



Written Comprehensive Examination
Guidelines and Grading Rubric for PhD Students

2020-2021 Academic Year

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INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITTEN COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION FOR PHD STUDENTS

The written comprehensive examination for PhD students is designed to support the academic goals of the Sue & Bill Gross school of Nursing: to establish a sustainable PhD program infrastructure that fosters intellectual growth and development and promote excellence in student scholarship. Toward this end, students complete the Comprehensive Examination after finishing PhD coursework with the intended goal of allowing students to demonstrate that they have the breadth and depth of knowledge required to formulate thoughtful, well-defined research questions and designs. To pass the comprehensive examination, students must demonstrate that they have the breadth and depth of knowledge required to:

- review the empirical literature in an area of interest;
- identify scientific gaps in the literature;
- formulate a well-defined research question that addresses these gaps;
- have a clear understanding of potential theoretical approaches that will guide data analysis;
- critically evaluate the appropriateness of two different research design to conduct a study to address the question.

For these reasons, students complete the exam when they have finished their PhD coursework.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM PROCESS AND GUIDELINES

Students will receive this handbook and instructions in advance of the exam. The exam must be completed independently, and students may not receive input/feedback from faculty, supervisors, other students, and/or outside colleagues while preparing their exam. The student may use course papers, assignments, or drafts as a starting point for the comprehensive exam, but they must submit an original document for the final comprehensive exam, not a paper they wrote prior to the start of the comprehensive examination. The comprehensive exam does not count toward the 3-paper option for completion of a student's doctoral dissertation. Student's comprehensive exam committee members in the Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing will review and evaluate the quality and acceptability of the exam.

The comprehensive exam consists of two questions that will be developed by each student's PhD supervisor(s) in collaboration with the student's comprehensive exam committee members. There will be one theory/conceptual question (which may be a literature review) and one design/methods question. These will be tailored to the student's area of interest.

Comprehensive Exam Questions

Question 1

Question 1 will focus on evaluating the student's understanding of the domains, theories, frameworks, and/or concepts/constructs involved in their area of interest. The result should be a focused, organized presentation of what is involved and what is at stake in the student's area of interest, including an analysis of what is already known and where potential gaps or areas for further inquiry lie. The student is encouraged to think critically as well, considering the assumptions and implications of the ways their area of interest has been framed/theorized/conceptualized, and how these assumptions and/or implications may affect the discipline and/or practice of nursing. The approach to answering Question 1 is not prescriptive. Some examples include a systematic literature review (we encourage a broad approach and conceptual analysis no matter what review methodology is used); an in depth concept analysis that focuses on both concepts and the relationships between concepts identified as important; a concept mapping methodology; or a critical analysis of seminal papers/books in the field. No matter the method chosen, the answer to

the question should be comprehensive, cohesive, logically argued, and enable the reviewers to make a determination as to the student's in depth understanding of the current state-of-the-science of their area of interest and where the next steps should be taken.

Question 2

The student will then be asked to provide a rigorous and coherent delineation of 2 potential research designs, including each design's supporting methods to generate new knowledge on her/his area of interest based on an explicit articulation of a research question. The student must provide a logical justification for each design. Nursing PhD Comprehensive Exam Guidelines and methods -- explain how the research design and methods will answer the articulated research question and why it is an appropriate design for that question; critically evaluate and summarize the strengths and weaknesses of each research design/methods; implications of each approach for translating new knowledge gained into policy or practice; and provide a summary statement and conclusion that clearly articulates your synthesis of these methodological approaches chosen to address the research question(s).

Comprehensive Exam Paper Organization

The responses to the questions will be organized into an APA formatted paper. There is no absolute page limit: exams in the past have ranged from 20-40 pages double spaced, not including tables, figures, and references. The committee will evaluate student's work in terms of content, intellectual thought and rigor (process), communication style, and grammar. See 'Grading Rubric' section for details about the scoring criteria. The submitted document must be in most current APA edition format.

