

# Revised Guidance for Exceptions to In-Person Participation Requirements for Graduate Benchmark Examinations

*Effective Aug 24, 2020*

Consistent with Penn State's efforts to minimize the risk of spreading infections leading to COVID-19 while ensuring continued student progress toward their degree the Graduate School provides this updated guidance for attendance requirements for benchmark examinations. This guidance supersedes the guidance released on April 14, 2020.

Please note that program-specific requirements (including the format of the Comprehensive Examination) are at the discretion of the graduate program. We encourage all graduate programs to make modifications to these program-specific requirements as appropriate given the importance of minimizing the risk of spreading infection.

## **SCOPE**

This guidance applies to in-person participation in the following benchmark examinations:

- Comprehensive Examinations
  - [GCAC-606 Comprehensive Examination - Research Doctorate](#)
  - [GCAC-700-F Comprehensive Examination - Professional Doctoral Degrees](#)
- Final Oral Examinations
  - [GCAC-608 Final Oral Examination - Research Doctorate](#)
  - [GCAC-700-G Culminating Project / Final Performance - Professional Doctoral Degrees](#)
- Final Examination for research master's degrees (MA, MS)
  - [GCAC-642 Culminating Experience - Research Master's](#)
  - [GCAC-700-AA Degree Requirements - Professional Master's Degrees](#)

## **REVISED APPROACH for Fall 2020**

1. Given the ongoing pandemic, and in the interest of reducing the risk of spreading the disease, graduate programs are encouraged to hold all benchmark examinations in a remote format.
2. Graduate programs do not need to request prior approval for an exception to allow any or all faculty members or the student to participate remotely in benchmark examinations.
3. Programs must report the participation conditions of all doctoral examinations held under this guidance to Graduate Enrollment Services contemporaneously with the results of the examination using the form posted [here](#).

## **REQUIREMENTS**

*Doctoral Degrees*

- **The student must agree to participate in the examination under the conditions established by the examination committee.**
  - If the student is not comfortable participating remotely using video conferencing technology, the graduate program is responsible for making arrangements for the student to use on-campus facilities to hold the meeting in person in a manner that is consistent with physical distancing recommendations (a distance of six feet/approximately two meters between participants). The graduate program will make arrangements with Environmental Health and Safety and/ or Office of Physical Plant to have the room disinfected before and after the examination.
    - Given the extended length of some benchmark examinations, to further reduce the risk of spreading the disease, programs are encouraged to increase physical distancing beyond six feet to the extent possible and appropriate.
  - If the student and the committee cannot come to agreement on the format and conditions of the examination, the student should contact the College Administrator for Graduate Education in their unit for assistance.
- **The public presentation portion of the examination may be cancelled.**
  - Graduate programs are welcome to make the public presentation available to the public remotely through video conferencing technology, or to cancel it, as they see fit.
- **All examinations that are conducted with remote participants must be held using Zoom video conference or Microsoft Teams video conference accessed through the University's license.**
  - *The student's graduate program is responsible for setting up the video conference software for the purposes of the examination.*
  - The student's graduate program is responsible (in conjunction with their college IT unit) for ensuring that the technology meets the needs of the examination, and that all participants are trained in the relevant technology if needed *before* the scheduled examination; this includes system and hardware testing *before* the day of the examination.
  - **Programs are strongly encouraged to record examinations in which a majority of participants are participating by video conferencing.**
    - If the examination is recorded, to comply with Pennsylvania law, all participants must affirmatively acknowledge that recording is permissible. If a faculty member does not wish to be recorded, the faculty member may be replaced following the standard approach by contacting Graduate Enrollment Services.
    - If the examination is recorded, the student's graduate program is responsible for storing the examination recording until the student's degree is conferred.
  - If there are technological problems on the day of the examination, the examination must be rescheduled so that the student has an authentic opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the Scholarly and Professional Goals for All Graduate Degree Students ([GCAC-201](#)). Contact Graduate Enrollment Services to reschedule an examination.
- **This guidance applies only to the requirements for in-person participation in these benchmark examinations.**
  - All other Graduate Council-defined requirements remain, including but not limited to: the student must be in good academic standing, prior scheduling of the examination through Graduate Enrollment Services, full participation by every member of the committee of record, timely reporting of examination result, etc.

- **The college home of the graduate program is responsible for ensuring that graduate programs report all the details of all examinations held under these guidelines.**
  - Graduate programs must submit the form reporting the participation conditions of all examinations to Graduate Enrollment Services contemporaneously with the results of the examination.

### *Master's Degrees*

The format of final examinations and other benchmark assessments for master's degrees are defined by the graduate program. Graduate programs are expected to offer students the opportunity to complete their assessments using either remote conferencing or in person accompanied by best practices for physical distancing as agreed upon by the degree candidate and any faculty members involved.

If the student and the committee cannot come to agreement on the format and conditions of the examination, the student should contact the College Administrator for Graduate Education in their unit for assistance.

Reporting of participation conditions for master's examinations through Graduate Enrollment Services is not required.

### ***DURATION***

This guidance is effective Aug 24, 2020 and remains in effect as long as Penn State requires masks and physical distancing on campus.

Questions about this guidance may be directed to Michael Verderame, Senior Associate Dean of the Graduate School at [mxv8@psu.edu](mailto:mxv8@psu.edu) or 814-865-2516