Comprehensive Exam Policy

The comprehensive exams are coordinated by the MSW Coordinator. Exam questions are developed by the Grace Abbott School of Social Work faculty, and approved by the MSW Coordinator and Director.

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). Not counting the current semester, students who have nine credit hours or less remaining in the program are eligible to take the exam. The Grace Abbott School of Social Work (School) strongly recommends that students take the exam after beginning the advanced practicum.

Students must follow a high standard of academic integrity and ethical behavior when taking the exam. Students are not allowed to reference any study materials or aids 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 result in a Level 3 review. The violated attempt will count as one of three allowed exam attempts.

Students who do not successfully pass the written or oral exam, or do not qualify for the oral exam, must retake the written exam at the next regularly scheduled time the exam is offered. The result of a written or oral exam cannot be appealed. The exam may be attempted a maximum of three times and must be successfully passed within the time limit for completing the MSW degree program (unless the student has received a written extension from the Director).

Exam Questions, Cases, and Criteria
Exam questions are open-ended and comprise 100% of the exam. Open-ended questions typically remain unchanged from one semester to the next. Exam questions are posted on the GASSW website, and are provided to students who attend comp orientation. Students are notified within six weeks of the scheduled exam when and if there are any substantive changes to exam items. Minor, technical, and/or format changes to the exam will be posted on the GASSW website, but will not be disseminated to students in advance of the scheduled exam.

Exam Orientation
Students are encouraged to attend the face-to-face exam orientation offered one month prior to the scheduled written exam. At orientation, students can become familiar with the testing process, receive information on the exam, and ask questions. Orientation is facilitated by the MSW Coordinator.

Exam Procedures
Students will sign-up online to take comp during the semester in which they plan to take the exam. Academic Advisors and the Student Services Administrator audit 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 may not have access to the internet or any technology such as cellphone, smartwatch, notepad, laptop, etc. during the exam. Students are allowed to wear noise-canceling headphones or ear plugs during the exam. These items may be subject to inspection prior to beginning the exam.

Students are permitted to bring food and drink in the exam room, but not near the computers or technology. Upon entering the exam room, students should power off all electronic devices, remove their watch, and leave all items (jackets, backpacks, food, drink, etc.) along the wall at the edge of the exam room. Students are allowed to drink and eat during the exam, just not at their computer.

On the day of the exam, students are required to sign in and out of their assigned exam room with the exam proctor. The School will provide each student with digital and printed versions of the exam. Students have five hours to complete the written exam. The exam is administered in a university classroom or meeting room, with a clock and computers. Each student is given access to a university computer. The written exam will be formatted in a Microsoft Word document. Students assume responsibility for knowing how to use Microsoft Word. An exam proctor competent in Microsoft Word will be present during the exam to help with minor technical difficulties. If a student experiences an unsolvable technical issue, the student will complete the exam on another computer or by writing answers in a Blue Book provided by the School. The student will be compensated for time lost during the trouble-shooting process by adjusting the window of time allowed to complete the exam.

The Student Services Administrator assigns a code number to each student’s exam so results cannot be identified during grading. During the exam, students should not reveal their name or any other identifying information anywhere on their exam materials. The School will provide each student with a Blue Book to be used in drawing the genogram and/or ecomap and to use as scratch paper. Students must mark the top of each page in the Blue Book with “grade” or “do not grade.” Students must provide their own writing utensil(s).

After completing the exam, the student should do a final save, minimize their digital exam to the task bar, place all exam materials in the Blue Book, close the Blue Book, quietly gather belongings, sign-out, and leave the room.

**Exam Results**

When the exam window is closed and after all students have left the exam room, all exam materials are gathered and the digital exam is transferred from the exam computer to a thumb-drive by the Student Services Administrator. All written exam materials are scanned and sent electronically to faculty for grading. All grading is done blindly; only the exam code is revealed to the grading faculty. The MSW Coordinator will provide students with a pass or fail exam result, approximately 10 days after the written exam date.

Students who pass the written exam are notified by the MSW Coordinator via email. The graders’ comments and final score may be provided to the student upon the student’s written request to the
MSW Coordinator. Students do not receive a copy of their exam responses and the identity of their graders will not be revealed.

A student who receives less than 80% on the written exam is contacted via phone by the MSW Coordinator, provided their score, and given information on next steps. If the student qualifies for an oral exam, the student can submit a written request to receive graders’ comments from the written exam, but these will not be sent until after the student has passed the oral exam. If the student does not qualify for an oral exam or does not pass the oral exam, the student’s score and graders’ comments from the written exam will be provided to the student.

Grading Guidelines
Students must provide responses for at least 80% of the exam to qualify for grading. Any attempt to take the written exam counts as an attempt, even if the student does not complete 80% of the exam.

The exam is worth 100 points and graded on a 0-100 scale. Responses reflect a student’s 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 earn less than 60 points on the written exam will retake the exam in the following fall or spring semester, if unused exam attempts are available. Requests to retake the exam at a date other than the department’s scheduled fall or spring date may be considered upon student’s written request to the MSW Coordinator and Director.

Each exam is graded by a team of two faculty members. Initially, each faculty grader evaluates and grades each exam independently of the other grader. Graders then discuss scores with each other and come to agreement on the final score.

Oral Exam
The oral exam provides students an opportunity to clarify and expand the answers provided on 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 and show improvement on the written responses; a high standard of performance is expected. The oral exam will be scheduled within two weeks after the student is notified of written exam results.

Students should contact the Student Services Administrator via email to arrange an appointment to review their exam materials. During this appointment, students may take notes, but may not remove the exam or the exam materials from the School. Students may not have access to a cell phone, watch, or other technological device, backpack, purse, etc., during the appointment.

The oral exam will typically be facilitated by a team of three faculty members, two of whom were the original graders of the exam. One of the three faculty members will serve as the chair for the oral exam. The faculty chair will document the student’s strengths, areas of improvement, and if the oral is a pass or fail. 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 then 15 minutes for the faculty to discuss, come to a decision, and verbally provide the oral exam results to the student.
The student will be asked to leave the room during the faculty decision. If a student fails the oral exam, the MSW Coordinator will send a letter to the student within two weeks of the oral exam date, outlining strengths and weaknesses, and offering recommendations to use in preparing for the next written exam.

**Special Circumstances**

Students with accessibility accommodations, e.g., visual impairment, dyslexia, or any other condition which might require special consideration must register with UNO’s Accessibility Services Center (ACS) by the second month of the semester in which they plan to take the exam.

Students must notify the MSW Coordinator and Student Services Administrator of their accommodations via email 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, if necessary. Students are responsible for making the exam appointment with the Testing Center. The Student Services Administrator will provide the Testing Center with all necessary exam materials. Students who take the exam in the UNO Testing Center will take it on the same day and at the same time as the regularly scheduled written exam.

Students who are non-English native speakers are allowed an additional two hours to take the written exam as well as the use of a hard-copy translation dictionary, provided by the student and examined by the exam proctor on the day of the exam. To qualify for this accommodation, the student must have lived less than 10 years in a country where English is the official language. Students must submit a request to the MSW Coordinator and Student Services Administrator by the deadline for signing up for the exam so that alternative arrangements can be made, if needed. Students who take the exam with this accommodation must take it on the same day and at the same time as the regularly scheduled written exam.

Students living out of region may be allowed to take the written exam away from UNO. Students must submit a request to the MSW Coordinator the semester prior to taking the exam so arrangements can be made. Students who take the exam with this accommodation are responsible for making arrangements for where they will take the exam, who will proctor the exam, cover any costs, and communicate all details to the MSW Coordinator. The MSW Coordinator must approve these arrangements prior to the student taking the exam. The student must take the exam on the same day and at the same time as the regularly scheduled written exam. Arrangements for an oral exam will be made by the MSW Coordinator, if needed.

Approved by Faculty Staff Round Table, 2019