PHD COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION GRADING COMMITTEE

The comprehensive exam committee is composed of the PhD supervisor(s) and two other faculty members with the appropriate expertise (inside or outside the SON). Faculty inside the SON must be senate faculty. Faculty members outside of UCI SON must have equivalent expertise/status. The student's supervisor(s) is responsible for the composition of the committee which is approved by the PhD Program Director. The student's comprehensive exam committee is responsible for grading the exam. Each faculty member on the committee will prepare an independent evaluation of the exam and the mean score across the three faculty will determine whether a student passes. The committee members will have 10 days to review the examinations and complete the grading rubric. The committee will submit completed grading rubrics for tallying to the Student Affairs Office and to the Comprehensive Exam Committee Chair. If there are any discrepancies, then the PhD Program Director will be brought in. The Comprehensive Exam Committee can be different from the student's PhD committee.

DUE DATES AND STUDENT SUBMISSION PROCESS

Timeline

Students are eligible to take the comprehensive exam when they have completed all required doctoral coursework, which will be verified by Student Affairs and the PhD Program Director. When the Comprehensive Exam Committee has been approved, they will create the 2 questions. When these questions are approved by the PhD Program Director, the Student Affairs office will send the question to the student in an email, "starting the clock" on the exam timeline. The student has 48 hours to confirm receipt of email. The student then has 4 weeks to complete the exam and return to Student Affairs office. Students will receive written notification of pass or fail 10 business days after the responses are received by the Student Affairs Office and Comprehensive Exam Committee Chair.

Submission Process

The students will submit one electronic copy of the comprehensive exam to the Student Affairs Office on the selected due date. The Student Affairs Office will distribute the examinations and grading rubrics to the grading committee members. The grading committee will have 10 business days to review examinations and complete the assigned

grading rubric. The grading committee will submit their completed grading rubrics to the Student Affairs Office and the Comprehensive Exam Committee Chair, who will average each student's score for each domain (content, thinking, communication, grammar) and determine if average score meets threshold-passing cutoff (described below). The Student Affairs Office will send scores to the PhD Program Director, who will confirm scoring and pass/fail grade. In collaboration with the PhD Program Director, the Student Affairs Office will send the students written and signed notification of pass/fail.

Pass/Fail

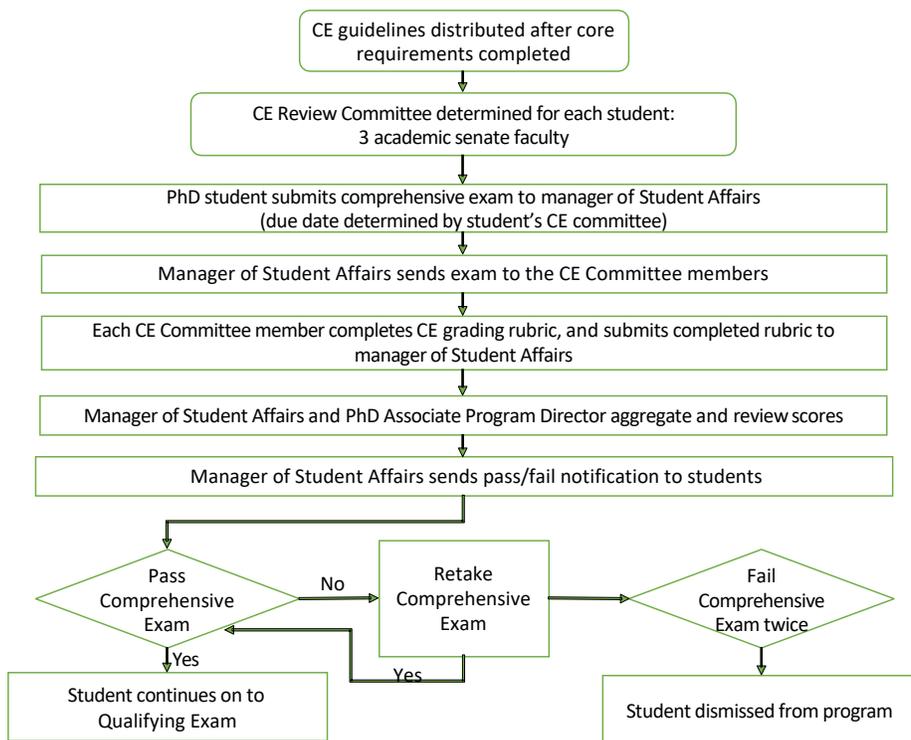
A passing grade for the comprehensive exam consists of an overall passing score from at minimum two of three comprehensive exam grading committee. See Grading rubric for passing score details.

