RSI DOCTORAL STUDENT SEMINAR SERIES

SEMINAR #1: COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS & THESIS PREPARATION

If you are a PhD student in RSI and have questions about comprehensive exams or thesis preparation, please join us for a co-led discussion by upper year PhD students and the graduate coordinator.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 2017, 3:00 – 4:30 P.M., Rm. 140

Rehabilitation Sciences Institute
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
SO WHAT'S THE PROCESS?: DEMYSTIFYING THE PHD THESIS & COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

Dina Brooks, PhD
Professor and Graduate Coordinator
and the
Doctoral Curriculum Student Committee
OVERALL PURPOSE

- To provide an overview of the process and timelines for RSI doctoral students regarding:
  - Comprehensive Exams
  - PhD thesis

- To provide a forum to discuss student questions or concerns related to PhD Thesis and Comprehensive Exams
COMPREHENSIVE EXAM
Two examination elements:

- A written submission
- A comprehensive oral exam of the written submission
1. A systematic review/synthesis
   - If directly related to the student`s PhD or part of the PhD
     - Can be included in the thesis as a fourth paper
     - Note: this is a change from previous RSI policy
   - If not related to the student`s thesis
     - Students can publish 3 papers plus the review as a separate paper not to be included in their thesis, but as part of their PhD

2. A grant proposal
   - The proposal must be unrelated to the student`s thesis
COMPREHENSIVE EXAM – COMMITTEE

- Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC) must include three examiners (RSI-affiliated faculty)
  - Only one examiner can be a PAC member
  - Your supervisor (mentor) is non-voting, but attends examination
  - Supervisor can support you to prepare paper and for oral exam

- Examiners are chosen by the student, supervisor (and potentially committee)
  - Examiners should be chosen, in part, based on research expertise of faculty (e.g., ability to provide appropriate critique of methodological and content)
COMPREHENSIVE EXAM — TIMELINE

- After all required course work is completed
- Begin preparing comp paper within 18 months of registration to the PhD program
- Students must successfully complete both the written and oral components of the comp within 36 months of registration in order to continue
COMPREHENSIVE EXAM — PROCESS

- Graduate Coordinator must approve topic and CEC
- Email or meet with grad coordinator to discuss
  - Topic, topic of thesis, format, and committee members
- Complete written submission
  - Some supervisors expect a comprehensive exam proposal
  - Length determined by target journal/grant competition guidelines
  - This process usually takes 4 – 12 months
- Form a CEC
  - Formally ask faculty to join CEC
  - Ensure availability re: examination dates/meetings
- Prepare for oral defense
  - Four weeks after CEC meeting (see next slide)
  - CEC provides 3 – 6 questions for student
- If exam is unsuccessful, can have one more attempt
COMPREHENSIVE EXAM – EXAMINER MEETING

- Once paper is complete, it is sent to CEC (and cc Loida)
- Within 3 weeks of receiving the paper, the CEC meets to review
- Student is expected to coordinate a meeting time for examiners
  - Useful to also set examination date with examiners at this time
- Date and time of meeting must be arranged through Loida, Loida secures chair and meeting room once date is confirmed
- RSI is required to find a chair (non-voting)
COMPREHENSIVE EXAM — DAY OF EXAM

- Loida will book conference room for the exam
- Arrive 15 minutes before to set up powerpoint
- Once committee arrives, student leaves while CEC prepares for exam
- Student re-enters and CEC take turns asking questions
- Questions can be those that were provided, or others
- 1-2 hours in total
- Student leaves again and CEC deliberates about result and completes paperwork
- Student re-enters and receives result; signs approval form and returns it to Loida
TIPS & QUESTIONS FROM STUDENTS

- Librarian support
  - RACER, Erika can help with search strategy

- Use of tools for systematic/scoping reviews COVIDENCE, ResearchGate tool

- Rationale behind grant proposal option - less time consuming

- Can use a second reviewer for your review (better for publication). Can be another student, your supervisor, or any one else fit for the job.

- For your COPMS you can only have 1 consultant and that is your mentor

- Formally, COMPS should be defended after finishing your required courses, but it is not always the case.

- Supervisors can choose to edit you comps paper before submitting it to the CEC, or not. It is up to them/you.

- Practice defense questions out loud! Get feedback from others on your answers.

- Can attend defense with supporting materials (e.g. powerpoint)

- Meet with supervisor after first CEC meeting to hear possible defense questions

- If you choose to publish your COMPS paper – CEC are not automatically authors on the paper,. Add them only if they contributed significantly.

- If finished coursework, you are considered a PhD Candidate and not a doctoral student.
PHD THESIS
PHD THESIS — TIMELINE

- **Year I & II**
  - Course Work
  - Comprehensive Examination
  - Preparation of research proposal should begin within 12 months
  - Formation of Supervisory Committee who approves proposal
  - Submission of proposal to REB [not mandatory to hand in a written proposal on top of REB proposal]

- **Year III**
  - Doctoral Research
  - Writing of Thesis

- **Year IV**
  - Writing of Thesis (outcomes of Doctoral Research)
  - Thesis Defense
PHD THESIS — CONTENT

- A body of work roughly equivalent to three peer-reviewed research papers, with an appropriate scholarly introduction and discussion
- Original contribution to knowledge
- The candidate should have demonstrated an appropriate level of scholarship in his/her chosen field
PHD THESIS — FORMAT

- **Manuscript format** — “Sandwich” - Example:
  - Chapter 1 - Detailed review of literature
  - Chapter 2 - Paper 1
  - Chapter 3 - Paper 2
  - Chapter 4 - Paper 3
  - Chapter 5 - Discussion - pulling it all together
  - Chapter 6 - Conclusion
  - References [at the end of the manuscript, not after each paper]

- **Non-manuscript format** - Example
  - Chapter 1 - Detailed review of Literature
  - Chapter 2 - Methods
  - Chapter 3 - Results
  - Chapter 4 - Discussion
  - Chapter 5 - Conclusion
# PhD Thesis — Manuscript Format

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<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tr>
<td>Papers published as you go</td>
<td>Repetitive as may repeat some of the methods in each chapter and repeat some content in first and last chapter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write as you go</td>
<td>Some research harder to divide into three clear packages</td>
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<td>Divided into clear chunks early</td>
<td>Requires copyright from journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work is peer reviewed so less likely to be negatively viewed at the end</td>
<td>Requires additional preparation and revision work along the way</td>
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# PhD Thesis — Non-Manuscript Format

<table>
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<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<td>More traditional way of writing a thesis</td>
<td>Often leads to less publications</td>
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<tr>
<td>More amenable for certain research types</td>
<td>Work not published before defense so more open to criticism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doesn't require copyright from journal</td>
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<td>Less revision work required</td>
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**THESES – RESEARCH ETHICS**

- REB approval usually occurs after student has a completed thesis proposal (approved by committee)
  - May submit once for entire thesis or potentially separate approvals for each manuscript

- Submission is usually to health sciences REB – monthly submission dates, except for August

- Must have approval from university, institution/community partners, and obtain Tricouncil certificate
Nearing the end — Thesis Defense

- Once PAC agrees you are ready — sign final PAC form and send to Loida.
- You must complete the form with examiners names on it (internal and external examiner) and 3 dates agreed upon — and send to Loida.
- SGS requires PhD thesis at least 8 weeks in advance — NO COMPROMISE [10 weeks in the summer]
- It is your supervisor’s responsibility to contact examiners and secure potential date and to coordinate with RSI admin
- SGS finds the Chair for defense
Nearing the End — Thesis Defense

- SGS/RSI send the thesis to examiners - You must send it to your committee
- Student/Supervisor to liaise with RSI admin (Loida) to book a room for thesis defense (and practice defense if you choose)
- It is your supervisor and your responsibility to arrange a Practice defense
- Refer to manual!
  - Critical information on forms, final PAC, submitting thesis, producing thesis
THESIS PROCESS — SOME TIPS

- Consider creating a timeline / GANTT chart
  - Most things take much longer than you think, but at least it will provide you with a guide

- Use the English Language and Writing Centre - Workshops
  - Thesis proposal writing
  - Grant writing

- Can see dissertation example on TSpace or hard copies in RSI.

- Ask to review senior student's proposals or theses to help guide your thinking

- When submitting final thesis to supervisor – mandatory 2 week turnaround for feedback. If this is being significantly delayed – contact Dina.

- Conduct several mock defenses, on top of the RSI one (with friends, colleagues).

- Send the thesis to the internal examiner yourself, just in case. You CANNOT contact external examiner yourself.
QUESTIONS?

Student Q&A
THANK YOU