



**HEALTH SCIENCES**

Health Research Methodology  
Graduate Program

**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION  
PURPOSE AND PROCEDURE  
2022-2023**

**COMPREHENSIVE MANUAL  
HEALTH RESEARCH METHODOLOGY  
Ph.D. LEVEL**

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## **DISCLAIMER**

This manual is intended to guide faculty and students through the procedures of the Comprehensive Examination. It is not a code of conduct or a precise legal document and, therefore, it must be understood by all that minor variations in the details, timing and manner in which the various steps are addressed or completed may occur and should be acceptable to all parties.

It is incumbent on the student to avail himself or herself of the described procedures. If any of the steps are not taken, the responsibility rests with the student and such omissions cannot be used as a basis for an Appeal against a decision of the Examining Committee. Any inquiries about these procedures are to be directed to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations (BCE) or HRM administrative staff at [hrmasst@mcmaster.ca](mailto:hrmasst@mcmaster.ca).

Any disagreement or misunderstanding over the interpretation of specific points should be referred to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations and, if resolution is not achieved, to the Assistant Dean HRM. If necessary, the Vice Dean, Health Sciences, and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (FHS) will make a final decision.

## **PREAMBLE**

McMaster has a long tradition of innovation in health education, one that the Health Research Methodology Program has embraced. We seek to provide our students with a comprehensive, methodologically rigorous and respectful interdisciplinary environment for learning, and to create intellectual leaders capable of addressing age-old and emerging problems in diverse areas of health research (e.g., clinical epidemiology, biostatistics, health service research, population and public health, health technology assessment and other health related fields).

## **GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

The Health Research Methodology (HRM) Ph.D. Program seeks to provide an educational experience that produces researchers with appropriate skills to contribute to understanding the production, protection and restoration of health in individuals, patient groups or populations, by the application of appropriate research methodology.

The comprehensive examination process within the HRM Ph.D. Program aims to assess the ability of students to integrate ideas that reflect the current state of knowledge in the three HRM fields (clinical epidemiology, biostatistics, and health technology assessment), and other areas of Health Research Methodology, as appropriate.

Candidates are expected to provide reasoned arguments to support their interpretation of the areas under study and to demonstrate their ability to use the information they have acquired. Students must pass the examination before being permitted to progress to the preparation of a research thesis.

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## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

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Any degree of academic dishonesty or plagiarism in the written part of the Comprehensive Examination is unacceptable ([see Graduate Calendar, section 5.1](#)). Any material taken word for word from the published work of others must be presented in quotation marks and referenced appropriately. It is not permissible to take the essential structure and ideas of a review article and merely paraphrase them. The source of diagrams and figures taken from the published literature must be acknowledged. The content of the written reports should represent the student's own analysis of the research literature in the student's own words.

If academic dishonesty is suspected on the written portion of the examination the Examination Chair will be notified and the matter will be pursued through the Academic Integrity Policy of the University. The student will not be permitted to proceed to oral examination until the allegation of dishonesty is satisfactorily resolved.

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## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

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### **THE BOARD OF COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS (BCE)**

The Board of Comprehensive Examinations (BCE) consists of at least six experienced HRM graduate faculty. Board members are appointed for staggered three-year terms by the Assistant Dean – HRM. The Chair is appointed by the Assistant Dean - HRM. The Seminar Coordinator(s), Assistant Dean - HRM and the Vice Dean, Health Sciences, and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (FHS) are ex-officio members. Dr. Feng Xie is the current BCE Chair..

### **COMPREHENSIVE SEMINAR COORDINATOR**

(Feng Xie, [feng.xie@mcmaster.ca](mailto:feng.xie@mcmaster.ca))

Member(s) of HRM graduate faculty will serve as Seminar Coordinator(s) responsible for coordinating and leading individual Ph.D. Seminar sessions. The faculty member will also serve as a resource person and content expert for the seminar session.

