Comprehensive Exam Policy and Procedures

The comprehensive exams are coordinated by the MSW Coordinator.

General procedures

The comprehensive exam (exam) is offered two times each academic year, once in the Fall semester (usually in October) and once in the Spring semester (usually in March).

Students must have no more than 9 credit hours remaining in the MSW program, not including the semester in which the exam is being taken. The School strongly recommends that students take the exam after beginning the advanced practicum.

A high standard of academic integrity and ethical behavior is demanded for the exam. Students are not allowed to reference any study notes while taking the exam. Also, students may not keep a copy of their exam responses. Any violation of these standards will invalidate the student’s exam results and will count as one of three exam attempts.

The exam may be taken a maximum of three times and must be passed within the time limit for completing the MSW (unless the student has received a written extension from the Director).

Students who do not pass the written and oral exam (or do not qualify for the oral exam) must retake the written exam at one of the next regularly scheduled times the exam is offered.

The results of the written and oral comps cannot be appealed.

Exam questions

Exam questions.

Open-ended questions comprise 100% of the exam.

Open-ended questions typically remain the same from semester-to-semester, are posted on the School’s website, and are provided at the comps orientation. (Students will be notified within six weeks of the scheduled exam of any substantive changes to exam items. Minor, technical, and/or format changes to the exam are not required to be disseminated ahead of time.)

Exam questions are developed by the Advanced Generalist and Clinical Task Forces and approved by the Executive Body.

Exam cases

The Advanced Generalist and Clinical Task Forces develop the cases for their respective concentration each time the exam is administered.

Exam criteria
The Advanced Generalist and Clinical Task Forces develop the evaluation criteria for their respective concentration each time the exam is administered.

Written exam

Students sign-up to take the written exam in the School office within the first six weeks of the semester in which they plan to take the exam.

The MSW Coordinator checks students’ Plans of Study to ensure their academic readiness for taking the exam, especially those students who have not yet begun their Advanced Practicum.

Students attend a face-to-face orientation one month prior to taking the written exam. At this orientation, students can become familiar with the computers, receive information on the exam, and ask questions.

Taking the exam

Students have five hours in which to complete the written exam.

The written exam is taken in a university computer lab. Each student is provided a computer in the computer lab, which is loaded with the most recent version of Microsoft Word software. Students assume responsibility for knowing how to use Word. A faculty person competent in Word will be present at the exam as a monitor and to help with any unforeseen technical difficulties. A help person will also be accessible for technical issues. In the unlikely event of a major unsolvable technical problem with a computer, the student will finish the remainder of the exam on another computer or by writing in blue books, which will be furnished.

Students will not have Internet access during the exam nor will they be allowed to have a cell phone or any other technological device with them while taking the exam.

The School provides each student with a prepared Word document upon which students type their responses. The student will type their code number into the header and use single spacing.

The School assigns a code number to each student so results cannot be identified prior to grading. Students are not to provide their name or any other identifying information anywhere on their exam responses.

The School provides each student with a blue book to be used in drawing the genogram and/or ecomap; each student must write their code number on the pages with the genogram and ecomap. Students can also use the blue book as scratch paper during the process of completing the exam. Students provide their own writing utensil.

Food and drink are not permitted in the computer room. Food and drink can remain in the hallway just outside the computer room and accessed during short breaks.
After taking the exam

Students are assisted by the proctors in copying the file to a USB flash drive provided by the School, printing a paper copy of the file, and deleting the file from the computer.

Students must turn in the entire blue book and all test materials. The genogram and ecomap will be scanned immediately following the exam.

Students are notified of their written exam results—pass/fail—approximately 10 days after taking the exam.

Students who pass the written exam are notified by email. Students are provided written comments from graders. Students do not receive a copy of their exam responses. The identity of graders is not provided.

Students who did not pass the written exam are contacted by phone by the MSW Coordinator and given information on next steps. Written comments by graders may not be provided until after the student has passed the exam.

Grading standards and procedures for the written exam

Students must provide responses for at least 80% of the exam for it to qualify to be graded. Any attempt at taking the written exam counts as an attempt, even if the student does not complete enough of the exam to qualify to be graded.

The exam is worth 100 points and graded on a 0-100 scale. Students’ responses must show adequate knowledge and application of social work competencies and practice behaviors.

A minimum exam score of 80 points is necessary to pass.

Students who receive an exam score of 60-79 points are offered an oral exam.

Students who receive a score of less than 60 points take the written comprehensive exam one of the next regular times it is offered.

Written exams must have no identifying information on them; graders are not to know whose exam they are grading.

The grading of each exam is done by a team of two faculty members who are knowledgeable about the student’s concentration. At least one member of each team will be a graduate faculty member.

Each grader evaluates each exam independently. Graders then discuss scores with each other and come to agreement on the final score.

Oral exam
When students are called by the MSW Coordinator and invited to take the oral exam, they will be provided with guidelines for completing the oral exam. Written guidelines are also provided by E-mail.

The oral exam offers an opportunity for clarification and elaboration of material in the written exam. The oral exam only covers the student’s insufficient responses on the written exam, not the entire exam.

Students are expected to prepare for the oral exam. Since they have ample opportunity to review their written exam and other materials, a high standard of performance is expected to show improvement on the written responses.

Students may contact the School Secretary to review their exam responses; students may take notes, but not remove the written exam from the social work office. Students may not have access to a cell phone or other technological device while reviewing their exam responses.

The oral exam will be scheduled within two weeks after the student is notified.

The oral exam will be given by a team of three faculty members, two of whom were the original graders of the exam. An original grader will serve as the chair for this meeting.

The oral exam will be graded on a pass/fail basis by consensus of the faculty grading team.

The oral exam is scheduled for 60 minutes: 45 minutes for the question process, and the final 15 minutes for the faculty to discuss and come to a decision.

Oral exam results are verbally provided to the student immediately following the committee's deliberations.

If a student does not pass the oral exam, a letter will be provided to the student within two weeks, outlining strengths and weaknesses, and offering recommendations to use in preparing for the next written exam.

Special circumstances

Students with disabilities, e.g., visual problems, dyslexia, or any other condition which might require special consideration must have registered with the UNO Office of Disability Services by the beginning of the semester in which they plan to take the exam in order to receive accommodations. They must notify the MSW Coordinator of this need when they sign up to take the written exam so arrangements can be made for the student to take the exam at the UNO Testing Center. The exam will be taken on the same day as other students taking the exam.

Students who are non-English native speakers may receive an additional two hours to take the written exam as well as the use of a translation dictionary. In order to receive this accommodation, the student must have lived less than 10 years in a country where English is an
official language. Students must submit their request to the MSW Coordinator by the deadline for signing up for the exam so that alternative arrangements can be made for the student to take the written exam. The exam will be taken on the same day as other students taking the exam.

Students living out of region may be allowed to take the written exam away from UNO. Students must submit their request to the MSW Coordinator the semester prior to taking the exam so arrangements can be made. The exam will be taken on the same day as other students taking the exam. Arrangements for an oral exam will be made, if needed.

Approved by Executive Body, 1-2013