



## Geography Graduate Program Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

### DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

The University of Calgary [Graduate Candidacy Regulations](#) (“the Regulations”) govern the conduct of admission to graduate candidacy at the University of Calgary. This document establishes program-specific requirements associated with the process of admission to graduate candidacy under the *Regulations*.

### Candidacy Regulations

Admission to candidacy for the doctoral degree is a judgment by faculty members in Geography that the student is prepared to successfully complete the requirements of the doctoral degree program. Subject to any extension allowances, Geography requires that doctoral students must complete all candidacy requirements within 24 months of first registration. Those students who have transferred from a Master’s program must complete all candidacy requirements within 36 months of the first registration in that Master's program.

#### A. Statement of Purpose

The candidacy requirements in Geography are designed to assess the competence of students to conduct independent and original research in the discipline of geography. The successful completion of these requirements emphasize the background preparation of students in their research area and the ability of students to conduct research of sufficient quality that it would be suitable for publication in the peer-reviewed primary literature. Prior to admission to candidacy, students must have completed their required course work, prepared and defended an approved Thesis Proposal, and successfully completed Field of Study Examinations, which confirms their communication skills and preparedness to undertake doctoral-level, independent research.

#### B. All doctoral students in the Geography Graduate Program must successfully complete the following components to become a doctoral candidate:

1. All course requirements, excepting GEOG 601 (Graduate Research Seminar).
2. Prepare a written Thesis Proposal that must be defended and approved by the Supervisory Committee.
3. Written Field of Study Examination, after the thesis proposal has been approved.
4. Oral Field of Study Examination, after the Written Field of Study Examination has been submitted.

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### **Thesis Proposal**

All students are required to prepare a written thesis proposal and orally defend the proposal to their Supervisory Committee. Thesis proposals are detailed documents that outline the research approach and methods that will be undertaken in thesis research. The proposal must contain a statement of objectives, methods, and anticipated results, and it must include a schedule of work and a budget section (if applicable). The approved proposal articulates the academic expectations for doctoral candidates and represents an initial “road map” for the work to be conducted in the remaining months of the program. The format, style, and structure of the proposal will vary among sub-disciplines in geography, so students should seek the mentorship of their supervisor to construct a document that is acceptable for their area of study.

### **Scheduling of the Thesis Proposal Defence**

Students should work with their supervisors to develop a defensible proposal; it is the role of the Supervisor to schedule the Proposal Defence with the Graduate Program Administrator at least two weeks in advance. A draft of the Thesis Proposal must be provided to the Supervisory Committee no less than two weeks prior to the date of the proposal defence. The Thesis Proposal Defence must be completed within 20 months of first registration in the Doctoral Program.

### **Conduct of the Thesis Proposal Defence**

Thesis proposal defences are chaired by the student’s supervisor, and all Supervisory Committee members act as evaluators. The format of the defence is flexible and less-formal than a Field of Study Examination or Thesis Examination. The primary purpose of the Defence is to provide students with an opportunity to present and discuss their plan to undertake a thesis research project with their Supervisory Committee and to gain valuable insight and feedback to improve the research plan. The Committee will use their collective expertise to help the student finalize a sound research plan, particularly with respect to an achievable scope of the research, appropriate research design, and feasible methods. Thus, thesis proposal defences are meant to ensure that students are well prepared and adequately supported to undertake and complete the independent research they intend to pursue.

The Thesis Proposal Defence typically begins with a short presentation (10 – 12 minutes) by the student regarding his or her proposed research plan. Committee members may engage in rounds of questions or less-structured discussion with the student regarding his or her research approach, design, methods, logistics, anticipated outcomes, or other topics related to the proposal. Students may be questioned on their understanding of the context and background knowledge pertaining to the research questions and their knowledge of the relevant published literature, current research approaches, and existing or potential new methods. If gaps in the student’s knowledge are identified, the Committee may recommend that the student undertake self-learning or remedial coursework outside the program’s

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course requirements (e.g., course audits) to improve the student's understanding of critical areas of the discipline. Significant knowledge gaps are likely to be re-evaluated in the Field of Study Exams (see below), so students are encouraged to use their Thesis Proposal Defence as a tool to help focus their study.

At the end of the defence, the Committee must make a judgement regarding whether the Thesis Proposal is acceptable. If minor revisions are required, the Thesis Proposal can be approved at the conclusion of the defence. If major revisions are required, Committee members may withhold their approval until an acceptable version of the proposal is delivered. If the Committee determines that the Thesis Proposal is unacceptable, the student may be given one re-take to defend a revised version of the proposal within two to six months. If a re-take Thesis Proposal Defence is not successful, the student will be required to withdraw from the Program.

### **Field of Study Examinations (formerly called the Candidacy Examination)**

All doctoral students in Geography must complete both Written and Oral Field of Study Examinations, which are designed to evaluate their understanding of their specific research area within geography prior to undertaking doctoral thesis research. A secondary purpose of the written and oral exams is to evaluate the student's ability to effectively communicate knowledge, ideas, or logical arguments, which is viewed as an essential skill within the Program.

The Written Field of Study Examination will be taken as an open-book, take-home examination, and all examinations will have the following characteristics:

- All students are tested in five topic areas of the discipline that relate to their research area and are agreed upon by the Supervisory Committee.
- Students will have two weeks to prepare their responses to the questions on the examination. Typically, students are offered some choice regarding which questions they are required to answer (for example, the examination provides five questions and the student must provide responses to three of them).

The format and style of the examination responses should be in paper format that mimics the presentation of a peer-reviewed journal article. All papers must demonstrate a critical analysis of each question or topic posed, as well as informed, insightful, and well-reasoned responses that incorporate recent knowledge from the relevant literature. The Oral Field of Study Examination supplements the written examination and provides the student with an opportunity to discuss and defend their written responses, as well as to be questioned orally about their research area (further details appear below).

### **Scheduling of the Field of Study Examinations**

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The Field of Study Examinations cannot be scheduled before the Thesis Proposal has been successfully defended. If the proposal was accepted pending revisions, the Field of Study Examinations may be scheduled before final approval of the proposal is obtained at the discretion of the Graduate Program Director.

When students are prepared to undertake the Field of Study Examinations, they should consult with their Supervisor and Supervisory Committee to establish five topic areas in the discipline that are directly relevant to their research area. Once established, the Supervisory Committee will recommend two additional examiners to participate in the Examination Committee that will evaluate the Written and Oral Field of Study Examinations. At least one of the additional examiners must be from the home program. The names of recommended examiners must be provided to the Graduate Program Director by the Supervisor at least two weeks prior to the date on which the written examination will be assigned, although Supervisors and students are encouraged to schedule the exam one to two months in advance so that students have plenty of time to discuss their examination preparations with their examiners. It is also the responsibility of the student to initiate a discussion with the examiners if the student would like guidance regarding exam preparation (e.g., to obtain background readings).

### **Conduct of the Written Field of Study Examination**

All examiners will be invited to develop questions relevant to the five topic areas chosen by the Supervisory Committee. Because the Supervisory Committee has already evaluated the Thesis Proposal and has the best understanding of the student's research goals, they are expected to provide most or all of the questions for the Written Field of Study Examination. The Supervisor will coordinate the development of potential questions and should provide guidance to examiners to avoid substantial overlap in their questions (e.g., the Supervisor may suggest that certain members focus their questions on certain topics). The Supervisor will collate the questions, and by mutual consent, the Examination Committee will identify the list of questions to be posed to the student. The number of questions posed may vary between examinations, but typically the exam will specify a choice of questions to be answered (e.g., choose three of five questions to answer), which is determined by the Examination Committee when the exam is prepared. Typically, the written examination will require three or four responses.

The student's deadline for submitting the responses to the Written Field of Study Examination will be two weeks after they are assigned. The examiners will be given up to two weeks to assess the responses. The evaluation of the written examination will be a simple pass or fail result, based on the examiners' comprehensive review of all responses to the questions posed in the written examination. Examiners will submit their evaluation at the deliberations immediately following the Oral Field of Study Examination (see below), and examiners are required to evaluate the written and oral components independently.

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### **Conduct of the Oral Field of Study Examination**

The Oral Field of Study Examination supplements the written examination and provides students with an opportunity to discuss and defend their written responses, as well as to be questioned orally about their research area. Oral Field of Study Examinations in Geography are not meant to be comprehensive to the entire discipline, but rather, to focus on the five topic areas agreed upon by the Supervisory Committee. However, students are expected to be able to locate their specific research area within the broader discipline of geography and explain how their research contributes to their specific research area, geography, and society in general.

The Oral Field of Study Examination will be scheduled no later than two weeks after the student's deadline to submit their written examination responses, which provides examiners sufficient time to review and reflect on the student's responses and prepare oral examination questions.

The Oral Field of Study Examination will be chaired by a Neutral Chair who is appointed by the Program. The Chair will facilitate rounds of questions to the student and ensure that examiners focus their questioning on the pre-determined topic areas selected by the Supervisory Committee. The duration of the oral examination will not exceed two hours, excluding time for deliberations or breaks in the examination approved by the Neutral Chair (e.g., bathroom breaks).

Examiners may use the responses to the Written Field of Study Examination as inspiration for questions in the oral examination, or they may seek clarification about the written responses. They may also ask students to defend their written responses, provided that the lines of questioning are meant to test the understanding of the student. If there was a choice of questions offered in the written exam, committee members may also orally examine the student on the written exam questions for which no written responses were prepared.

The Neutral Chair will ensure that examiners ask clear and succinct questions and that the student has ample time to respond or seek clarification to each question. If the student has understood the question and cannot answer, the examiner should pass to another question and not engage in a prolonged interrogation of the student.

### **Outcome of the Examinations**

Each of the Field of Study Examinations (Oral and Written) will be evaluated as a pass or fail, independently. A failure is indicated by two or more Examination Committee members that vote for a failed examination; otherwise, an examination will be considered a pass (i.e., a single vote for a fail results in a pass for an examination).

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The Neutral Chair will solicit a straw ballot for each of the Written and Oral Examinations and then facilitate deliberations by the Examination Committee. When possible, the Examination Committee will seek to reach a unanimous decision, although a unanimous decision is not required (see above). When deliberations are completed, the Neutral Chair will record the final outcome for each component and have each committee member record their vote on the designated form. The Neutral Chair or the Supervisor will then immediately inform the student about the outcome of the examination.

If a student fails the Written Field of Study Examination, then one re-take of the written exam will be permitted, provided they can do so within FGS program deadlines. A failure of the written exam necessitates that both the Written and Oral Field of Study Exams must be completed again.

If a student fails the Oral Field of Study Examination, then one re-take of the oral exam will be permitted, provided they can do so within FGS program deadlines. If a student fails the Oral Field of Study Examination, but passes the Written Field of Study Examination, only the Oral Field of Study Examination will need to be re-taken.

A re-take examination must occur between two and six months following the date of the first examination. If a student fails either examination component (written or oral) twice, they will be required to withdraw from the Program.

### **Committee Procedures for Failed Thesis Proposal Defences or Field of Study Examinations**

If a student's Thesis Proposal is deemed unacceptable or a student does not pass a Field of Study Examination component (written or oral), each member of the respective committee will provide a detailed letter to the Graduate Program Director (or the Head of the Department or delegate, if the Graduate Program Director evaluated the failed component) stating the rationale for his or her evaluation. For the Field of Study Examinations, the Neutral Chair will also provide a letter that details the examination procedures, including timings and any irregularities that may have been observed. Each letter must be delivered no later than five business days following the date of the failed Thesis Proposal Defence or Field of Study Examination. Within five business days of receiving letters from the committee, the Program will respond to the student with a judgement about the final outcome.

### **Appeals**

If the outcome of any component of the Candidacy Requirements relating to the Thesis Proposal or Field of Study Examinations is a fail, the student has the right to appeal the decision. Students must appeal directly to the Faculty of Graduate Studies following the procedures described in the *Graduate Calendar* under *Academic Regulations – [N.2 Appeals](#) – Appeals Against Faculty of Graduate Studies Rulings*).

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