### **INDEPENDENT STUDY SUPERVISOR**

A member of HRM graduate faculty, authorized to be an Independent Study Supervisor. The IS supervisor may not be the student's thesis supervisor but may be a member of the supervisory committee (NB. Only one of either the Independent Study Supervisor or the Member-at-large may sit on the student's supervisory committee). This person supervises the Independent Study component of the comprehensive exam.

### **MEMBER-AT-LARGE**

A member of HRM graduate faculty, authorized to be a Member-at-Large (MAL). MAL may not be the student's thesis supervisor but may be a member of the supervisory committee (NB. Only one of the Independent Study Supervisor or the MAL may sit on the student's supervisory committee). This person aids in the evaluation of the Independent Study component of the comprehensive exam but should not be expected to play a supervisory role.

## DISSERTATION SUPERVISOR

This person is a member of HRM graduate faculty. This person cannot serve as the student's Independent Study Supervisor or the MAL.

## ASSISTANT DEAN

The Health Research Methodology Graduate Program is under the leadership of an experienced Graduate Faculty member, who is the Assistant Dean - HRM.

## ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Abir Abdulla [hmasst@mcmaster.ca](mailto:hmasst@mcmaster.ca) | Lorraine Carroll [carrl@mcmaster.ca](mailto:carrl@mcmaster.ca) |

The administrative staff are persons responsible for the administrative functioning of the HRM Program.

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## AIM AND CONTENT OF THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

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The comprehensive examination process has two educational components: (1) a Ph.D. seminar series of 10 biweekly seminars providing students with the opportunity to engage broadly in interdisciplinary learning, and (2) an Independent Study project, involving part time work over 6 months, to allow students to demonstrate their competence in an area of specialization. The Ph.D. Seminars address the student's need to demonstrate breadth of learning, and the Independent Study empowers the student to demonstrate their depth of specialization.

The Comprehensive examination is graded like a course, with an overall mark that sums the grades assigned for all portions of the comprehensive process. Successful completion of **both major components** of the exam (the Ph.D. Seminar and Independent Study) is required to pass (B- or above), with a final grade of pass (B- to A) or pass with distinction (A+) determined as a summary grade. The comprehensive examination process involves multiple faculty in grading each student for multiple discrete elements of the examination. These attributes improve the reliability of the evaluation process.

The comprehensive examination process as a whole will be coordinated by the Board of Comprehensive Examinations under the direction of the BCE Chair. The Ph.D. Seminars will be conducted by faculty members, in consultation with the Comprehensive Seminar coordinator. Students are responsible for coordinating their Independent Study, in consultation with their dissertation supervisor (and supervisory committee, where appropriate). Students may help to identify a faculty member to supervise the Independent Study, and a Member-at-large to aid in its evaluation.

## Ph.D. SEMINAR

The seminar series will consist of 10 biweekly seminars running from October to April during a student's second year of PhD studies. The seminars will cover the following health research methodology topics (not in chronological order): (1) knowledge translation (2) research ethics (3) clinical epidemiology (4) HTA (5) clinical trials, (6) health services research (focus on non-experimental designs) (7) qualitative and mixed methods (8) health policy (9) biostatistics and (10) philosophy of science. Each of these seminars will be led by seminar faculty, an expert in that area.

Two weeks in advance of these seminars the students will be provided with 4 large comprehensive (breadth, not depth) questions on the seminar topic. Students will be given a bibliography of resources which they can use to assist in answering the questions. Students are expected to come to the seminars prepared to answer (oral discussion) the four questions.

In the first hour of the seminar the seminar faculty may choose to provide a brief presentation on the topic. Then the students will break into four small groups and each group will be assigned to discuss amongst themselves one of the four questions from the answers that they have prepared. The seminar faculty will move between the groups and act as a resource to help resolve disagreements. (The student composition of the four groups will change with each seminar.)

In the final hour a representative from each group will present to the other students in attendance the answer for the assigned question, which will be followed by an open discussion involving all the students. The seminar faculty will also be available to respond to questions from the students in order to help the students better

understand the topic. Participation in the seminar will have a grade value of 1% (10 seminars will account for 10% of the final seminar grade). There will be no written assignment for the seminar series.