If the Student Fails

If the student fails the comprehensive exam, the student will receive one more opportunity to pass the examination. The student will first meet with their PhD supervisor(s) and the PhD Program Director to go over the reviewers' evaluations and identify areas for improvement. Students will then revise their original exam on their own and prepare a letter responding to each point in the reviews provided by the grading committee. They must do this with no additional input from PhD supervisor(s) and will have 2 weeks to do this. The response letter can be no more than 5 single-spaced pages.

The student will follow the same submission process listed above. The same committee will grade the examination over the same period as described in the original process. The grading rubric must be submitted to the Student Affairs and the student will be notified in writing about pass or fail within a week of receiving the scores. If the student passes, no further action is taken and their record will reflect the passing grade. If the student fails a second time, the student may not move forward to the dissertation proposal defense and will be dismissed from the program.

Figure 1: Comprehensive Examination Review Process



GRADING RUBRIC DESCRIPTION

The grading rubric below provides competency benchmarks to ensure consistency in grading across reviewers of each student’s examination. The committee will evaluate student work in terms of content, intellectual thought and rigor (process), communication style, and grammar. There is a section on definitions to help the evaluator understand the scoring criteria.

Grading Rubric

Please complete all scoring and place comments in appropriate sections

Focus on content PART A						
EVALUATION	15 (Strong)	12 (Proficient)	9 (Satisfactory)	6 (Weak)	3 (Poor)	Score & Comments
Focus on Content: QUESTION 1	All required content addressed and clearly articulated	All content addressed Minor gaps in articulation of content presented	All content addressed Salient gaps in articulation of content	More than 80% of the content addressed Missing content and/or checklist items not addressed	Less than 80% content addressed Missing substantial content and/or data related to checklist items	
Total content A score (Range: 3-15)						

Focus on content PART B

EVALUATION	25 (Strong)	20 (Proficient)	15 (Satisfactory)	10 (Weak)	5 (Poor)	Score & Comments
<p>Focus on Content:</p> <p>QUESTION 2</p>	<p>All content addressed and clearly articulated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Research question clearly delineated b) Research question justified based on analysis from Question 1 c) Research designs fit question(s) & are well justified d) Designs described well and information is clear & complete e) Strengths/weaknesses of each design carefully described f) Implications for translation clearly articulated g) Thoughtful critique and synthesis across study designs used to justify two choices h) Summary statement clear and concise i) Structured abstract clearly articulated 	<p>All content addressed</p> <p>Minor gaps in articulation of content presented</p>	<p>All content addressed</p> <p>Salient gaps in articulation of content</p>	<p>More than 80% of the content addressed</p> <p>Missing content and/or checklist items not addressed</p>	<p>Less than 80% content addressed</p> <p>Missing substantial content and/or data related to checklist items</p>	
Total content B score (Range: 5-25)						
TOTAL CONTENT SCORE: PART A + PART B (RANGE: 8-40)						

Focus on thinking (using SOLO taxonomy definitions)

EVALUATION	10 (Strong)	8 (Proficient)	6 (Satisfactory)	4 (Weak)	2 (Poor)	Score & Comments
<p>Focus on thinking:</p> <p>THOROUGHNESS AND FOCUS</p>	<p>Exam successfully addresses the research question; exam thoroughly reviews the literature;</p> <p>Exam engages SOLO competencies: create, formulate, generalize, hypothesize, reflect, theorize</p>	<p>Exam addresses the research question with only minor digressions; exam sufficiently reviews literature;</p> <p>Exam engages SOLO competencies: analyze, apply, argue, compare/contrast, criticize, explain causes, relate, justify</p>	<p>Exam addresses the research question with some digression; exam sufficiently reviews literature;</p> <p>Exam engages SOLO competencies: combine, describe, enumerate, perform serial skills, list</p>	<p>Exam addresses the research question but digresses significantly; exam insufficiently reviews literature;</p> <p>Exam engages SOLO competencies: identify, name, follow simple procedure</p>	<p>Exam insufficiently addresses the research question and insufficiently reviews literature;</p> <p>Exam engages SOLO competencies: fail, incompetent, misses point</p>	

EVALUATION	10 (Strong)	8 (Proficient)	6 (Satisfactory)	4 (Weak)	2 (Poor)	Score & Comments
Focus on thinking: ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL THINKING	Exhibits strong higher- order critical thinking and analysis SOLO Level of understanding: generalized to new domain	Generally exhibits higher-order critical thinking and analysis SOLO Level of understanding: integrated into a structure	Exhibits limited higher- order critical thinking and analysis SOLO Level of understanding: several relevant independent aspects	Exhibits simplistic or reductive thinking and analysis SOLO Level of understanding: One relevant aspect	Exhibits simplistic or reductive thinking and analysis SOLO Level of understanding:: no relevant aspects	
EVALUATION	10 (Strong)	8 (Proficient)	6 (Satisfactory)	4 (Weak)	2 (Poor)	Score & Comments
Focus on thinking: LOGIC & FLOW	Flow of thought is logical and clear to reader; points are addressed individually and linked appropriately	Flow of thought is predominantly logical and clear to reader; some points may be bunched together or not clearly linked	Flow of thought inconsistently logical and at times unclear to reader; points may be inadequately linked	Flow of thought is not logical (reasoning isn't sound); points are insufficiently linked	Flow of thought is not logical or otherwise unacceptable; points are not linked	
<u>Total thinking score (range 6-30)</u>						

Focus on Communication						
EVALUATION	10 (Strong)	8 (Proficient)	6 (Satisfactory)	4 (Weak)	2 (Poor)	Score & Comments
Focus on Communication STRUCTURE & ORGANIZATION	Structure and organization are strong: Introduction & conclusion are well-developed and effective; Paragraphs are well-developed and have strong topic sentences	Structure and organization are proficient: Introduction & conclusion are adequately developed and competent; Paragraphs are occasionally weak and/or underdeveloped; topic sentences are generally good	Structure and organization are adequate but flawed: Introduction and/or conclusion are less well-developed or weak in some areas; Paragraphs inconsistently or less well-developed; topic sentences are present but weak	Flawed structure and organization: Introduction or conclusion is missing; Paragraphs are underdeveloped; topic sentences are missing or unfocused	Seriously flawed structure and organization are ineffective: Introduction and conclusion are missing; Paragraphs are undeveloped; topic sentences are missing	
EVALUATION	10 (Strong)	8 (Proficient)	6 (Satisfactory)	4 (Weak)	2 (Poor)	Score & Comments
Focus on communication: WRITING STYLE	Sentences are consistently clear, concise and direct; Tone is appropriately formal/informal	Sentences are generally clear, concise, and direct; Tone is appropriately formal/informal	Sentences are occasionally wordy or ambiguous; Tone is too informal for academic writing in some places	Sentences are generally wordy and/or ambiguous; Tone is consistently too informal for academic writing	Sentences are unclear enough to impair meaning; Tone is inappropriate and/or inconsistent	

EVALUATION	5 (Strong)	4 (Proficient)	3 (Satisfactory)	2 (Weak)	1 (Poor)	Score & Comments
Focus on Communication: APA FORMAT	Excellent use of citations and references	Appropriate use of APA format, inclusive of citations and references; Only infrequent errors (suggested: fewer than 1 errors per page)	Adequate use of APA format, inclusive of citations and references; Frequency of errors detracts from strength of paper (suggested: 1-2 errors per page)	Inadequate use of APA format, inclusive of citations and references; Frequency of errors obstructs clarity for reader (suggested: 3-4 errors per page)	Unacceptable use of APA format, inclusive of citations and references; (Suggested: five or more errors per page)	

EVALUATION	5 (Strong)	4 (Proficient)	3 (Satisfactory)	2 (Weak)	1 (Poor)	Score & Comments
Focus on grammar: USAGE AND MECHANICS (GUM)	GUM skills are strong (Suggested: fewer than 1 errors per page)	GUM skills are competent (Suggested: 1 error per page)	GUM skills are adequate for this level (Suggested: 2 errors per page)	GUM skills are inadequate; clarity and meaning are impaired (Suggested: 3-5 errors per page)	GUM skills are incompetent for this level (Suggested: 6 or more errors per page)	

Total Communication-Grammar score (range 6-30)						
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Plagiarism: Any noted plagiarism is immediate grounds for failing the comprehensive exam (see definitions for more details)

EXAM SCORING SHEET

Student			
Student's PhD supervisor			
Date			
Grading Category	Score Range	Actual score	Passing score threshold
Total Content score PART A and B	8-40		24
Total Thinking score	6-30		18
Total Communication/Grammar score	6-30		18
TOTAL SCORE	20-100		60

DEFINITIONS OF EVALUATION COMPONENTS

Focus On Content

Content of Question 1 will vary based on the actual question the committee asks and the approach the student uses to answer the question. No matter the approach, the reviewer should be able to grasp the major components of the area of interest, in terms of domains, theories, frameworks, and/or concepts/constructs. These should be coherently and comprehensively described along with appropriate and adequate citation of relevant literature(s). Some guidelines for different approaches to the question (i.e. literature review, scoping reviews, conceptual mapping, etc.) are listed below, but the list is not exhaustive.

A good basic resource for reporting on many different types of research kinds is the Equator network: Enhancing the Quality and Transparency Of health Research. The site is here: <https://www.equator-network.org>

For more information on PRISMA (systematic literature review guidelines see: <http://www.prisma-statement.org>

For more information on MOOSE (meta-analysis of observational research) guidelines see: <https://www.editorialmanager.com/jognn/account/MOOSE.pdf>

For more information on Scoping Review guidelines see: [http://joannabriggs.org/assets/docs/sumari/Reviewers-Manual Methodology-for-JBI-Scoping-Reviews_2015_v2.pdf](http://joannabriggs.org/assets/docs/sumari/Reviewers-Manual_Methodology-for-JBI-Scoping-Reviews_2015_v2.pdf).

For more information on concept mapping guidelines see: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.100.8995&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

For more information on conducting a critical realist review see: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis2011/proceedings/researchmethods/7/>

For more information about interpretive synthesis of the literature see: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1258/1355819054308576>

The content of Question 2 must include the research question(s), two research designs and two sets of methodologies based on the designs. The content must show the reviewers that the student clearly understands the what and how of each research design, including a justification for each research design, how the design will enable new and appropriate knowledge generation, and an analysis of the different ways or kinds of knowledge each design might generate and why and how that is the case. The methodologies must be thoroughly described, using the appropriate reporting guideline accessed from the Equator Network (see above) or another appropriate source, and each methodology must be qualified with references from the literature. General content requirements include:

- a) Research question clearly delineated
- a) Research question justified based on analysis from Question 1
- b) Research designs fit question(s) & are well justified
- c) Designs described well and information is clear & complete
- d) Strengths/weaknesses of each design carefully described

- e) Implications for translation clearly articulated
- f) Thoughtful critique and synthesis across study designs used to justify two choices
- g) Summary statement clear and concise
- h) Structured abstract clearly articulated

Focus on Thinking

Thoroughness and Focus (Using Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome taxonomy)

SOLO stands for the **Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome** and is a means of classifying learning outcomes in terms of their complexity, enabling assessment of students' work in terms of its quality. Kevin Collis and John Biggs first described SOLO in *Evaluating the Quality of Learning: The SOLO Taxonomy* (New York: Academic Press, 1982). The premise suggests that initially students may pick up only one or few elements of a learning objective; then perhaps several, yet unrelated, elements. Next step is learning to integrate elements into a whole. The last step is the ability to generalize that whole to other applications. The diagram below is from John Biggs website and lists verbs typical of each such level.

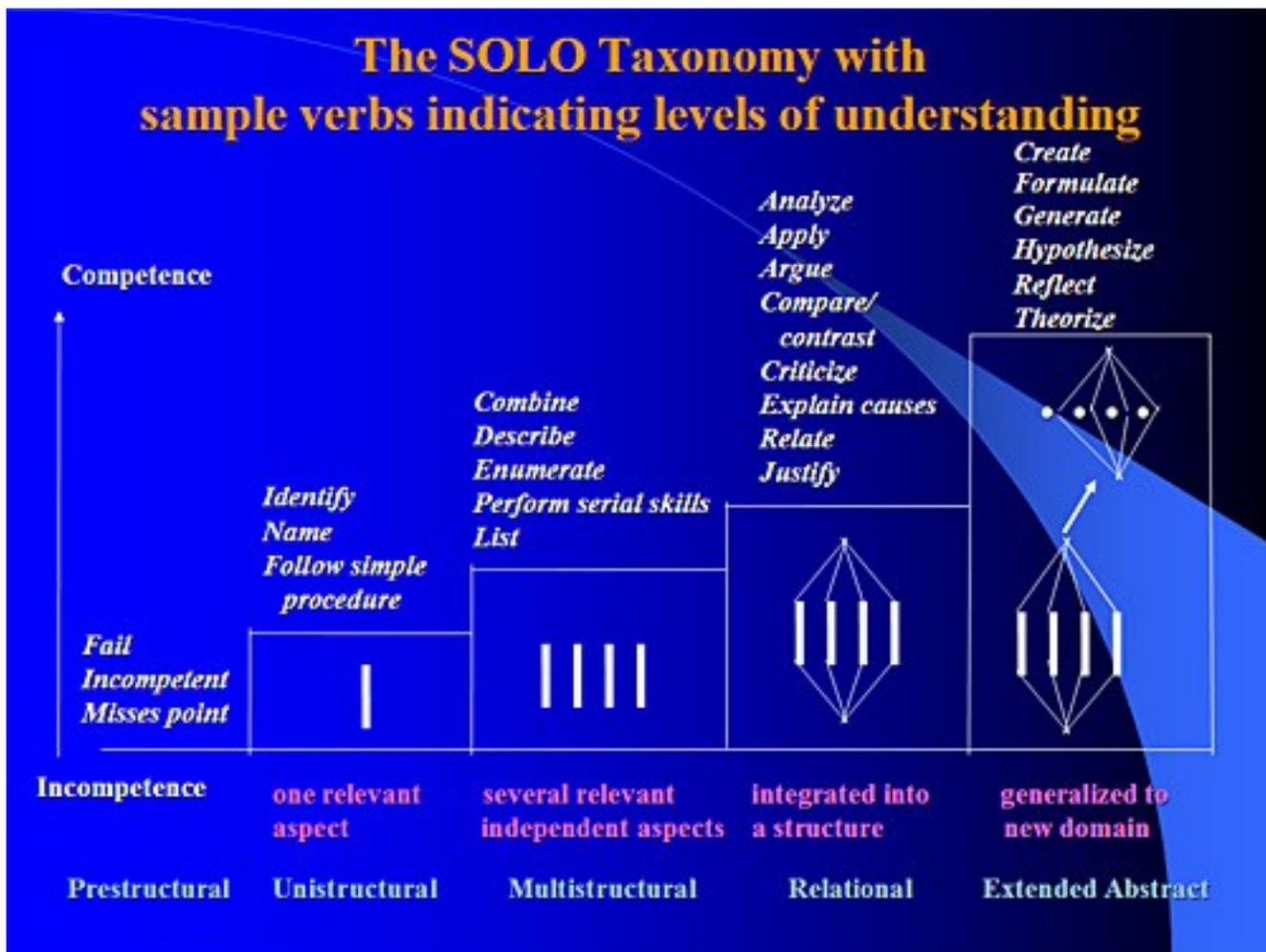


Diagram retrieved from: <http://www.johnbiggs.com.au/academic/solo-taxonomy/>

Analysis and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying,

analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, its foundation is universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. It entails the examination of those structures or elements of thought implicit in all reasoning: purpose, problem, or question-at-issue, assumptions, concepts, empirical grounding; reasoning leading to conclusions, implications and consequences, objections from alternative viewpoints, and frame of reference. Critical thinking - in being responsive to variable subject matter, issues, and purposes - is incorporated in a family of interwoven modes of thinking, among them: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking, and philosophical thinking, among many others.

Critical thinking often involves two key components:

1. A set of skills to process and generate information and beliefs, and
2. The habit, based on intellectual commitment, of using those skills to guide behavior.

As such, it is distinct from:

1. The mere acquisition and retention of information alone because it involves a particular way in which information is sought and treated
2. The mere possession of a set of skills, because it involves the continual use of them, and
3. The mere use of those skills "as an exercise" without acceptance of their results.

From: Scriven, M. and Paul, R. (2013). Defining critical thinking: A draft statement. National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking. <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/410>

Logic and Flow

The argument is well structured. Groundwork is laid, accurate conclusions are drawn from the evidence used, points are argued and linked appropriately. Logic and flow presents a good example of building a case by presenting evidence and arguing toward a conclusion that represents the extended abstract level of SOLO taxonomy.

Focus On Communication

Structure & Organization

The paper is well structured. All parts of the document (introduction, sections, paragraphs, conclusions) are present and well organized.

Writing Style

Strong, clear sentences; appropriate academic tone.

APA Format

The formatting, including all in-text citations, references, headings, etc. follow only those conventions required by Instructor, but should be consistent with Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association/Edition 6 by American Psychological Association. Contents are available at <http://www.apastyle.org>

Focus on Grammar: Usage/Mechanics

This includes appropriate use of the different parts of speech; complete sentences; subject-verb consistency;

spelling; punctuation; typographical errors; etc.

Focus on Plagiarism

The UCI definition of plagiarism is: “in an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source” (see <http://honesty.uci.edu/AcademicHonestyTips.pdf> for more information).

Nursing PhD Comprehensive Exam Committee Form

Instructions: Please email completed form to current Ph.D. Program Director and gnsao@uci.edu for approval.

Committee Criteria: The committee is comprised of the faculty advisor and 2 other faculty members inside or outside the SON with demonstrated expertise in the topical focus of the student's doctoral research. Faculty inside the SON must be senate faculty. Faculty members outside of UCI SON must have equivalent expertise/status. The comprehensive exam committee can be different from the candidacy committee.

Student's Name:

Faculty Advisor (Committee Member 1)

Name:

Committee Member 2

Name:

SON Faculty: Yes No

If no, which UCI Department or School do they belong to:

Briefly describe member's expertise in the topical focus of the student's doctoral research:

Committee Member 3

Name:

SON Faculty: Yes No

If no, which UCI Department or School do they belong to:

Briefly describe member's expertise in the topical focus of the student's doctoral research:

Faculty Advisor Signature Date

Ph.D. Program Director Signature Date



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Nursing PhD Comprehensive Exam Questions

Instructions: The Ph.D. Program Director or delegate will approve the comprehensive exam questions. If the questions are not approved, then the Ph.D Program Director will work with the committee to refine the questions. Once the questions are approved then the timeline for comprehensive exam will begin. Please email completed form to current Ph.D. Program Director.

Timeline: Once the questions are approved, the Student Affairs office will send the questions to the student via email and copy in the faculty advisor, Ph.D Program Director, and committee members. The student then has 4 calendar weeks from the date the questions are sent to complete the comprehensive exam and return to Student Affairs at gnsao@uci.edu. The student will receive notification of pass/fail from the Student Affairs office within 3 weeks after the comprehensive exam is submitted.

Question 1 Instructions:

Question 1 will focus on evaluating the student's understanding of the domains, theories, frameworks, and/or concepts/constructs involved in their area of interest. The result should be a focused, organized presentation of what is involved and what is at stake in the student's area of interest, including an analysis of what is already known and where potential gaps or areas for further inquiry lie. The student is encouraged to think critically as well, considering the assumptions and implications of the ways their area of interest has been framed/theorized/conceptualized, and how these assumptions and/or implications may affect the discipline and/or practice of nursing. The approach to answering Question 1 is not prescriptive. Some examples include a systematic literature review (we encourage a broad approach and conceptual analysis no matter what review methodology is used); an in depth concept analysis that focuses on both concepts and the relationships between concepts identified as important; a concept mapping methodology; or a critical analysis of seminal papers/books in the field. No matter the method chosen, the answer to the question should be comprehensive, cohesive, logically argued, and enable the reviewers to make a determination as to the student's in depth understanding of the current state-of-the-science of their area of interest and where the next steps should be taken.

Question 1:



Question 2 Instructions:

The student will then be asked to provide a rigorous and coherent delineation of 2 potential research designs, including each design's supporting methods to generate new knowledge on her/his area of interest based on an explicit articulation of a research question. The student must provide a logical justification for each design and methods -- explain how the research design and methods will answer the articulated research question and why it is an appropriate design for that question; critically evaluate and summarize the strengths and weaknesses of each research design/methods; implications of each approach for translating new knowledge gained into policy or practice; and provide a summary statement and conclusion that clearly articulates your synthesis of these methodological approaches chosen to address the research question(s).

Question 2:

Approved by Ph.D Program Director or delegate: Yes No

Faculty Advisor Signature Date

Ph.D. Program Director Signature Date

