

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION POLICY FOR THE FAMILY AND CHILD STUDIES (FCS) AREA  
(M.S. IN APPLIED FAMILY AND CHILD STUDIES)  
SCHOOL OF FAMILY, CONSUMER & NUTRITION SCIENCES:  
**STUDENT GUIDE**

One of the requirements in nearly all NIU master's degree programs is successful completion of a comprehensive examination. The format and procedures are determined by the faculty of each area within a department. Refer to your Graduate Catalog for degree requirements.

**A. Format and Content of the Comprehensive Exam**

Comprehensive examinations are intended to encourage students to integrate what they have learned during their graduate studies at NIU. The examinations are "comprehensive" in that they evaluate students' scholarship and knowledge of material from all required course work and relevant current literature.

Examinations normally are given from 9:00 a.m. to 4 p.m., with a one-hour break from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m., on the Friday of the 6th week of classes in the Fall term and Friday of the 6th week of classes in the Spring term. Typing, editing and printing are included in the two-hour period allotted for each question. Comprehensive examinations are not scheduled at other times or in the Summer term except by special permission of the FCS graduate faculty.

Comprehensive examinations must be taken on (IBM-compatible) computers. Exceptions must be requested to and approved by the Family and Child Studies graduate faculty.

The examinations are divided into three major questions. General (covering a non-clinical family and child studies topic you choose from the FCS faculty approved list attached to the How To Study For The Comprehensive Exams form), Research (covering research methodology; this question may be waived if writing a thesis), and Special Emphasis (focusing on each student's specialization area; this question may be waived by AFCS majors writing a thesis). The topic of a student's thesis may not be used for any question. A list of 12-15 references, no more than 2 pages, typed in APA format for the general (and an additional list for the special question for non-SMFT students) can be brought the day of the exam. These will be turned in with your exams.

To aid the students' study for comprehensive examinations, previous years' general and special questions are available to students for inspection at the NIU Library reserve room (Folder title: AFCS Comps). Student study groups have also proven helpful as a means of preparation for the exams. Students should see the FCS area document "How to Study for Comprehensive Exams" and consult with graduate faculty members for additional assistance.

**B. Procedure for Applying to take Comprehensive Examinations**

Graduate students must complete at least 21 hours of course work for an M.S. degree before taking the comprehensive examination. In addition, students must have completed FCNS 500B/501 and FCNS 504.

Graduate students must complete a form (attached) which will inform the Coordinator of Family and Child Studies of the student's intention to take the exam. The form must be signed by the student, his or her advisor, and the faculty member whom the student requests to write the special question. Along with the form, the student should send a check for \$20 made out to NIU. Return form to the FCS Secretary, Wirtz 118.

Students must request that a specific faculty member write the Special Emphasis question of the examination, although the final decision regarding who will write the examination is that of the Area Coordinator and is based upon consultation with the student's advisor and other graduate faculty in the student's area(s) of concentration.

The Coordinator of Family and Child Studies confirms the date and time of the examination and each student's eligibility to take the examination by sending a letter to the student. Examinations are scheduled to allow ample time for evaluation prior to the date the reports on results are due to the Graduate School.

In extreme circumstances, a student will be allowed to postpone taking the comprehensive exam the semester it was requested. Otherwise, failure to take comps during the requested semester will be considered a fail.

C. Evaluation Procedures

Each question stands alone in the evaluation process, in other words, don't say when writing the answer to one question, "please refer to [my other answer]."

Each examination question is evaluated anonymously and independently by an Evaluation Committee consisting of two FCS area graduate faculty members.

Each question is evaluated on a pass/fail basis. Students must receive passing marks from both faculty members.

The examinations are evaluated on accuracy, objectivity, specificity, scope/breadth, organization, relevancy, clarity, documentation, appropriate references, and comprehensiveness. Note that documentation and references must both be in APA style. Failure to cite using APA style will be viewed as plagiarizing and an automatic failure.

D. Reporting of Examination Results

The Evaluation Committee returns its evaluation results to the Area Coordinator who informs the School Chair of the results of the examination. The results are communicated to each student by his/her advisor within five weeks of the examination date. The School Chair issues a letter reporting the results of the examination to each student and informs the Graduate School of the results. Examination results are treated confidentially.

In the event that a student fails the examination, evaluating faculty and/or the student's advisor provides constructive critiques, in writing, of the relevant examination items.

E. Retaking the Comprehensive Examination

Students who have failed the examination are allowed to take it again ("retake") on the next scheduled examination date. (Normally, the exam is given only in Fall and Spring semesters). Students who retake exam questions the following semester will be asked to retake only the question(s) failed. However, students who delay retaking the exam beyond one semester (summer excluded) will be asked to retake all of the questions. Students who fail the exam on their second attempt are dropped from the program.

In the event that a student passes two of the three examination questions, graduate faculty may choose to allow the student to re-write answers to the third question during the same semester, and, in the case of students planning to graduate in the same semester, before reports of examination results are due to the Graduate School. Such re-writes may be requested by the graduate faculty when items seem incomplete or unclear, when the student seems to have a fundamental grasp of the material, and when a student fails the multiple-choice part of the SMFT special question. Variations on the original question or more specific questions may be used for the re-write. Re-write time for the multiple-choice exam is ½ hour.

If the student chooses not to re-write at the designated time after being notified of the results, then the student will have to retake during the next semester's comp exam time. The student will need to apply for this retake and pay the fee again.

If a student takes the comprehensive exams in the semester in which s/he has been approved for graduation, the student may retake the 2 failed questions later in the semester, for graduation in the subsequent semester. Failure at this retake will mean removal from the program.

F. Appeals of Examination Results

Students who have failed the examination or failed a question and its re-write may appeal to the graduate faculty of the FCS Area for reconsideration of the examination results. Appeals must be written and must state the grounds on which the appeal is based. The appeal will be considered at the next faculty area meeting, which may or may not occur before the re-write date. Therefore, students who wish to take advantage of the rewrite option should do so before appealing. Students should discuss these options with their advisors.

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