In April-May following the seminar series, three or four dates will be set aside for a one-hour oral examination of each student that will be based upon the materials arising from the seminar questions. Each student will be asked to respond to three of the possible 40 seminar questions that had been previously discussed in the seminar series. The three questions will be chosen at random. The student will have 10-15 minutes for their response per question with an additional 5-10 minutes for any follow-up questions that the examiners may have. There will be two examiners from the BCE. The expectation regarding the depth of the exam will be at the level of general knowledge of a health research methodologist and is NOT intended to reflect the level of knowledge of an expert in that particular HRM field. Each question will count for 30% of the student's seminar series grade (each examiner's mark will be weighted equally).

## **INDEPENDENT STUDY**

The Independent Study is expected to take 20% of the student's time (that is, one day per week), from September through April.

The Independent Study is intended to provide an opportunity for the student to explore an area of interest and specialization in depth. It is expected that the student will explore a topic that builds on and deepens their expertise, but **the specific topic/methodology is expected to be different from the dissertation topic** so that the student has the opportunity to demonstrate breadth in their expertise. Generally, this will mean that the student explores a distinct topic or set of methods, though it is not necessary for the topic to be in a distinct field. Responsibility for ensuring the absence of extensive overlap falls to the dissertation supervisor, independent study supervisor and the supervisory committee (as appropriate), in consultation with the student.

The student, in consultation with his/her thesis supervisor (and supervisory committee, where appropriate), must select one topic (and one appropriate topic supervisor) for independent study. The Independent Study supervisor will be a member of HRM graduate faculty authorized to be an Independent Study Supervisor, different from the thesis supervisor. The guiding principle should be that the student learns something new/valuable/and relevant in the area of specialization and will be able to demonstrate mastery of the material. During the independent study, consultations may be sought from other individuals, but a diary should be kept that tracks what portion of the work (intellectual or otherwise) belonged to the student and what portion was completed by the student him/herself. The model here is that of the dissertation – any given chapter within a thesis might be published with multiple authors, but the supervisory committee, independent study examiners, and the BCE must be re-assured that the end product is predominantly the work of the student. The write-up itself should be exclusively the work of the student.

Topics may be of multiple formats, including, but not limited to:

- Design a study to advance understanding
- Carry out a brief study including data analysis, etc.

Conducting a systematic review is NOT sufficient to fulfil the IS project requirement. A systematic review accompanied by a novel or unique analysis may be considered for the IS project but will need BCE approval that the project is more than a common systematic review and meta-analysis.

In deciding on a topic and approach the student and his/her supervisory team are advised to think carefully about the amount of time required to complete the project and the readiness with which the necessary materials including items outside of the student's control (including access to existing data sets, ethics or security approval) can be accessed within approved timelines.

Students must prepare a written report (***no more than 20-double-spaced-pages in length, excluding appendices***), summarizing their study, to be submitted mid-to-late March.

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## **TIMING OF THE EXAMINATION**

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Under normal circumstances, students enter the program in September. Full time students are expected to

complete both components of the Comprehensive Examination, the Seminar and Independent Study in the second year of their Ph.D. studies, before the end of the 24<sup>th</sup> month for full-time students and the 36<sup>th</sup> month for part-time students. Part time students may complete the total comprehensive examination process over two years, in years two and three, and may elect to complete either portion in either year or both portions in Year 3.

The timing of the comprehensive examination process for part-time students will be determined in consultation and agreement between the student and his/her Ph.D. supervisor and Ph.D. supervisory committee.

In instances in which students begin their Ph.D. studies in January they are generally expected to complete the comprehensive exam at the same time as those students who began the preceding September. In instances in which students begin their Ph.D. studies in May students are advised to complete the comprehensives exam at the same time as those students who will begin the following September.

Students may complete the comprehensives on a schedule distinct from the routine presented here only in unique and compelling circumstances to the extent that the Board of Comprehensive Examiners will allow such flexibility in the comprehensives. To complete the examination off-schedule, an application must be made to the BCE by the deadline for submitting IS proposals to the BCE outlining the reason for the request and the proposed start time. This application must be accompanied by a letter from the student's dissertation supervisor and his/her potential independent study supervisor. Applications will only be considered if the request falls within the parameters imposed by the School of Graduate Studies. Upon approval of the application, the BCE will determine a timeline that is comparable in duration to that of other students completing the comprehensives during their regular schedule.

