Final Examination

Assessment of university and program-level learning outcomes is required for each individual candidate for a masters degree. For thesis programs, a final oral examination is required. For non-thesis programs, the individual level assessment may be completed with a final oral or written examination. Other mechanisms may be used for non-thesis programs if approved by both the Graduate School and the Graduate Council.

Final Oral Examination – thesis-based programs

The final oral examination for master's candidates may, at the discretion of the graduate program, consist of a public thesis defense followed by a closed session of the examining committee with the candidate. Under normal circumstances, the final oral examination should be scheduled for two hours.

For master's candidates whose programs require a thesis, not more than half of the examination period should be devoted to the presentation and defense of the thesis; the remaining time can be spent on questions relating to the student's knowledge of the major field, and minor field if a minor is included in the program of study. Graduate faculty serving on thesis-oriented master's degree programs may contribute to the direction of the student's thesis, will assess the student's thesis and his or her defense of it in the final oral examination, will vote to pass or fail the student, and may sign the thesis when it is in acceptable final form. The examining committee consists of at least four members of the graduate faculty—two in the major field, one in the minor field if a minor is included, and a Graduate Council representative. When a minor is not included, the fourth member may be from the graduate faculty at large. All members of the student's graduate committee must approve the scheduling of the final examination.

Students writing a thesis must have a Graduate Council representative on their committee. It is the student's responsibility to obtain his or her own Graduate Council representative from a list provided by the Graduate School. This must be done prior to scheduling the final exam.

Final Examination – non-thesis based programs

For non-thesis master's degree programs, a final cumulative examination (oral or written) is required. Additionally, a capstone experience is required that integrates concepts across multiple courses and is aligned with achieving program level learning outcomes. The capstone experience may take the form of research, culminating project, or creative work. Use of a portfolio or other collection of artifacts or alternative methods of assessment of student learning may be used if approved by the Graduate School and the Graduate Council. The capstone experience should be conducted outside of the didactic course requirements. The major professor is responsible for directing and assigning a final grade for the capstone experience. Other members of the examining committee will assess the capstone experience as well as the student's knowledge of his or her field, and vote to pass or fail the student.

The examining committee consists of three members of the graduate faculty—two in the major field and one in the minor field if a minor is included. When a minor is not included, the third member may be from the graduate faculty at large.

If a final oral examination is used, not more than half of the examination period should be devoted to the presentation of the capstone experience; the remaining time can be spent on questions relating to the student's knowledge of the major field, and minor field if one is included in the program.