



NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL STATE UNIVERSITY

THESIS, DISSERTATION AND COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

UNIT POLICY—ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Theses and dissertations: A thesis or dissertation presents the results of the student's original investigation in the field of major interest. It must represent a contribution to knowledge, be adequately supported by data and be written in a manner consistent with the highest standards of scholarship.

Thesis/Dissertation Research Topic:

The thesis/dissertation research topic must be approved by the thesis/dissertation advisory committee. Students whose research involves human subjects, animals, biohazards, or radiation must have their research proposals approved by the appropriate compliance committee before beginning their research.

Qualifying Examination:

The Qualifying Examination is given to assess a doctoral student's competence in a broad range of relevant subject areas. Only students with unconditional admission status and in good academic standing may take the Qualifying Examination. A student may not register for dissertation credits before passing the Qualifying Examination. A student may be permitted to attempt the Qualifying Examination at most twice. A student who wants to retake the Qualifying Examination must apply to retake the Qualifying Examination by the posted deadline. A student not recommended for re-examination or who fails the exam on a second attempt will be dismissed from the doctoral program. While it is expected that the student takes the Qualifying Exam during his/her first year, he/she must take the exam before the end of three semesters or 27 attempted credit hours. A student who fails on the first attempt must retake the exam and pass it in the following semester, but no later than the end of the first four semesters or 36 attempted hours. The results of the qualifying exam will be communicated by the department to the Graduate College within 30 days from the date of the exam.

Each program will offer the qualifying examination at least once each semester (fall/spring) through a process administered by the graduate coordinator. The program handbook and website

will clearly publish the exam format including subjects tested, number of questions from each subject, time allowed for each question and total exam duration, whether the exam is open book or closed book, written or oral, and passing score. Consequences of failing one or more parts of the exam will be clearly mentioned. All students taking the exam in the same academic year will receive the same exam format; therefore, any changes in the exam format will be published at least one year in advance.

Preliminary Examination:

The Preliminary Examination is conducted by a doctoral student's dissertation committee and is an oral defense of the student's dissertation proposal. Only students with unconditional admission status, in good academic standing, and a confirmed dissertation advisor may take the Preliminary Examination. A student may be permitted to attempt the Preliminary Examination at most twice. A student who wants to retake the Preliminary Examination must apply to retake the Preliminary Examination by the posted deadline. At least one full semester must elapse before the re-examination. A student not recommended for re-examination or who fails the exam on a second attempt will be dismissed from the doctoral program. A student who has not passed the Preliminary Exam by the time he/she has attempted 45 doctoral credit hours will be dismissed from the program. The results of the preliminary exam will be communicated by the department to the Graduate College within 30 days from the date of the exam.

Each program will offer the preliminary examination at least once each semester (fall/spring) through a process administered by the graduate coordinator. The program handbook and website will clearly publish the exam format including material tested, exam duration, whether the exam is open book or closed book, written or oral, and passing score. Consequences of failing one or more parts of the exam will be clearly mentioned. All students taking the exam in the same academic year will receive the same exam format; therefore, any changes in the exam format will be published at least one year in advance.

Admission to Candidacy

A doctoral student will be admitted to candidacy upon successful completion of the Qualifying Exam and the Preliminary Oral Exam.

Thesis/Dissertation Defense:

The thesis/dissertation defense is conducted by the student's thesis/dissertation committee and is an oral defense of the student's final thesis/dissertation and is scheduled after the thesis/dissertation is completed. Copies of the thesis/dissertation must be presented by the student to his or her faculty advisor for review by the examining committee no later than one week prior to the defense of the thesis/dissertation. The examination may be held no earlier than one semester (or four months) after admission to candidacy. The results of the defense must be submitted by department to the Graduate College within 24 hours. Failure on the examination may result in dismissal from the program. The student's Advisory Committee may permit one re-examination. At least one full semester must elapse before the re-examination. Failure on the second attempt will result in dismissal from the program.

Submission of Thesis/Dissertation:

After the thesis/dissertation has been successfully defended, the thesis/dissertation must be approved by each member of the student's thesis/dissertation committee. The student must submit the approved thesis/dissertation to the Graduate College by the deadline posted on the academic calendar, and must conform to the Graduate College's formatting guidelines for theses and dissertations. Prior to or at the time of submission, the student must complete and sign the Non-Exclusive Distribution Agreement granting North Carolina A&T State University a limited, nonexclusive, royalty-free, license to reproduce the thesis or dissertation in electronic form and make it available to the general public at no charge, subject to the embargo choice/publishing restrictions of the student. This form should be delivered to the Graduate College along with the original copy of the signature page bearing signatures of committee chair, department chair and/or dean of the school.

Thesis/Dissertation Advisor

All students in graduate programs must have a graduate advisor who is a member of the graduate faculty in the student's major program. In the case of doctoral programs and master's programs requiring theses and/or final oral examinations, the thesis/dissertation advisor is the chair or co-chair of the thesis/dissertation committee and serves as the graduate advisor. It is the student's responsibility to reach mutual agreement with a thesis/dissertation advisor and, in consultation with the advisor, to select a thesis/dissertation committee consisting of graduate faculty members.

Master's student: A student pursuing a master's thesis should reach agreement with a full member of the graduate faculty to serve as his/her thesis advisor by the time he/she has attempted 18 credit hours. The Graduate Coordinator or Department Chair approves and submits the advisor and committee names on the student's Plan of Study by the end of the second semester to the Graduate College for final approval. A student who is unable to reach agreement with any qualified faculty member to serve as his/her advisor by the time he/she has attempted 18 credit hours may be approved to graduate under a non-thesis option; this will require a revised Plan of Study and approval by the graduate coordinator/department chair and the Graduate College.

Doctoral student: A doctoral student should reach agreement with a full member of the graduate faculty to serve as his/her dissertation advisor by the time he/she has attempted 27 credit hours. The Graduate Coordinator or Department Chair approves and submits the advisor and committee names on the student's revised Plan of Study by the end of the third semester to the Graduate College for final approval. A student who is unable to reach agreement with any qualified faculty member to serve as his/her advisor by the time he/she has attempted 27 credit hours will be dismissed from the program. In this case, the student may submit a new application for admission to another program at North Carolina A&T State University or may transfer to another institution.

Advisory Committee Role

The primary function of the committee is to advise the student in all aspects of the educational program and to monitor and evaluate that student's progress toward the degree. The student is expected to meet with committee in formal sessions at appropriate intervals to critically assess

the student's progress; such meetings may be requested by the student or by any member of the committee.

The advisory committee is responsible for the following aspects of the thesis or dissertation and the related or associated research experience:

- approval of the subject matter and methodology of the thesis or dissertation research;
- approval of the organization, content and format of the thesis or dissertation according to NCA&T guidelines;
- review of and comment on drafts of various sections of the thesis or dissertation, including (a) the quality of data and evidence, (b) logical reasoning, and (c) the editorial, linguistic and bibliographic quality;
- evaluation of the thesis or dissertation as a basis for certification that the student has fulfilled the requirements of the degree for which he or she is a candidate; and
- encouragement of and advice to the student and review of manuscripts based on the thesis or dissertation research for publication in the scholarly literature of his or her field.

Advisory Committee Composition

The advisory committee for a master's thesis is composed of at least three members of the Graduate Faculty, including the committee chair. At least two committee members must be Full or Associate members of the graduate faculty. The student's advisor serves as chair of the committee and is a Full member of the graduate faculty. The advisory committee for a doctoral dissertation is composed of at least four members of the Graduate Faculty. At least three committee members must be Full or Associate members of the graduate faculty. The student's advisor serves as chair of the committee and is a full member of the graduate faculty.

The Advisory Committee is selected by the student in consultation with his/her advisor.

The members of the committee must be approved by the graduate coordinator or department chair. The Graduate College verifies the eligibility of faculty to serve on advisory committees when the Plan of Study is submitted. The Graduate College will appoint an additional external committee member for all doctoral dissertation committees. The Graduate College faculty representative serves on the doctoral dissertation committee with all the rights and responsibilities of any other member. In addition, the Graduate College faculty representative also represents the Graduate College to (i) protect the interest of the University by ensuring that the dissertation meets the highest academic standards, (ii) provide assurance that appropriate procedures are followed; and (iii) provide an 'outside' point of view by sharing expertise with a new perspective or theoretical vantage that might not otherwise be available.

Committee Members from Other Institutions

At most one of the required committee members may be selected from an external institution. If such a committee member is from another university, he/she must have graduate faculty status at his/her home institution; the program coordinator or department chair will provide evidence to the Graduate College before the appointment is approved. If the external committee member is from a non-academic organization, the appointment will be considered, and if appropriate, approved by the Graduate College after receiving a request and copy of the CV from the program coordinator or department chair. In all cases, it should be made clear to that person that he or she will be expected to participate in the comprehensive oral examinations.

Substitution of Committee Members

Under extenuating circumstances, it may be necessary for a member of a graduate advisory committee to have a substitute at committee meetings or the exam. The substitution of a committee member on an oral examination must be requested in writing by the program coordinator or department chair and approved by the Graduate College in advance of the examination.

Permanent Changes in Committee Members

- **Changes before Preliminary Examination.** Should the student, in consultation with his/her advisor, wish to change any of the committee members, he/she must submit a revised Plan of Study with the new members, indicating that this change has been approved by the advisor and by the graduate coordinator or department chair.
- **Changes after Preliminary Examination.** Changes in committee membership after the preliminary exam requires signatures of both outgoing and incoming committee members and the student, as well as justification for the committee change. Approval by the Graduate College is required before holding any examinations.
- Disagreements within the committee or between the student and a committee member over the quality of a student's performance are not grounds for reconstituting the committee.

Comprehensive Exams: Students enrolled in a graduate program may be tested by a comprehensive examination to determine the student's knowledge and skills in a general subject area or a concentration. The comprehensive examination date will be announced by the departmental graduate committee chairperson at the beginning of the semester. This examination will be administered to the enrolled student by an examining committee of the department.

- a. Eligibility to sit for the examination will be determined by the departmental graduate committee and the results of the examination will be forwarded to the Graduate College no later than 30 days prior to the end of the semester.
- b. Students may only take the comprehensive examination twice. After the second failure, the student will be dismissed from their academic program.
- c. All graduate students who take their comprehensive examination must be enrolled in the program.

Approved by the Chancellor

Date revised policy is effective: Upon approval and only applies to those graduate students beginning their graduate work on or after October 12, 2015, or those who leave the program and return under a later catalogue.

First approved:	Prior to July 2012
Revised:	August 6, 2012
Revised:	October 12, 2015
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