Failure to successfully complete the Comprehensive Examination within two years of commencing the Ph.D. program for full-time students (extra semester permitted for students starting the program in the May semester) or three years for part-time students, without approval for delay by the Board of Comprehensive Examinations and the School of Graduate Studies, will result in the student's withdrawal from the HRM Ph.D. Program.

### **Ph.D. SEMINAR**

The seminars consist of ten 3 hour sessions that take place bi-weekly, on Thursday afternoons October through April, with the oral exams conducted in April and May.

### **INDEPENDENT STUDY**

The Independent Study topic should be chosen, appropriate supervision arranged, and review by an appropriate Member-at-Large should be finalized in time to submit a plan of study to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations for final approval by **June 1**. In support of this, the Seminar Coordinator(s) will convene an organizational meeting each spring for students who will begin their comprehensive examinations the following academic year, to apprise them of requirements.

The Independent Study will commence in September and proceed in parallel with (but independently from) the Seminar throughout the academic year (though students may compress their Independent Study into a shorter period, if this is mutually agreed upon by the student and Independent Study supervisor). The Independent Study will be completed in time for students to prepare a final written report by mid-to-late March.

Key dates for students are as follows:

- **February/March:** Organizational meeting convened by BCE Chair to inform pre-comp students about the process for their comprehensive examinations, beginning in September
- **June 1:** Students must submit plan of study for Independent Study to the Administrative Assistant for distribution to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations for final approval. Plan of study must be signed by Dissertation supervisor, Independent Study supervisor, Member-at-Large and student
- **September:** Student begins Independent Study and Comprehensive Seminar. The member-at-large for the IS cannot be consulted beyond the end of September as that individual is expected to provide an "arm's length" evaluation upon completion of the independent study.
- **Early December:** Student submits interim progress report to the Independent Study supervisor and to the Administrative Assistant by first Thursday in December.

- **late- March:** Student submits final written report on Independent Study to Independent Study supervisor, Member-at-Large and Administrative Assistant.

**PLEASE REFER TO THE AVENUE TO LEARN HRM PHD COMPREHENSIVE EXAM SITE FOR DEADLINES AND DIRECTIONS RE HOW TO SUBMIT FOR THE FOLLOWING:**

- **INDEPENDENT STUDY PROPOSAL**
- **INDEPENDENT STUDY INTERIM REPORT**
- **INDEPENDENT STUDY FINAL WRITTEN REPORT**

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**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

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**THE BOARD OF COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS (BCE)**

It will be the responsibility of the Board to:

- i. Establish and revise the course content for the Seminar, in consultation with the seminar coordinator and faculty.
- ii. Evaluate students in the oral exam following the seminar series
- iii. Review and give final approval to each student's Independent Study plan
- iv. Review and convey interim and final reports to students and the relevant authorities
- v. Serve as an advisory board for participating faculty, as issues arise
- vi. Serve as an advisory board for students, as issues arise

**THE STUDENT**

Ph.D. students pursuing their comprehensive examinations will take an active role in directing the examination, to ensure that their own educational goals are met. Specifically, the student will:

- i. Select an Independent Study topic, in consultation with the Dissertation supervisor (and supervisory committee, where appropriate), that allows the student to further develop and demonstrate depth of specialization in the field, while ensuring that the topic is sufficiently distinct from the dissertation research to evidence some breadth in the area of specialization
- ii. Identify an appropriate Independent Study supervisor (i.e. HRM graduate faculty with expertise and interest in the subject of the independent study and authorized to be an Independent Study Supervisor), in consultation with the Dissertation supervisor (and supervisory committee, where appropriate).
- iii. Develop a plan of study for the Independent Study, in consultation with the Independent Study supervisor, that specifies the project to be completed, a timeline and the nature and extent of a progress report to be submitted in December (sufficient to allow the supervisor to provide substantive interim feedback on the student's progress).
- iv. Where necessary, revise this plan of study in consultation with the Independent Study supervisor, to account for any substantive modifications that are driven by external circumstances (e.g., the failure of an experiment, the lack of an expected data source, etc.)
- v. Identify an appropriate individual to fulfill the Member-at-large role for evaluation of the Independent Study, in consultation with the Independent Study supervisor (and Dissertation supervisor, where appropriate)
- vi. Attend and fully participate in Ph.D. Seminar activities
- vii. Provide an interim progress report to the Administrative Assistant for distribution to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations in December and to the Independent Study supervisor, to be evaluated by the Independent Study supervisor
- viii. Produce a well-argued and written final report on the Independent Study, to be evaluated by the Independent Study supervisor and the Member-at-large
- ix. If problems arise with the Independent Study or with the Seminar (where the latter cannot be resolved through consultation with the Seminar coordinators), alert the Board to these issues, and work with the Board to seek a satisfactory resolution
- x. Convey the plan of study for the Independent Study, any revisions of this study plan, the Interim progress report, and other relevant materials as appropriate, to the Independent Study Supervisor and the Board
- xi. Undertake the oral exam following the completion of the seminar series



### **Ph.D. SEMINAR SESSION FACULTY**

Members of graduate faculty at McMaster University will serve as presenters for each core seminar session in their areas of expertise and interest. The faculty member will be responsible for preparing four large comprehensive (breadth, not depth) questions on their seminar topic, and for providing a bibliography of resources which students can use to assist in answering the questions, **TWO WEEKS** in advance of their seminar.

### **INDEPENDENT STUDY SUPERVISOR**

The Independent Study Supervisor is a member of HRM graduate faculty with expertise and interest in the subject of the independent study and authorized to be an Independent Study Supervisor. A key characteristic of Independent Study Supervisors is that they are *not* the student's thesis supervisor (though they may be on the supervisory committee).<sup>1</sup> It is expected that students will pursue an advanced topic of mutual interest in an independent but consultative fashion. Independent Study supervisors will be required to agree to a plan of study, as proposed and revised by the student, to submit an interim assessment of the student's progress (in December), and to evaluate the student's performance (written and oral). Specifically, Independent Study supervisors will:

- i. Supervise a student's Independent Study in an area of expertise and mutual interest
- ii. Assist the student to identify a Member-at-Large who can evaluate the final written paper on the Independent Study
- iii. Confirm with the Member-at-Large their willingness to serve in this capacity
- iv. Be available for consultation at mutually convenient times at least once per month between September and April
- v. Work with student as student develops a plan of study specifying the project to be completed, a timeline and the nature and extent of a progress report to be submitted in December (sufficient to allow the supervisor to provide substantive interim feedback on the student's progress)
- vi. Where necessary, encourage or permit the student to revise this plan of study in a mutually agreeable manner, to account for any substantive modifications that may be necessary or appropriate (due, for example, to circumstances such as the failure of an experiment, the lack of an expected data source, etc.)
- vii. Provide an evaluation of the interim progress report to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations in December, whose substance will be transmitted to the student
- viii. Evaluate the student's final written paper on the Independent Study
- ix. Convey all marks, and other relevant materials, to the Board in a timely manner

### **MEMBER-AT-LARGE**

The member-at-large is a member of HRM graduate faculty (SGS approved non-supervisory privileges) authorized to be a Member-at-Large with interest in the Independent Study topic and who assists in its evaluation. The member-at-large should be at arm's length from the independent study project. He or she may consult with the student until the end of September, but should not be called upon during the remainder of the independent study. The primary role of the member-at-large is to evaluate the student's final written paper on the Independent Study. The member at large does not necessarily have to be an expert on the topic. The member-at-large cannot be the student's Dissertation Supervisor (though they may be on the supervisory committee).<sup>2</sup>

### **Clarification of Policy on Supervision of Independent Study (IS)**

Supervisors and members at large for IS projects must be members of the HRM faculty who appear on the list of approved IS supervisors maintained and published online by the HRM program. This list is reviewed and approved by the Assistant Dean HRM in consultation with the Chair of BCE. The membership of this list is

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<sup>1</sup> Note that only one of the Independent Study Supervisor or Member-at-large may sit on the student's supervisory committee.

