophical grounding in an area of research germane to HRM students. The first half of the core session presentation will be led by the Seminar presenter; the second half of most core sessions will consist of student-led presentations and discussions on topics of interest that relate to that session's focus. Four of the 20 total session dates will be allocated to student presentations and oral defences of Independent Study projects. The remaining four sessions will offer non-core material (i.e., not examinable) that is useful to students at this stage in their career (e.g., writing skills, establishing a research career, etc.). The first 2-3 will consist of student presentations of their independent study proposals, the goal being to enable a collaborative learning environment in which one can engage with their peers and learn from their ideas. The approximate breakout of sessions will be as follows:

- Core Sessions (examinable content)
 - Sessions will be dedicated to a historical/philosophical/conceptual overview of each of the HRM fields, and the remainder sessions will be dedicated to a similar overview of issues of scholarly or research importance to all HRM students. For example, one or more sessions might be devoted to research ethics issues, or issues in education such as student evaluation.
- Non Core Sessions (non-examinable content)
 - Non core sessions dates will be dedicated to issues of more general interest, to present independent study proposals, or for skill development (e.g., pedagogical issues, career advancement, writing skills, or delivering oral presentations). The non-core sessions will typically bookend the core sessions, thus allowing students time to prepare their own presentations (either In-Seminar or Independent Study oral defences).
- Oral Defence Sessions
 - Four sessions will be allocated to student presentations and oral defences of their Independent Study projects. The Oral Defence sessions run from 1:00-5:30. Up to 4 students will present during each session, thus allowing one hour for presentation and response to questions (i.e., an oral defence). Several oral defence sessions may be held concurrently as necessary to ensure that all students have sufficient time to present their work.

Full time students are expected to complete the seminars in the second year of their Ph.D. studies. Part time students may complete the seminars in the second or third year of their Ph.D. studies, as appropriate. The timing of the seminars for part-time students will be determined in consultation and agreement between the student and his/her Ph.D. supervisor and Ph.D. supervisory committee.

INDEPENDENT STUDY

The Independent Study is expected to take 20% of the student's time (that is, one day per week), from September through April.

Full time students are expected to complete the Independent Study alongside the Ph.D. seminar in the second year of their Ph.D. program. Part time students may complete the independent study in years two or three, as appropriate.

The Independent Study is intended to provide an opportunity for the student to explore an area of interest and specialization in depth. It is expected that the student will explore a topic that builds on and deepens their expertise, but **the specific topic is expected to be different from the dissertation topic** so that the student has the opportunity to demonstrate breadth in their expertise. Generally, this will mean that the student explores a distinct topic or set of methods, though it is not necessary for the topic to be in a distinct field. Responsibility for ensuring the absence of extensive overlap falls to the dissertation supervisor, independent study supervisor and the supervisory committee (as appropriate), in consultation with the student.

The student, in consultation with his/her thesis supervisor (and supervisory committee, where appropriate), must select one topic (and one appropriate topic supervisor) for intensive independent study. The Independent Study supervisor will be a member of HRM graduate faculty authorized to be an Independent Study Supervisor, different from the thesis supervisor. The guiding principle should be that the student learns something new/valuable/and relevant in their area of specialization and will be able to demonstrate mastery of the material. During the independent study consultations may be sought from other individuals, but a diary should be kept that tracks what portion of the work (intellectual or otherwise) belonged to the student and what portion was completed by the student him/herself. The model here is that of the dissertation – any given chapter within a thesis might be published with multiple authors, but the supervisory committee, independent study examiners, and the BCE must be re-assured that the end product is predominantly the work of the student. The write-up itself should be exclusively the work of the student.

Topics may be of multiple formats, including, but not limited to:

- Review state-of-the-art of an issue/area of study relevant to HRM
- Design a study to advance understanding
- Carry out a brief study including data analysis, etc.

In deciding on a topic and approach the student and his/her supervisory team are advised to think carefully about the amount of time required to complete the project and the readiness with which the necessary materials including items outside of the student's control (including access to existing data sets, ethics or security approval) can be accessed within approved timelines.

Students must prepare a written report (***no more than 20-double-spaced-pages in length, excluding appendices***), summarizing their study, to be submitted mid-to-late- March. The student will also prepare an oral presentation of their Independent Study (20 minutes in length), and be prepared to explain and defend their work in an oral defence (40 minutes).

TIMING OF THE EXAMINATION

Under normal circumstances, students enter the program in September. Full time students are expected to complete both components of the Comprehensive Examination, the Seminar and Independent Study in the second year of their Ph.D. studies, before the end of the 24th month for full-time students and the 36th month for part-time students. Part time students may complete the total comprehensive examination process over two years, in years two and three, and may elect to complete either portion in either year or both portions in Year 3.

The timing of the comprehensive examination process for part-time students will be determined in consultation and agreement between the student and his/her Ph.D. supervisor and Ph.D. supervisory committee.

In instances in which students begin their Ph.D. studies in January they are generally expected to complete the comprehensive exam at the same time as those students who began the preceding September. In instances in which students begin their Ph.D. studies in May they are generally granted a one-month extension to enable them to complete the comprehensives exam at the same time as those students who began the following September.

Students may complete the comprehensives on a schedule distinct from the routine presented here only in unique and compelling circumstances to the extent that the Board of Comprehensive Examiners will allow such flexibility in the comprehensives. To complete the examination off-schedule an application must be made to the BCE by the deadline for submitting IS proposals to the BCE outlining the reason for the request and the proposed start time. This application must be accompanied by a letter from the student's dissertation supervisor and his/her potential independent study supervisor. Applications will only be considered if the request falls within the parameters imposed by the School of Graduate Studies. Upon approval of the application, the BCE will determine a timeline that is comparable in duration to that of other students completing the comprehensives during their regular schedule.

Failure to successfully complete the Comprehensive Examination within two years of commencing the Ph.D. program for full-time students or three years for part-time students, without approval for delay by the Board of Comprehensive Examinations and the School of Graduate Studies, will result in the student's withdrawal from the HRM Ph.D. Program.

Ph.D. SEMINAR

The seminar consists of approximately twenty, 2-3 hour sessions that take place bi-weekly, on Thursday afternoons September through May. Full time students are expected to complete the Seminar in the second year of their Ph.D. studies. Part time students may complete the total comprehensive examination process over two years, in years two and three, and may elect to complete either portion in either year.

INDEPENDENT STUDY

The Independent Study topic should be chosen, appropriate supervision arranged, and review by an appropriate Member-at-Large should be finalized in time to submit a plan of study to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations for final approval by **May 1**. In support of this, the Seminar Coordinator(s) will convene an organizational meeting each spring for students who will begin their comprehensive examinations the following academic year, to apprise them of requirements.

The Independent Study will commence in September and proceed in parallel with (but independently from) the Seminar throughout the academic year (though students may compress their Independent Study into a shorter period, if this is mutually agreed upon by the student and Independent Study supervisor). The Independent Study will be completed in time for students to prepare a final written report by mid-to-late March and an oral defence in May. Key dates for students are as follows:

- February/March: Organizational meeting convened by Seminar Coordinators to inform pre-comp students about the process for their comprehensive examinations, beginning in September
- May 1: Students must submit plan of study for Independent Study to the Administrative Assistant for distribution to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations for final approval. Plan of study must be signed by Dissertation supervisor, Independent Study supervisor, Member-at-Large and student
- September: Student begins Independent Study and Comprehensive Seminar. The member-at-large cannot be consulted beyond the end of September as that individual is expected to provide an "arm's length" evaluation upon completion of the independent study.
- Early December: Student submits interim progress report to Independent Study supervisor and to the Administrative Assistant by first Thursday in December.
- mid to late- March: Student submits final written report on Independent Study to Independent Study supervisor, Member-at-Large and Administrative Assistant.
- April-June: Student completes oral presentation and defence of Independent Study project

PLEASE REFER TO THE AVENUE TO LEARN HRM PHD COMPREHENSIVE EXAM SITE FOR DEADLINES AND DIRECTIONS RE HOW TO SUBMIT FOR THE FOLLOWING:

INDEPENDENT STUDY PROPOSAL
INDEPENDENT STUDY INTERIM REPORT
INDEPENDENT STUDY FINAL WRITTEN REPORT
INDEPENDENT STUDY ORAL PRESENTATION

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

THE BOARD OF COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS (BCE)

It will be the responsibility of the Board to:

- i. Establish and revise the course material for the Seminar, in consultation with the Seminar coordinators. In most cases this will be a matter of identifying appropriate topics and identifying Seminar presenters to develop/deliver the seminar on those topics.
- ii. Review and give final approval to each student's Independent study plan
- iii. Review and convey interim and final reports to students and the relevant authorities
- iv. Serve as an advisory board for participating faculty, as issues arise

- v. Serve as an advisory board for students, as issues arise

THE STUDENT

Ph.D. students pursuing their comprehensive examinations will take an active role in directing the examination, to ensure that their own educational goals are met. Specifically, the student will:

- i. Select an Independent Study topic, in consultation with the Dissertation supervisor (and supervisory committee, where appropriate), that allows the student to further develop and demonstrate depth of specialization in the field, while ensuring that the topic is sufficiently distinct from the dissertation research to evidence some breadth in the area of specialization
- ii. Identify an appropriate Independent Study supervisor (i.e. HRM graduate faculty with expertise and interest in the subject of the independent study and authorized to be an Independent Study Supervisor), in consultation with the Dissertation supervisor (and supervisory committee, where appropriate).
- iii. Develop a plan of study for the Independent Study, in consultation with the Independent Study supervisor, that specifies the project to be completed, a timeline and the nature and extent of a progress report to be submitted in December (sufficient to allow the supervisor to provide substantive interim feedback on the student's progress).
- iv. Where necessary, revise this plan of study in consultation with the Independent Study supervisor, to account for any substantive modifications that are driven by external circumstances (e.g., the failure of an experiment, the lack of an expected data source, etc.)
- v. Identify an appropriate individual to fulfill the Member-at-large role for evaluation of the Independent Study, in consultation with the Independent Study supervisor (and Dissertation supervisor, where appropriate)
- vi. Attend and fully participate in Ph.D. Seminar activities, and complete all assignments, selecting topic areas that strengthen the student's interdisciplinary expertise and breadth of knowledge
- vii. Submit a written commentary on 4 of the core sessions of greatest interest or as schedules permit. (Students responsible for an in-seminar presentation on the session topic may not submit a written commentary for those sessions)
- viii. Prepare 1 in-seminar presentation in an area where they have an interest but limited expertise so that they may gain some breadth of exposure (i.e., not within fields of Independent Study or their dissertation fields)
- ix. Provide an interim progress report to the Administrative Assistant for distribution to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations in December and to the Independent Study supervisor, to be evaluated by the Independent Study supervisor.
- x. Produce a well-argued and written final report on the Independent Study, to be evaluated by the Independent Study supervisor and the Member-at-large
- xi. Provide a well-argued and presented oral summary of the Independent Study and orally explain and defend its content, to be evaluated by the Independent Study supervisor and the Member-at-large.
- xii. If problems arise with the Independent Study or with the Seminar (where the latter cannot be resolved through consultation with the Seminar coordinators), alert the Board to these issues, and work with the Board to seek a satisfactory resolution
- xiii. Convey the plan of study for the Independent Study, any revisions of this study plan, the Interim progress report, and other relevant materials as appropriate, to the Independent Study Supervisor and the Board

Ph.D. SEMINAR COORDINATOR (Kathryn Bennett, kbennett@mcmaster.ca)

One or two faculty members will serve as coordinators for the Ph.D. Seminar. They will be responsible for attending (or providing alternating attendance at) each Seminar, coordinating presenters for each session, ensuring continuity for students as the Seminar progresses, and assisting in the grading of student activities, as necessary. Specifically, the coordinator(s) will:

- i. Work with the Board of Comprehensive Examinations to establish and revise the course material for the Seminar
- ii. Take attendance
- iii. Collate marks for students on all commentaries and in-seminar student presentations

- iv. If problems arise with individual students, alert the student to these problems where possible. Where these problems persist or cannot be resolved, alert the Board to these issues, and work with the Board to seek a satisfactory resolution
- v. Liaise with the Board of Comprehensive Examinations to provide interim and final assessments of student performance in the Seminar component of the Comprehensives.

Ph.D. SEMINAR PRESENTER

Members of graduate faculty at McMaster University will serve as presenters for each core seminar session in their areas of expertise and interest. Post-comprehensive Ph.D. students may sometimes serve as seminar presenters for non-core seminar sessions, where marks are not assigned. Faculty seminar presenters will be responsible for preparing a session outline including identifying key materials to be read in advance and critiqued. They will also mark student commentaries addressing those materials, and any student presentations during their sessions. Specifically, seminar presenters will:

- i. Identify appropriate articles to be pre-circulated to students in advance of the seminar session devoted to their discussion
- ii. Mark all written commentaries submitted for the seminar session
- iii. Mark all in-seminar student presentations for the seminar session
- iv. Liaise with the Seminar Coordinators to ensure that these marks have been documented

INDEPENDENT STUDY SUPERVISOR

The Independent Study Supervisor is a member of HRM graduate faculty with expertise and interest in the subject of the independent study and authorized to be an Independent Study Supervisor. A key characteristic of Independent Study Supervisors is that they are *not* the student's thesis supervisor (though they may be on the supervisory committee).¹ It is expected that students will pursue an advanced topic of mutual interest in an independent but consultative fashion. Independent Study supervisors will be required to agree to a plan of study, as proposed and revised by the student, to submit an interim assessment of the student's progress (in December), and to evaluate the student's performance (written and oral). Specifically, Independent Study supervisors will:

- i. Supervise a student's Independent Study in an area of expertise and mutual interest
- ii. Assist the student to identify a Member-at-Large who can evaluate the final written paper and oral presentation on the Independent Study
- iii. Confirm with the Member-at-Large their willingness to serve in this capacity
- iv. Be available for consultation at mutually convenient times at least once per month between September and April
- v. Work with student as student develops a plan of study specifying the project to be completed, a timeline and the nature and extent of a progress report to be submitted in December (sufficient to allow the supervisor to provide substantive interim feedback on the student's progress)
- vi. Where necessary, encourage or permit the student to revise this plan of study in a mutually agreeable manner, to account for any substantive modifications that may be necessary or appropriate (due, for example, to circumstances such as the failure of an experiment, the lack of an expected data source, etc.)
- vii. Provide an evaluation of the interim progress report to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations in December, whose substance will be transmitted to the student
- viii. Evaluate the student's final written paper on the Independent Study
- ix. Evaluate the student's oral presentation and defence of their Independent Study. If problems arise, alert the Board to these issues, and work with the Board to seek a satisfactory resolution
- x. Convey all marks, and other relevant materials, to the Board in a timely manner

MEMBER-AT-LARGE

The member-at-large is a member of HRM graduate faculty authorized to be a Member-at-Large with interest in the Independent Study topic and who assists in its evaluation. The member-at-large should be at arm's length from the independent study project. He or she may consult with the student until the end of September, but should not be called upon during the remainder of the independent study. The primary role of the member-

¹ Note that only one of the Independent Study Supervisor or Member-at-large may sit on the student's supervisory committee.

at-large is to evaluate the Independent Study. The member at large does not necessarily have to be an expert on the topic. The member-at-large cannot be the student's Dissertation Supervisor (though they may be on the supervisory committee).² Specifically, the member-at-large will:

- i. Evaluate the student's final written paper on the Independent Study
- ii. Evaluate the student's oral presentation and defence of their Independent Study
- i. Convey all marks, and other relevant materials, to the Board in a timely manner

Clarification of Policy on Supervision of Independent Study (IS)

Supervisors and members at large for IS projects must be members of the HRM faculty who appear on the list of approved IS supervisors maintained and published online by the HRM program. This list is reviewed and approved by the Assistant Dean HRM in consultation with the Chair of BCE. The membership of this list is coordinated with the faculty appointments process in HEI and is not modified in response to individual student proposals. Proposals for IS projects that specify unapproved faculty will normally be rejected.

In exceptional circumstances, the Chair of BCE, in consultation with the Assistant Dean HRM, may approve supervisors or members at large that do not appear on the list of approved faculty. This is expected to be unusual. The student's PhD supervisor must make the request in writing at least 3 weeks prior to the IS proposal deadline and include a copy of the proposed faculty's CV. The written request should clearly justify the exception in terms of qualifications, the need for an exception, and the ability to make the required commitment to the student. Proposed faculty must have an academic appointment in a research intensive position and they must agree to appear in person at the defence in April. It will be wise for the student to prepare an alternative plan in case of rejection.

Approval of faculty supervisors or member at large on an exceptional basis is made in consideration of an individual student's circumstances and does not imply any precedent for other faculty approvals or that a faculty member can be added to the list of approved supervisors.

DISSERTATION SUPERVISOR

The proposed comprehensive examination process relies on the Dissertation supervisor to play a key role in the Independent Study. The Dissertation supervisor will assist the student in identifying a suitable Independent Study (one that is of substantive interest and value to the student, but which does not replicate dissertation research), a suitable Independent Study supervisor, and (where appropriate) a suitable Member-at-large to serve as a second evaluator. Specifically, the Dissertation supervisor will:

- i. Assist the student in identifying an appropriate Independent Study topic
- ii. Assist the student in identifying an appropriate Independent Study supervisor
- iii. Where requested, assist the student in identifying an appropriate Member-at-large to evaluate the Independent Study

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

hrmasst@mcmaster.ca HSC 2C5B ext. 26236 | [Lorraine Carroll carrl@mcmaster.ca](mailto:Lorraine.Carroll@mcmaster.ca) HSC 2C5B ext. 27718

The administrative assistant is the person responsible for the administrative functioning of the HRM Program. The administrative assistant distributes the Independent Study Plans and Interim Reports to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations.

THE EXAMINATION PROCESS

Ph.D. SEMINAR

Students are expected to attend and participate in the Ph.D. seminar for 10 months including the oral defence sessions.

They will be expected to submit a 3 to 4 page (double-spaced) commentary following instructions provided by the seminar presenter in the pre-meeting materials, and may select the sessions of greatest interest or of

² Note that only one of the Independent Study Supervisor or Member-at-large may sit on the student's supervisory committee.

greatest flexibility given individuals' schedules. *The content of the commentary should be scholarly and should provide a thoughtful overview of the primary readings, linking them together in an interesting way and following the instructions provided by the seminar presenter.* **A summary of the content of the provided readings is not sufficient.**

Students are expected to complete at least 2 commentaries before Christmas. Students responsible for an in-seminar presentation on the session topic may not submit a commentary for those sessions. If the student fails to accomplish this the Chair of the BCE and the student's dissertation supervisor will be notified.

Students are expected to prepare 1 in-seminar presentation in an area of interest where they wish to gain expertise and breadth of exposure. Students will not prepare presentations within their fields of Independent Study or their dissertation fields. (As well students cannot submit a commentary for the session they present at). Students will use the initial list of papers identified by the faculty instructor for the relevant field session as the basis **for a more advanced study in the area**, addressing a related question or topic of interest. To complete this advanced study, **the student will be expected to identify additional, relevant readings**, and prepare a 15-minute presentation (with electronic aids). Students may draw on the Seminar Presenter or their seminar colleagues to assist in the identification of additional sources, or search strategies, but they are expected to complete the in-seminar presentation and commentaries independently. If students are concerned about potential overlap between their presentation and the presentation content of the faculty Seminar Presenter, they should communicate with the faculty member in advance of the session.

Attendance Policy

The attendance policy for the PhD comprehensive seminar is the same as for all courses in the HRM program: <https://fhs.mcmaster.ca/hrm/documents/HRMPhDCompsManual2017.pdf>

Students completing the HRM Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination – seminar component are expected to attend all sessions, including the Independent Study oral defences. Special requests to miss a session must be discussed with the Seminar Coordinator and potentially the Board of Comprehensive Examinations. Any absences must be due to a reasonable excuse that is exceptional and out of control to some extent of the student (i.e., illness, death in family, special exams, etc). One absence with a legitimate excuse is reasonable, two may be acceptable at the discretion of the Seminar Coordinator and potentially the Board of Comprehensive Examinations, but if you miss 3 or more seminars you will not obtain credit for the seminar component. Attendance is considered in the assignment of participation grades. In cases where participation is credited for each session, you will normally receive 0 for participation any day you are absent.

INDEPENDENT STUDY

The student is responsible for identifying an appropriate Independent Study topic and supervisor, in consultation with her/his dissertation supervisor (and supervisory committee, where appropriate). The student is also responsible for identifying an appropriate Member-at-Large, with the support of the Independent Study supervisor. The student should prepare a written plan of study that provides an overview of the Independent Study project, outlining any meeting schedule and the expectations for the Independent Study (including outlining the form and extent of a progress report that should be prepared to allow the supervisor to submit an Interim report on the student's progress to the Board of Comprehensive Exams in December).

The plan of study should be agreed to by the Independent Study supervisor, and together with a copy of the student's curriculum vitae and a brief description of their present and any previous thesis topics, should be submitted to the Administrative Assistant for distribution to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations by May 1. The plan of study should be reviewed and amended by the student and supervisor as necessary during the academic year, especially if major changes are made in the expectations (the Board should be notified of any such revisions).

Student Interim Progress Report

Students will submit in early December an interim progress report on their Independent Study to their Independent Study Supervisor and to the Administrative Assistant for distribution to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations. The nature and extent of the report will have been pre-specified in the student's

plan of study, agreed to in the independent study proposal (and modified as required). The Independent Study Supervisor will use this report to provide an interim grade (worth 10% of the final Independent Study mark). In addition to the progress report, which is circulated to the Independent Study Supervisor, the student is invited to submit any further comments relating to their progress in the Seminar or the Independent Study to the Board, in confidence.

Interim Assessment from Independent Study Supervisor

The Independent Study Supervisor will submit an interim assessment of the student to the Administrative Assistant for distribution to the Board of Comprehensive Examination Chairs in mid-December. This assessment will consist of an evaluation of the student's interim progress report, which will be transmitted to the student directly, and any other comments on the student's progress of which the Board should be made aware, in confidence.

Interim Assessment from the Comprehensive Seminar Coordinators

The Seminar Coordinators will submit a brief report to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations in mid-December regarding the progress of all students participating in the comprehensive examination seminar. The report will provide marks-to-date from written commentaries and in-Seminar presentations, and an assessment of attendance. Where appropriate, the Seminar Coordinators will also append any comments about students' progress of which the Board should be made aware (e.g., attendance problems).

Interim Report

It is hoped that the interim evaluations will be helpful to the student in monitoring their own progress, and that they may indicate to the Board and the student whether there are problems arising with the process such that students who are not performing satisfactorily will improve their efforts to ensure success. Where appropriate, the Board will request a meeting with the student and/or Independent Study supervisor to discuss issues arising and to guide the parties to work toward a successful outcome.

Student Final Report

Students will submit the final report on their Independent Study to their Independent Study Supervisor, Member at Large and to the Administrative Assistant, mid-to-late-March.

Final Report

The Board of Comprehensive Examinations will provide official notification to students of their final grade shortly after the completion of the student's oral defence. This final grade will summarize the marks the students have received throughout the process, as reported by the Seminar coordinators, the Independent Study supervisor, and the other evaluators.

EVALUATION OF THE EXAMINATION

The final mark on the comprehensive examination sums the individual components of the examination. The Ph.D. seminar is worth 50% of the total grade and the Independent Study is worth 50%. The student must, however, receive a mark of at least a B- (70%) in each component to be considered to have passed the exam.

Ph.D. SEMINAR

The Ph.D. Seminar is worth 50% of the final mark for the Comprehensive Exam. The mark for the Ph.D. seminar will be arrived at from a summation of the following components:

- Attendance: Students will receive 0.5% of their seminar grade for each session attended to a maximum of 10%
 - Assessed by Seminar Coordinators
- Commentaries: Students will receive a total of 60% of their final mark for preparing 4, 3-4 page (double-spaced) commentaries: 15% each = 60%.
 - Marked by the Seminar presenter
- Presentations: Students will receive a total of 30% of their final mark for providing 1 in-seminar presentation = 30%.
 - Students will be assessed on the quality of their presentation (electronic aids are expected) and their ability to facilitate discussion in a subsequent question and answer period.

- Students will be assessed by the Seminar Presenter for that session

INDEPENDENT STUDY

The Independent Study is worth 50% of the final mark for the Comprehensive Exam. The mark for the Independent Study will be arrived at from a summation of the following components:

- Interim progress report: Students will receive 10% of their Independent Study mark from the assessment provided by their Independent Study supervisor of their interim progress report. Without a progress report a mark cannot be assigned.
- Final paper: Students will receive 50% of their Independent Study mark from the final paper. The final paper should review the student's Independent Study in sufficient depth to allow an expert in the field to evaluate the student's competence. The paper should be **no more than 20-pages in length, double-spaced**, excluding appendices such as graphs, figures, tables, references and glossaries of abbreviations.
 - Students will be assessed by their Independent Study supervisor and the designated Member-at-Large
 - The final mark for the Independent Study paper will average the marks of the two evaluators
- Oral Defence: Students will receive 40% of their Independent Study mark from the oral defence. Students are expected to prepare a 20 minute presentation, covering the material reviewed in the paper (the use of electronic aids is expected), and to orally explain and defend the material for a further 40 minutes.
 - Students will be assessed by their Independent Study supervisor and the designated Member-at-Large
 - The final mark for the oral defence will average the marks of the two evaluators

Key dates for evaluation:

- Evaluation of written portion of Independent Study
 - Early December: Students submit interim progress report on Independent Study
 - By January 31: Students receive interim report on their progress from the Board, including the assessment of their interim progress report
 - Mid-to-Late March (Time 0): Students submit final written report on their Independent Study
 - Mid- April to 4 weeks before defence (Time 0 + 2 weeks): Students receive evaluation of their final written report; students who fail are given 2 weeks to re-write the final report on their Independent Study
 - + 2 weeks (Time 0 + 4 weeks): Students required to re-write their final reports submit revised version
 - + 1 week (Time 0 + 5 weeks): Students receive evaluation of their re-written final report.
- Evaluation of oral portion of Independent Study
 - April-June: Students complete oral defence of their Independent Study
 - June/July: Students who failed their oral defence re-do their oral defence
- Evaluation of Seminar
 - End May (at end of oral defence sessions): Students receive final grade on their Seminar
 - June/July: Students who failed their Seminar undertake oral examination to demonstrate their knowledge

Refer to the key dates document, the seminar schedule and the defence schedule for the Independent Study deadlines. The documents are available on the avenue to learn seminar course and available from the HRM Program Office.

PASS AND PASS WITH DISTINCTION

The final mark on the comprehensive examination sums the individual components (Seminar and Independent Study) of the examination. The Ph.D. seminar is worth 50% of the total grade and the Independent Study is worth 50%. The student must, however, pass each component (i.e., B- or above) to be considered to have passed the Comprehensive Examination.

To pass the Comprehensive Seminar students must achieve a minimum of a B- in their final summary grade

(i.e., the grade that sums the individual marks on the written commentaries, in-Seminar presentation, and attendance). The final grade, whether fail (C+ or below), pass (B- to A) or pass with distinction (A+; 90%) will be determined by the summary grade. Students who do not achieve a passing summary grade on the Seminar portion of the Comprehensives will be given one second opportunity to address the deficiencies (see below).

To pass the Independent Study, students must pass both the written and oral portions of this component. Students must first pass the written portion of the Independent Study – that is, students must receive at least a B- on the combined grade assigned to the interim progress report (10%) and written paper (50%). Students who do not pass the written portion of the Independent Study will be given one opportunity to re-write the paper (see below). Students who pass the written portion of the Independent Study will then proceed to the Oral Defence. Students who are unsuccessful with their first attempt at the Oral Defence will be given one second opportunity (see below). Students who pass both the written and oral portions of their Independent Study (on first try or second chance) will be deemed to have passed that component of their Comprehensive examination. The final grade on the Independent Study, whether pass (B- to A) or pass with distinction (A+) will be determined by the summary grade of the oral and written portions.

SECOND CHANCE AND FAILURE

Feedback mechanisms have been built into the examination process such that the student should have ample opportunity to address any potential weaknesses before the end of the comprehensive process. However, should a student fail either component of the comprehensive exam they will be provided with a second chance to demonstrate their knowledge of the material (refer to schedule for second chance date). If this is required pass with distinction will no longer be a potential outcome for the student to achieve.

Ph.D. Seminar

A cumulative mark of less than 70% (B-) on the Ph.D. seminar will be considered a failure of that component of the comprehensive process. To address the deficiencies, the student will be required to sit an oral examination in late June. The oral exam will focus upon a sub-set of the topics for which the student submitted commentaries and prepared presentations. The Board of Comprehensive Examinations will select the topics, in consultation with the Seminar Coordinators, and will recruit 2 additional faculty members who were involved with the Comprehensive Seminar to serve as oral examiners. Specifically, the student will be provided with a second opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in two fields outside their own area of field expertise. These areas are understood to be defined by the student's selection of areas for written commentaries and presentations. Where this is unclear (i.e., where a student failed to submit sufficient commentaries), the Board of Comprehensive Examinations will identify the areas to be examined orally, and the student will be notified. The oral examination committee will consist of:

- 1 Seminar Coordinator, who acts as Chair
- 2 Faculty examiners who participated as Seminar presenters in the fields under examination.

The oral examination will take 1 hour. The date for oral examinations will be specified in the Seminar syllabus so that the student and faculty can plan, in advance, for this possibility. Post-examination, each examiner will be asked to provide a mark using the percentage scale. The average of these two marks will determine the student's final grade on the Seminar component of the comprehensive examination. If the student fails the oral examination, they will be deemed to have failed the Comprehensive Examination and will be required to withdraw from the program.

Independent Study

An average mark of less than 70% on the written component of the Independent Study (comprising the interim progress report and the final written report) will be considered a failure of that portion of the Independent Study. To make up for this failure the student will be required to re-submit a revised version of their final written report within two weeks of the original submission date. During this 2-week period, the student will have one (1) opportunity to meet with the IS supervisor and with the member-at-large to clarify their respective comments if necessary. If the student fails on re-evaluation of the written portion, they will be deemed to have failed the Comprehensive Examination and will be required to withdraw from the program.

The student must pass the written portion of the Independent Study in order to proceed to the oral defence. Should a student fail the oral defence (based upon the average mark assigned by his/her examiners), the student will be expected to re-defend the project orally. If the student fails on re-evaluation of the oral portion, they will be

deemed to have failed the Comprehensive Examination and will be required to withdraw from the program.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO BEAR IN MIND

1. Students must submit the Independent Plan of Study to the Administrative Assistant by May 1
2. Students must provide the Administrative Assistant with a copy of their curriculum vitae and a brief description of their present and any previous thesis topics when they submit their Independent Plan of Study. This information is kept on file to prevent duplication of previous work in the Comprehensive Examination papers.
3. Once the sequence of dates for the examination process (i.e., Independent Study Plan, Ph.D. Seminar Presentation) has been set; it may only be delayed for reasons of ill health or other extreme circumstances. If a student fails to complete the written or oral examination components in time without such a reason, the student may, at the discretion of the Board, be considered to have failed the first attempt at the examination. The Board of Comprehensive Examinations will have the discretion in consultation with the Seminar Coordinators and the Independent Study Supervisor to determine the validity of a student's need for extension. After a second failure to complete all components of the examination, the student will be required to withdraw from the HRM Ph.D. Graduate Program

**HRM COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
INDEPENDENT STUDY PLAN OF STUDY PROPOSAL FORM**

PLEASE NOTE:

1. The *HRM Comprehensive Examination – Independent Study Plan of Study* must be completed by all Health Research Methodology students completing their comprehensive examinations.
2. All sections of this form **must** be completed. This form must be **signed** by the Independent Study Supervisor, the Dissertation Supervisor, the Member-at-Large and the Student.
3. This form and a copy of your curriculum vitae must be submitted to Lorraine Carroll (carrl@mcmaster.ca) by May 1. Lorraine circulates the documents to the Board of Comprehensive Examiners for review.

Date:	
Student Name:	
Dissertation Supervisor:	
Members of Supervisory Committee:	
Independent Study Supervisor:	
Member-at-Large:	

Independent Study Proposal: (*Length = 1.5 pages single-spaced maximum; see Table 1 at the end of this form for tips on how to prepare your proposal*).

Independent Study Proposal (continued from previous page):

Relevance of Proposed Independent Study Topic to Your Doctoral Training Goals: *(What is your PhD Dissertation topic? How is your IS study topic distinct from your PhD dissertation topic? How is your IS proposal topic relevant to your doctoral training goals?)*

What are the challenges to successfully completing your independent study? How will you address them? That is, do you have a Plan B if an insoluble problem arises and you can't pursue your IS topic as proposed?

Interim Progress Report (to be submitted in early December): *(Provide a list of headings and state the page length for the interim progress report. This description should clearly indicate the specific aspects of progress the supervisor expects the student to report on. The interim progress report is evaluated by the Independent Study Supervisor and makes up 10% of the final grade for the Independent Study component of the Comprehensive Exam.*

Independent Study Project Timeline: *(Please provide a timeline for completion of the key elements of your IS project including meetings with your IS supervisor, etc.)*

I _____, [Name of Student] recognize that by signing this form I accept all responsibility in ensuring the completion of the Independent Study project. I understand that the Independent Study Supervisor will play a consultative role in this project and that my work will be done independently. I

understand that contact with my Member-at-Large regarding this project is only allowed for one month during September 2017. I also recognize that this agreement can be revised at any time, but that all parties must sign the new agreement.

By signing, each of the parties agrees that all aspects of the IS study described above are appropriate for a Comprehensive Examination Independent Study Project.

Signatures of:

Ph.D. Student: _____

Independent Study Supervisor: _____

Dissertation Supervisor: _____

Member-at-Large: _____

INDEPENDENT STUDY ORAL DEFENCES:

Independent study oral defences will be held on Thursdays in April – June on the dates shown in the HRM PhD Comp Seminar Schedule. **PLEASE HOLD THESE DATES IN YOUR CALENDAR. *The student, Independent Study Supervisor and Member-at-Large MUST attend.***

NOTE THAT THE HRM PROGRAM OFFICE WILL SET THE ORAL DEFENCE SCHEDULE IN SEPTEMBER 2018 USING INPUT FROM YOU, YOUR SUPERVISOR AND MEMBER-AT-LARGE.

CHANGES TO ORAL DEFENCE DATES ONCE SET IN SEPTEMBER WILL ONLY BE CONSIDERED UNDER EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

Assessments of the oral defence from the independent study supervisor and member-at-large are due the week of the oral defence. Second Chance Week will normally occur two weeks after the last scheduled oral defence.

TABLE 1: TIPS FOR PREPARING YOUR INDEPENDENT STUDY PROPOSAL

1	<p>Describe the project in sufficient detail. For example: specific objectives, PICOTS, inclusion/exclusion criteria, outcomes/measures, sample size/SCOPE, statistical methods and analysis plan, covariates, confounders</p>
2	<p>Convince the reviewer re: the feasibility and likelihood of successfully completing the objectives within the project timeline.</p>
3	<p>Provide a detailed project timeline (September to March), including a month-to-month critical path of work to map out the scope and anticipated progress of the project.</p>
4	<p>Describe very clearly how your IS project is distinct from your dissertation.</p>
5	<p>Edit and review for spelling and grammatical errors.</p>
6	<p>If proposing the use of a dataset, consider: How will the database support your proposed question and how can the intended sample be obtained from it? Are there any issues with data completeness that may jeopardize your work? What will you do if you cannot obtain a suitable dataset? What if there are delays with obtaining access? Describe any potential challenges to accessing the data.</p>
7	<p>If proposing a systematic review consider: Provide details re: PICOTS, search strategy, selections of papers, anticipated number of citations – including any preliminary info, partner for screening/data extraction/risk of bias/GRADE, whether you plan on accessing library support, data extraction plan</p>

Grading Form for Commentary

Each commentary is expected to be 3-4 pages (double-spaced) in length. It should entail a scholarly synopsis, critique, and commentary on the readings distributed for the Ph.D. seminar and follow any special instructions provided by the seminar presenter in the pre-meeting materials. Supplemental resources are allowable if they add meaningful content to the commentary, but they are not required. In assigning a percentage grade, please keep the following in mind:

70% is the pass mark for graduate students

90% is the cut-point for passing with distinction

Each commentary is worth 15% of the student's mark in the seminar portion of the comprehensives

The writing style should be appropriate for the graduate student level

The content should be scholarly in that it should provide a thoughtful overview of the primary readings, linking them together in an interesting way – when possible - rather than simply being a summary of the content of the provided readings.

Student Name: _____

Faculty Name: _____

Topic: _____

Grade: _____%

Comments:

Grading Form for In-seminar Presentations

The in-seminar presentation is expected to be approximately 30 minutes in length, (approximately 15 minutes for presentation and 15 minutes for discussion). It should entail a scholarly synopsis, critique, and commentary on readings that expand the focus of the seminar to that point (i.e., it is expected to build on the material presented by the faculty facilitator in some way rather than simply restating the material provided in the seminar readings). Supplemental resources should be used in a manner that adds meaningful content to the seminar. In assigning a percentage grade, please keep the following in mind:

- 70% is the pass mark for graduate students
- 90% is the cut-point for passing with distinction
- Students are expected to prepare presentations in areas where they have an interest but limited expertise so that they may gain some breadth of exposure.
- The in-seminar presentation is worth 30% of the student's mark in the seminar portion of the comprehensives
- The presentation style should be appropriate for the graduate student level (i.e., appropriate length, professional visual supports, and strong verbal skills).
- The content should be scholarly in that it should provide a thoughtful overview of the focal topic and build upon the material presented in the pre-seminar readings.
- The student may not be able to answer all questions stemming from the discussion, but should be able to facilitate the discussion and speak knowledgeably of the issues

Student Name: _____

Faculty Name: _____

Topic: _____

Grade: _____%

Comments:

Grading Form for Independent Study (Written)

Each report is expected to be no more than 20 double-spaced pages in length, excluding appendices such as graphs, tables, etc. It should entail a scholarly synopsis of the project undertaken for the student's independent study, presented in sufficient depth to allow an expert in the field to evaluate the student's competence. A mark will be assigned by both the independent study supervisor and the member-at-large with the average of the two scores constituting 50% of the student's grade for the independent study.

In assigning a percentage grade, please keep the following in mind:

70% is the pass mark for graduate students

90% is the cut-point for passing with distinction

The writing style should be appropriate for the graduate student level

The content should be scholarly in that it should provide a thoughtful overview of the issue focused upon (including a focused research question if appropriate), rigour in the methods adopted, appropriate analyses, and a integrative, intellectually-sound discussion.

Please return this form to the HRM Program Assistant (hrmasst@mcmaster.ca, HSC 2C5B).

Student Name: _____

Faculty Name: _____

Topic: _____

Grade: _____%

Comments:

Grading Form for Independent Study (Oral Defence)

Each student will have 20 minutes (maximum) to deliver an oral summary of his/her independent study. It should entail a scholarly synopsis of the project undertaken. A mark will be assigned by both the independent study supervisor and the member-at-large with the average of the two scores constituting 40% of the student's grade for the independent study.

In assigning a percentage grade, please keep the following in mind:

- 70% is the pass mark for graduate students
- 90% is the cut-point for passing with distinction
- The presentation style should be appropriate for the graduate student level
- The content should be scholarly in that it should provide a clear and thoughtful overview of the issue of focus as well as a critical and well-organized summary of the work completed within the context of a professional and engaging presentation with use of appropriate audiovisual material and minimal use of notes.

After the presentation examiners will have up to 25 minutes to question the student to generate an assessment of the student's understanding of the issues relevant to the project after which time 10 minutes will be available for discussion with the broader audience in attendance.

Student Name: _____

Faculty Name: _____

Topic: _____

Grade: _____%

Comments: