Milestone #4: Preliminary Written Exam

For students admitted fall 2017 or later, follow the Preliminary Written and Oral Exam procedures described below.

For students admitted prior to fall 2017, you may choose to follow these new Preliminary Written and Oral Exam procedures if you have not yet sent a draft of your preliminary written exam (formerly called the CRP) to your advisor for review. Please discuss the options with your Preliminary Oral Committee.

School of Nursing Preliminary Written Examination Policy
The University of Minnesota requires PhD students to pass a written examination in the major field in order to become a doctoral candidate. This examination encompasses work that is fundamental to the field and reflects competencies expected of PhD students. In the School of Nursing, there is one Preliminary Written Examination. After successful completion of the written examination (paper), the DGS reports to the Graduate School that the Written Preliminary Examination requirement for the major has been successfully completed. This is then recorded in the student’s UMN graduate record. The written exam is graded only by SoN faculty as it is a program level requirement.

Academic Integrity
As with all coursework, academic integrity is a critical part of preliminary written exam. Every student attending the School of Nursing is expected to adhere to the U of M Code of Conduct (https://oscai.umn.edu/), as well as the School of Nursing Behavioral Standards. Any violation of the above is considered an act of misconduct and warrants disciplinary action appropriate to the violation, including failing a written exam. Particularly relevant to the written exam is plagiarism, defined as “representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one’s own without providing documentation of source. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Copying information word for word from a source without using quotation marks and giving proper acknowledgement by way of footnote, endnote, or in-text citation;
- Representing the words, ideas or data of another person as one’s own without providing proper attribution to the author through quotation, reference, in-text citation, or footnote;
- Paraphrasing, without sufficient acknowledgement, ideas taken from another person that the reader might reasonably mistake as the author’s; and
- Borrowing various words, ideas, phrases, or data from original sources and blending them with one’s own without acknowledging the sources.

Students and faculty examiners are encouraged to use sources such as Turn-It-In to verify that plagiarism has not occurred whether intentional or not.

Preliminary Written Examination
PhD students are eligible to complete the Preliminary Written Exam after completing NURS 8190 and at least 18 additional required Nursing PhD program credits. The goal at this point in your education is to be have completed the necessary nursing coursework be to ready for the written examination. Completing NURS 8190 will prepare you for conducting a literature review and other required nursing courses will help you prepare for the content. Therefore, elective course credits should not be counted.
when assessing credit-eligibility for the Preliminary Written Exam. Typically, students will complete the exam in the summer following the first year of study or during the second year of study. It is expected that students will have officially assigned faculty members to their Preliminary Oral Exam Committee before initiating the Preliminary Written Exam. **All members of the Preliminary Oral Exam Committee will assist with delineation of the scope of the Preliminary Written Exam even though only SoN faculty members of this committee will actually grade the exam.**

**Exam Content Overview**

This paper involves a comprehensive critical review of the state of the science in which the student provides evidence of the breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding in a particular content area of nursing that is of special interest. The goal is to demonstrate the student’s ability to clearly formulate a problem, conduct a literature search, synthesize the literature, analyze and interpret the findings, identify gaps in knowledge related to the proposed topic and make recommendations for the next steps needed to advance the science. Students are encouraged to submit their paper for publication after they have received a passing grade for the written examination, although it may need to be revised per journal requirements and co-author input.

**Step-By-Step Preliminary Written Examination Process**

1) The student must discuss with his/her advisor the feasibility and plans for a potential topic, scope and timing of the written exam. **(NOTE: The topic can be related to, but must be different than, the paper written for Nursing 8190: Critical Review of Health Research. Moreover, the purpose of the course is to build a foundation on how to write a critical review and the course assignment requirements may be similar but not exactly the same as the written exam.)** The student then writes a 1-2 page written exam proposal outline describing the topic and scope of the exam paper, sends it via email to the Preliminary Oral Exam Committee members (including advisor and external committee member) and consults with committee members about a date for a meeting to discuss the proposal (approximately two weeks from receipt of the outline).

2) The student schedules a meeting date/time and a meeting location (schedule through advisor’s coop). At the meeting, Preliminary Oral Exam Committee members provide input on the paper topic, scope (and possible journal for publication). After all Preliminary Oral Exam Committee members agree with the scope and topic, all of the SoN faculty on the Preliminary Oral Exam Committee sign the Preliminary Written Exam Planning Form, due dates for the exam submission and grading dates are made (please avoid due dates for grades on holidays and weekends). After all signatures are completed, the student may proceed with writing the Preliminary Written Exam.

3) The student should make copies of the signed Preliminary Written Exam Planning Form for all SoN reviewers and the signed form must be submitted by the student to the DGS using the following website link ([https://is.gd/prelimwrittenplanningform](https://is.gd/prelimwrittenplanningform)).

4) The student submits a draft of the Preliminary Written Exam to his/her advisor via email by the agreed upon date. **Due date changes from the Preliminary Written Exam Planning Form are only allowed one time and must be prior to submitting the exam to the advisor for approval and must be signed off by all SoN reviewers.**

5) The primary advisor only provides the student with no more than ½ page (single-spaced) of written feedback (no track changes or editing) on the draft Preliminary Written Exam via email by the agreed upon date.
6) The student revises the Preliminary Written Exam and submits it to the SoN reviewers via email on the agreed upon date. If changes to dates are needed after the signed Preliminary Written Exam Planning Form has been submitted, the student must email the DGS with the advisor cc’d. Date changes are not allowed after the Preliminary Written Exam has been sent to the advisor for approval. Due date changes are only allowed in special and exceptional circumstances and the student must contact and get approval for a due date change from the DGS as soon as possible.

7) The student uploads a copy of the Preliminary Written Exam to the DGS using the following website link (https://is.gd/prelimwrittenupload).

8) SoN reviewers individually evaluate the Preliminary Written Exam and send a grade of “pass” or “no pass” for the exam via email to the DGS only (not to advisor). A written critique must be provided to the student’s advisor (not DGS) if a “no pass” grade is assigned. A written critique or commentary on a “pass” grade is optional.

9) The DGS notifies the student’s advisor and other committee members of the outcome of the Preliminary Written Exam.

10) The student’s advisor notifies the student (in person, by phone or email) of the Preliminary Written Exam outcome as soon as possible and provides the student with a written summary of feedback from the examiners (including their own), if relevant, within two weeks. It is not required, but preferable that this meeting is held in person.

Getting Input on the Preliminary Written Exam During Development

Faculty, students and other resources may be consulted in the Preliminary Written Exam development prior to submitting a formal first draft to the advisor for formal feedback (date determined by student and advisor). After the brief written advisor feedback is received, the student may seek clarification and general information from faculty and students but may not solicit formal written feedback from faculty on further drafts of the complete Preliminary Written Exam. Remember, the Preliminary Written Exam is an exam so it is meant to be independent work with minimal input from others.

Criteria for Preliminary Written Exam Evaluation

General guidelines: The length of the paper must be at least 20 pages and no more than 30 pages, including figures and tables, but excluding references and the title page. The student has the option to prepare the paper in a format suitable to submit for publication as a literature review as long as the criteria described in this document is followed. If so, the style must follow the guidelines outlined by the journal to which the student plans to submit the paper (which may or may not be APA style).

Specific grading criteria that can be used to guide the evaluation are as follows:

1. The purpose of the Preliminary Written Exam is clearly stated; the exam topic goes beyond or is different in topic from the paper developed for Nursing 8190: Critical Review of Health Research (student will describe differences in scope between the Preliminary Written Exam and course paper on Preliminary Written Exam Planning Form).
2. The scope of the literature review is clearly circumscribed and fits well with the purpose;
3. The search strategy (including inclusion criteria and strategies for identifying literature related to the topic) is clearly specified;
4. Appropriate literature is identified for the review;
5. The synthesis of the literature is coherent and appropriate;
6. The analysis of the literature and critique of results is appropriate;
7. Findings are presented in a clear and organized manner;
8. The state of science in the area is clearly expressed;
9. Gaps in the state of the science are identified and described;
10. At least two potential areas of research (next steps) to advance the science are proposed with descriptions of potential methodologies;
11. The significance of the next steps is clearly described (summarization of the NIH definition of significance: Do the next steps describe an important problem or a critical barrier to progress the field? How will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?)
12. The paper is clearly articulated and logically constructed;
13. A standard style format is consistently and accurately used (APA or a style required by a journal being considered for submission).

Retaking the Preliminary Written Exam:
A pass by two of the three SoN reviewers is required for the student to pass the Preliminary Written Exam. Students may retake the examination one time and it must be with the same committee members. Failure to pass the Preliminary Written Exam the second time will lead to the student being dismissed from the program.

Milestone #5: Preliminary Oral Examination

A. Description of Preliminary Oral Examination
University of Minnesota Graduate Education policies require students to take the Preliminary Oral Examination after completing a substantial portion of the course work and passing the Preliminary Written Examination, but before beginning dissertation research. The Preliminary Oral Examination is conducted as a closed examination, attended by only the student and all members of the Preliminary Oral Exam Committee. Advisors ARE allowed to chair the preliminary oral examination. Students and advisors are advised to review the Graduate School website for rules for Examination Committee membership and responsibilities. For information regarding expectations for the preliminary oral examination, please visit: http://www.nursing.umn.edu/current-students/phd-students

In the School of Nursing, the Preliminary Oral Examination will be conducted within one month of passing the Preliminary Written Exam. The Preliminary Oral Examination will focus on the quality and content of the Preliminary Written Exam paper, the content of the major field of study and minor field or supporting coursework, and the next steps towards developing the Dissertation Research Proposal. The student should prepare a 10-15 minute presentation of their Preliminary Written Exam content, including gaps in the state of the science and potential next steps to advance the field; PowerPoint presentations are optional. The presentation will be followed by questions and discussion with the Preliminary Oral Exam Committee and is intended to move the student forward in beginning to develop his/her Dissertation Research Proposal. When successfully completed, the Preliminary Oral Examination Report will be filed with the Graduate School indicating that the Preliminary Oral Exam has been completed and the student will be considered a doctoral candidate. To schedule the Preliminary Oral Examination, students contact the committee members in advance. Students should email his/her advisor’s co-operative unit to reserve a room (see link below). If students are uncertain of their advisor’s co-operative unit look it up at this link: http://www.nursing.umn.edu/about/cooperative-units

May 2017
B. Scheduling of the Preliminary Oral Exam with the Graduate School (GSSP) and Submitting the Exam Form

The student must schedule the preliminary oral examination with Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP) online as soon as a date is set, but no later than one week prior to the examination. Once the student schedules online, a confirmation email will be sent to the student's UMN email account. Upon initial review of the student’s record, an email will be sent to the student’s UMN email account regarding any outstanding graduate school requirements, and how to fulfill those requirements. About one week prior to the exam, an email will be sent to the student’s UMN email account confirming authorization of the exam or reminding the student of remaining outstanding requirements. To schedule the exam, students go to this link:
http://www.grad.umn.edu/current-students-graduate-student-services-progress/preliminary-scheduling

It is critical at this point that an advisor ensures the student has received an email confirmation from the Graduate School that s/he is authorized to proceed with the examination. A customized Preliminary Oral Examination Form will be generated by the Graduate School (this form is not available online and is not provided to Nursing PhD staff or administrators). The Preliminary Oral Exam Form is mailed to the chair of the committee (as designated on the Degree Program; can be the advisor). If there is not sufficient time to mail the exam form, Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP) will contact the student via email to pick up the exam form. Unless the Preliminary Oral Examination Form has been generated and given to the committee chair, the exam is invalid. The committee chair will run the Preliminary Oral Exam meeting itself and work with the student to get the Preliminary Oral Examination Form signed and returned by all members within 24 hours of the examination. The student should submit the signed exam form to the Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP) in 160 Williamson Hall once all signatures are obtained. Students will not be given permission to register for dissertation credits until GSSP has received the signed Preliminary Oral Examination form.

Milestone #6: Dissertation Research Proposal

For students admitted fall 2017 or later, follow the Dissertation Research Proposal procedures described below.

For students admitted prior to fall 2017, you may chose to follow these new Dissertation Research Proposal procedures or follow the previous procedures. Please discuss the options with your Final Examination Committee.

Milestone #6 consists of a Dissertation Research Proposal. The intent of the Dissertation Research Proposal is for the student to develop his/her research plan for his/her dissertation; it is not an exam but
a document to clearly articulate the topic, scope and methodology to be used for the student’s dissertation. Completion of the Dissertation Research Proposal should be considered after the student has completed the majority of coursework, filed the Graduate Degree Plan with the Graduate School, and successfully completed the Preliminary Written Examination (Milestone #4) and Preliminary Oral Examination (Milestone #5). Students must have officially assigned faculty members to their Final Exam Committee before initiating the Dissertation Research Proposal.

Dissertation Research Proposal Content
The Dissertation Research Proposal should be in the form of portions of a Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Individual Predoctoral Fellowship (F31) proposal which includes specific aims (1 page, single spaced) and research strategy (6 pages, single spaced) and human subjects sections (unlimited length). The biosketch, investigator/team, facilities and environment sections are not included. Students begin developing their Dissertation Research Proposal from the grant proposal developed for NURS 8173 if applicable but should be aware that final exam committee members may have substantial changes to the proposal. The finalization of the Dissertation Research Proposal is an iterative process between the student and his/her final exam committee members.

In the proposal, the student must address the following:

Specific Aims (think of as an abbreviated version of the full grant)
- Describe the research topic, what is known, gaps in knowledge and critical need.
- Introduce the proposed solution to address the research gap, a rationale, and how it will advance the science.
- Delineate aims (and hypotheses or research questions).
- Consider including long-term goals. What future research will be developed from this research.
- Provide a summary of why the proposed work is innovative and how it will impact the field.

Significance
- Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress that the proposed research addresses.
- Describe the scientific premise for the proposed research, including consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of published research or preliminary data crucial to the support of your proposal.
- Explain how the proposed research will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in nursing.
- Describe how the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field will be changed if the proposed aims are achieved.

Innovation
- Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms.
- Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.
- Explain any refinements, improvements, or new applications of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.

Approach
• Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project.
• Address the suitability (strengths and limitations) of a conceptual framework if relevant.
• Describe the study design and methods proposed and how they will achieve robust and unbiased results.
• Address how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted.
• Discuss potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success anticipated to achieve the aims. If the project is in the early stages of development, describe any strategy to establish feasibility, and address the management of any high risk aspects of the proposed work.

Protections for Human Subjects
• If the proposed project involves human subjects, propose protections from research risk relating to their participation according to the following five review criteria: 1) risk to subjects, 2) adequacy of protection against risks, 3) potential benefits to the subjects and others, 4) importance of the knowledge to be gained, and 5) data and safety monitoring for clinical trials. For research that involves human subjects and meets the criteria for one or more of the six categories of research that are exempt under 45 CFR Part 46, evaluate: 1) the justification for the exemption, 2) human subjects involvement and characteristics, and 3) sources of materials.

Inclusion of Women, Minorities, and Children
• If the proposed project involves human subjects, describe plans for the inclusion (or exclusion) of individuals on the basis of sex/gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as the inclusion (or exclusion) of children to determine if it is justified in terms of the scientific goals and research strategy proposed.

Step-By-Step Dissertation Proposal Process
1) Based on the discussion and feedback provided to the student by the Preliminary Oral Exam Committee regarding the development of the Dissertation Research Proposal, the student must draft the Dissertation Research Proposal following the guidelines described above. The student then sends the Dissertation Research Proposal via email to the Final Exam Committee members (including advisor and external committee member) and consults with committee members to find a date for a meeting to discuss the proposal plan (at least two weeks after the student has provided the committee with the Dissertation Research Proposal).
2) The student schedules a meeting date/time and a meeting location (schedule through advisor’s co-operative unit) to meet with the Final Exam Committee members. For the meeting, the student should prepare a 10-15 minute presentation of their Dissertation Research Proposal content; PowerPoint presentations are optional.
3) At the meeting, committee members are to provide input on the Dissertation Proposal. The student and committee members should discuss whether the student should write a traditional dissertation or opt for the multiple paper option. It is also a good idea to discuss potential authorship at this point. Not all committee members necessarily need to be considered as potential authors but it is good to start the discussion early. If all members believe they have enough detail about the proposed dissertation research for the student to begin an IRB application and proceeding to complete the research, they may sign their approval on the Dissertation Proposal Approval Form. If major changes are required for committee approval, committee members should not sign the Dissertation Proposal Approval Form at this initial meeting. The student will revise the Dissertation Research Proposal until all committee
members agree that the student is ready to initiate an IRB application and begin dissertation research (this process can be done via email) and at this point all committee members should sign the Dissertation Proposal Approval Form (found at https://www.nursing.umn.edu/current-students/phd-students). The Final Exam Committee designates the length and detail required in the Dissertation Research Proposal before approval. The student may not submit an IRB application for dissertation research or begin the research until all committee members have approved the proposal with a signature on the Dissertation Research Proposal Approval Form and have received a copy of the final Dissertation Research Proposal.

4) The student makes copies of the signed Dissertation Research Proposal Approval Form for all Final Exam Committee members and submits the form and the approved Dissertation Research Proposal Approval Form to the DGS using the following website link https://is.gd/dissertationproposal