<sup>2</sup> Note that only one of the Independent Study Supervisor or Member-at-large may sit on the student's supervisory committee.

coordinated with the faculty appointments process in HEI and is not modified in response to individual student proposals. Proposals for IS projects that specify unapproved faculty will normally be rejected.

In exceptional circumstances, the Chair of BCE, in consultation with the Assistant Dean - HRM, may approve supervisors or members at large that do not appear on the list of approved faculty. The student's PhD supervisor must make the request in writing at least 3 weeks prior to the IS proposal deadline and include a copy of the proposed faculty's CV. The written request should clearly justify the exception in terms of qualifications, the need for an exception, and the ability to make the required commitment to the student. Proposed faculty must have an academic appointment in a research intensive position. It will be wise for the student to prepare an alternative plan in case of rejection.

Approval of faculty supervisors or member at large on an exceptional basis is made in consideration of an individual student's circumstances and does not imply any precedent for other faculty approvals or that a faculty member can be added to the list of approved supervisors.

### **DISSERTATION SUPERVISOR**

The proposed comprehensive examination process relies on the Dissertation supervisor to play a key role in the Independent Study. The Dissertation supervisor will assist the student in identifying a suitable Independent Study (one that is of substantive interest and value to the student, but which does not replicate dissertation research), a suitable Independent Study supervisor, and (where appropriate) a suitable Member-at-large to serve as a second evaluator. Specifically, the Dissertation supervisor will:

- i. Assist the student in identifying an appropriate Independent Study topic
- ii. Assist the student in identifying an appropriate Independent Study supervisor
- iii. Where requested, assist the student in identifying an appropriate Member-at-large to evaluate the Independent Study

### **ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT**

An administrative assistant will distribute the Independent Study Plans and Interim Reports to the Board of Comprehensive Examinations.

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## **EVALUATION OF THE EXAMINATION**

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The final mark on the comprehensive examination is the sum of the individual components of the examination. The Ph.D. seminar is worth 50% of the total grade and the Independent Study is worth 50%. The student must receive a mark of at least a B- (70%) **in both components** to be considered to have passed the exam. A student who fails either the IS project or the seminar series will be given a second opportunity to pass by re-writing their IS report or by participating in a second oral exam, respectively.

### **Ph.D. SEMINAR**

The Ph.D. Seminar is worth 50% of the final mark for the Comprehensive Exam. The mark for the Ph.D. seminar will be arrived at from a summation of the following components:

- Attendance: Students will receive 1% of their seminar grade for each session they participate in for a total of 10%
  - Assessed by Seminar Faculty
- Oral examination: Each student will answer three questions from the pool of 40 questions that had been discussed in the seminar series. The three questions will be selected at random. The student will have 10-15 minutes to give their response per question with an additional 5-10 minutes for any follow-up questions that the examiners may have. Each question will have a value of 15% per examiner for a total of 90%
  - Assessed by two members of the BCE

### **INDEPENDENT STUDY**

The Independent Study is worth 50% of the final mark for the Comprehensive Exam. The mark for the Independent Study will be arrived at from a summation of the following components:

- Interim progress report: Students will receive 10% of their Independent Study mark from the assessment provided by their Independent Study supervisor of their interim progress report. Without a progress report a mark cannot be assigned.

- Final paper: Students will receive 90% of their Independent Study mark from the final paper (45% by each reader). The final paper should review the student's Independent Study in sufficient depth to allow an expert in the field to evaluate the student's competence. The paper should be *no more than 20-pages in length, double-spaced*, excluding appendices such as graphs, figures, tables, references and glossaries of abbreviations.
  - Students will be assessed by their Independent Study supervisor and the designated Member-at-Large (final mark will be the average of the two evaluators)

**Key dates for evaluation:**

- Evaluation of written portion of Independent Study
  - Early December: Students submit interim progress report on Independent Study
  - By January 31: Students receive interim report on their progress from the Board, including the assessment of their interim progress report
  - Mid-to-Late March (Time 0): Students submit final written report on their Independent Study
  - Two weeks later (Time 0 + 2 weeks): Students receive evaluation of their final written report; students who fail are given 2 weeks to re-write the final report on their Independent Study
  - + 2 weeks (Time 0 + 4 weeks): Students required to re-write their final reports submit revised version
  - + 1 week (Time 0 + 5 weeks): Students receive evaluation of their re-written final report.
  
- Evaluation of Seminar
  - April/May oral examination of seminar questions
  - June/July: Students who failed their Seminar undertake oral re-examination to demonstrate their knowledge

Refer to the key dates document, the seminar schedule and the defence schedule for the Independent Study deadlines. The documents are available on the avenue to learn seminar course and available from the HRM Program Office.

**PASS AND PASS WITH DISTINCTION**

The final mark on the comprehensive examination sums the individual components (Seminar and Independent Study) of the examination. The Ph.D. seminar is worth 50% of the total grade and the Independent Study is worth 50%. The student must, however, **pass both components** (i.e., B- or above) to be considered to have passed the Comprehensive Examination.

To pass the Comprehensive Seminar students must achieve a minimum of a B- in their final summary grade. The final grade, whether fail (C+ or below), pass (B- to A) or pass with distinction (A+; 90%) will be determined by the summary grade. Students who do not achieve a passing summary grade on the Seminar portion of the Comprehensives will be given one second opportunity to address the deficiencies (see below).

To pass the Independent Study, students must receive at least a B- on the combined grade assigned to the interim progress report (10%) and written paper (90%). Students who do not pass the Independent Study will be given one opportunity to re-write the paper (see below). Students who pass the written portion of their Independent Study (on first try or second chance) will be deemed to have passed that component of their Comprehensive examination. The final grade on the Independent Study, whether pass (B- to A) or pass with distinction (A+) will be determined by the written report.

**SECOND CHANCE AND FAILURE**

Feedback mechanisms have been built into the examination process such that the student should have an opportunity to address any potential weaknesses before the end of the comprehensive process. Should a student fail either component of the comprehensive exam they will be provided with a second chance to demonstrate their knowledge of the material (refer to schedule for second chance date). If this is required pass with distinction will no longer be a potential outcome for the student to achieve.

**HRM COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION  
INDEPENDENT STUDY PLAN OF STUDY PROPOSAL FORM**

**PLEASE NOTE:**

1. The *HRM Comprehensive Examination – Independent Study Plan of Study* must be completed by all Health Research Methodology students completing their comprehensive examinations.
2. All sections of this form **must** be completed. This form must be **signed** by the Independent Study Supervisor, the Dissertation Supervisor, the Member-at-Large and the Student.
3. This form and a copy of your curriculum vitae must be submitted to Lorraine Carroll ([carrl@mcmaster.ca](mailto:carrl@mcmaster.ca)) by June 1. Lorraine circulates the documents to the Board of Comprehensive Examiners for review.

<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Student Name:</b>	
<b>Dissertation Supervisor:</b>	
<b>Members of Supervisory Committee:</b>	
<b>Independent Study Supervisor:</b>	
<b>Member-at-Large:</b>	
<b>Independent Study Proposal:</b> ( <i>Length = 1.5 pages single-spaced maximum; see Table 1 at the end of this form for tips on how to prepare your proposal</i> ).	

**Independent Study Proposal (continued from previous page):**

**Relevance of Proposed Independent Study Topic to Your Doctoral Training Goals:** *(What is your PhD Dissertation topic? How is your IS study topic distinct from your PhD dissertation topic? How is your IS proposal topic relevant to your doctoral training goals?)*

**What are the challenges to successfully completing your independent study? How will you address them? That is, do you have a Plan B if an insoluble problem arises and you can't pursue your IS topic as proposed?**

**Interim Progress Report (to be submitted in early December):** *(Provide a list of headings and state the page length for the interim progress report. This description should clearly indicate the specific aspects of progress the supervisor expects the student to report on. The interim progress report is evaluated by the Independent Study Supervisor and makes up 10% of the final grade for the Independent Study component of the Comprehensive Exam.*

**Independent Study Project Timeline:** *(Please provide a timeline for completion of the key elements of your IS project including meetings with your IS supervisor, etc.)*

I \_\_\_\_\_, [Name of Student] recognize that by signing this form I accept all responsibility in ensuring the completion of the Independent Study project. I understand that the Independent Study Supervisor will play a consultative role in this project and that my work will be done independently. I understand that contact with my Member-at-Large regarding this project is only allowed up to the end of the month of September. I also recognize that this agreement can be revised at any time, but that all parties must sign the new agreement.

By signing, each of the parties agrees that all aspects of the IS study described above are appropriate for a Comprehensive Examination Independent Study Project.

Signatures of:

Ph.D. Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Independent Study Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Dissertation Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Member-at-Large: \_\_\_\_\_



**Table 1: TIPS FOR PREPARING YOUR INDEPENDENT STUDY PROPOSAL**

1	<p><b>Describe the project in sufficient detail.</b>  <b>For example:</b> specific objectives, PICOTS, inclusion/exclusion criteria, outcomes/measures, sample size/SCOPE, statistical methods and analysis plan, covariates, confounders</p>
2	<p><b>Convince the reviewer re: the feasibility and likelihood of successfully completing the objectives within the project timeline.</b></p>
3	<p><b>Provide a detailed project timeline (September to March), including a month-to-month critical path of work to map out the scope and anticipated progress of the project.</b></p>
4	<p><b>Describe very clearly how your IS project is distinct from your dissertation.</b></p>
5	<p><b>Edit and review for spelling and grammatical errors.</b></p>
6	<p><b>If proposing the use of a dataset, consider:</b>          How will the database support your proposed question and how can the intended sample be obtained from it?          Are there any issues with data completeness that may jeopardize your work?          What will you do if you cannot obtain a suitable dataset?          What if there are delays with obtaining access? Describe any potential challenges to accessing the data.</p>

## GRADING FORM FOR INDEPENDENT STUDY (WRITTEN)

Each report is expected to be no more than 20 double-spaced pages in length, excluding appendices such as graphs, tables, etc. It should entail a scholarly synopsis of the project undertaken for the student's independent study, presented in sufficient depth to allow an expert in the field to evaluate the student's competence. A mark will be assigned by both the independent study supervisor and the member-at-large with the average of the two scores constituting 90% of the student's grade for the independent study.

In assigning a percentage grade, please keep the following in mind:

70% is the pass mark for graduate students

90% is the cut-point for passing with distinction

The writing style should be appropriate for the graduate student level

The content should be scholarly in that it should provide a thoughtful overview of the issue focused upon (including a focused research question if appropriate), rigour in the methods adopted, appropriate analyses, and an integrative, intellectually-sound discussion.

Please return this form to the HRM Program Assistant (hrmasst@mcmaster.ca, HSC 2C5B).

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_%

Comments:

**GRADING FORM FOR SEMINAR ORAL EXAMINATION**

Each student will answer three questions from the pool of 40 questions that had been discussed in the seminar series. The three questions will be selected at random. The student will have 10-15 minutes to give their response per question with an additional 5-10 minutes for any follow-up questions that the examiners may have. Each question will have a value of 15% per examiner for a total of 90%.

In assigning a percentage grade, please keep the following in mind:

- 70% is the pass mark for graduate students
- 90% is the cut-point for passing with distinction

The discussion should be appropriate for the graduate student level  
The content should be scholarly in that it should provide a thoughtful overview of the issue focused upon (including a focused research question if appropriate), rigour in the methods adopted, appropriate analyses, and an integrative, intellectually-sound discussion.

Please return this form to the HRM Program Assistant (hrmasst@mcmaster.ca, HSC 2C5B).

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Mark (out of 15): \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

Question 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Mark (out of 15): \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

Question 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Mark (out of 15): \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: