

# **MMC Comprehensive Exam Guide**

Manship School of Mass Communication

July 2021

## **What is the Master's Comprehensive Exam?**

The Master's Comprehensive Examination consists of a written examination, followed by an oral examination (defense).

The exam consists of essay questions that motivate students to bring together and interrelate the skills and understandings derived from the required and elective courses and other educational experiences undertaken in the Manship School. The exam will cover the topics from the four MMC core courses (MC 7001/7002/7005/7021) and topics from two electives courses. Students will select a Graduate Advisory Committee. The committee members will create exam questions for the written portion, as well as conduct the oral defense afterwards. The examination is one way of completing the requirements for the MMC degree. Students may complete a thesis or a professional project, rather than the comprehensive examination.

The Master's Comprehensive Examination is to be taken by students only after all course work is completed (or at the end of their last semester). Students are not permitted to take part of the exam at one time and another part later. Questions from the comprehensive exam will be written by the student's graduate

## **Who should take the comprehensive exam?**

The comprehensive exam is appropriate for students who plan professional careers in advertising, public relations, journalism, political communication or other areas of industry practice. It is not recommended for those who expect to enroll in doctoral programs.

Although a lengthy examination may seem a major hurdle, it is little different in principle from the essay exams that students routinely take in advanced courses. The two parts (morning and afternoon) break the examination into distinct areas of study. Taking the comprehensive exam is quite similar to taking six substantial final examinations. The written exam is followed within two weeks by an oral examination, in which the student may clarify the answers given during the written exam and address the questions of the examining committee.

Students who choose to take the comprehensive examination must plan carefully. It is not less work or an "easy way out" for those who hesitate to complete a thesis or professional

project. Students who elect this option must take additional elective courses beyond what is required. In other words, students taking the comprehensive examination will take a total of 12 hours of elective courses, compared to 6 credit hours of electives for thesis and professional project students.

### **Who will be on my Graduate Advisory committee?**

Students wishing to take the comprehensive exam will be responsible for selecting and assembling his/her Graduate Advisory Committee. A Manship School faculty member will serve as the chair and assume primary leadership role for the committee. Each committee must consist of at least three graduate faculty members (for full list of Manship graduate faculty members, please refer to Appendix F in the Manship Master of Mass Communication Policies and Procedures Handbook). Members on the committee must hold graduate faculty status. One member may be from outside the Manship School, but at least one member must have associate or full professor rank. Every member is a full voting member of the committee. For more details or suggestions on selecting your committee, please refer to the Graduate Advisory Committee Section of the Manship MMC Policies and Procedures Handbook.

### **What kinds of questions are on the exam?**

Comprehensive examination questions are of a general nature. That is, they do not usually require you to memorize such matters as specific dates, percentages or other minor details. They are designed to allow you to bring together in your answers your knowledge of concepts, principles, theories and systematic understandings of the issues that you have studied in your course work and other academic experiences in the program.

The questions for the morning session are designed to probe your command of the content of the core courses in the program. These courses focus on mass communication theory and research, mass communication philosophy and principles, the news media and governance, the nature of public opinion, the process and effects of mass communication. These are basic issues that should be understood by anyone working as a professional communicator.

The afternoon session is devoted to the various professional areas of concentration and elective courses. For example, a “case history” of a problem in professional communication (e.g. advertising, public relations, journalism, political communication, etc.) may be presented. Students may be asked to provide an analysis of the situation and describe how they would handle the issues. This permits students to show the examiners how well they have mastered the skills, strategies, concepts, and principles that are important in the field of concentration. Student will be allowed to bring a pre-determined reading list.

During the oral examination, students are usually asked to clarify or further explain the answers given during the written examination. Additional related questions may also be asked. The oral examination should be scheduled within two weeks of the written examination.

Each examination is prepared and graded by an existing committee of faculty members who teach in the areas covered by the questions. The chair of the committee will coordinate the work of the committee. The student will meet with the committee in advance to plan for the comprehensive exam. The committee will review the courses completed by the student, determine which courses and areas will be examined, compose the questions for the examination and grade the exam. If necessary, the committee may call upon other members of the faculty with appropriate expertise.

### **What happens if the student does not pass?**

The examination is graded on a “pass/fail” basis. Although we expect students to pass the comprehensive examination, provision is made for a person who fails to try again. If a student passes one part but not the other, then only the failed part must be retaken. The examination cannot be taken during the summer months.

If a student fails one or all parts a second time, the student cannot graduate and is no longer eligible to remain in the program. Only in rare cases, in response to a petition documenting highly unusual circumstances (e.g., severe illness), will a student be permitted more than two attempts.

## How should one prepare for the comprehensive examination?

The way to prepare successfully for the comprehensive examination is no great secret. The key is to assemble and systematically review the material learned in the various courses taken in the Manship School, and to supplement that knowledge with additional self-selected readings pertaining to your area of concentration. It is recommended that students begin early to compile a list of books and articles read during the program, and present this list to the committee for discussion when preparing for the examination.

A number of steps can be suggested as an effective way to proceed. These include the following ten tips:

1. Begin your preparation well in advance. Experience elsewhere has shown that those who fail usually do not begin systematic study until shortly before the examination. They simply do not have enough time for adequate review of everything they have studied during their degree program.
2. Form "study groups" with other students who will be taking similar parts of the examination. This is a strategy well-known to medical and law students who must master large bodies of complex material to pass their professional examinations. A division of labor can be formed whereby each member of such a group can take responsibility for mastering special sections of the material. They can then aid their colleagues in mastering that part of the material.
3. Try to gain a perspective on the kinds of issues and questions that usually come up in the examinations. Talk to students who have taken the Master's Comprehensive Examination and see what they experienced.
4. Take good notes in every class. Save those notes and use them as a basis for review well in advance of the examination.

5. Keep textbooks that were used in your courses and review the major issues that they explain well in advance of the examination.
6. Acquire and read any good “classics” or “source books” that have been discussed or recommended by the faculty from whom you have taken courses. These should be part of your personal professional library in any case.
7. One major difference between a very impressive answer to a question and one that is marginal is the student’s ability to mention the source of a major idea, concept, theory or strategy, as opposed to merely describing it. Thus, preparation of note cards or other summaries of major ideas and where they came from is an invaluable aid to preparation.
8. The key to gaining a command of a complex body of material is to write summaries of major ideas. Writing such summaries helps to embed the knowledge in memory.
9. Well-prepared summaries, written by you on cards, a notebook or a computer, are the best basis for study in the days just before the examination.
10. Relax and get a good night’s sleep on the night before the examination. Avoid excesses and rest thoroughly. If you do not know the material by now, it is too late!

**What are the specific logistics of the examination?**

The comprehensive examination is administered at the end of the fall and spring semesters (and before the start of final exams). The student’s exam committee will determine the dates of the student’s exams and oral defense, in consultation with both the student and the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. Students must request permission to take the

comprehensive examination at the beginning of the semester in which they expect to take the exam. Please note the Graduate School deadlines for this, which are typically during the first two weeks of the semester. The LSU Graduate School form used to request permission is called “Request for Master’s Examination,” and is available on the Graduate School’s web site under: Enrolled Students → Forms → Request for Master’s Exam.

Here’s the form’s URL: [https://www.lsu.edu/graduateschool/files/enrolled-student-forms/rqst\\_for\\_masters\\_defense\\_and\\_degree\\_audit.pdf](https://www.lsu.edu/graduateschool/files/enrolled-student-forms/rqst_for_masters_defense_and_degree_audit.pdf)

The form requires the signature of the committee chair, the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and the Graduate School Dean. If more than one student per semester is taking the comprehensive exam, the committees and the Associate Dean may opt to have the exams occur on the same date/time.

The examination consists of 2 four-hour sessions (typically 8am-12pm and 12:30pm-4:30pm) separated by a 30-minute break. Students are not permitted to bring any materials into the examination room. Students will take the exam in a pre-determined location at the Manship School, and use a computer supplied by the Manship School. The computer will have no access to the Internet. The School will provide students, at the time of the exam, with a portable USB drive that they can use to save their answers and submit to the committee at the end of the process.

The morning session covers most of the required core courses taken by all students in the program:

MC 7001 Research Methods in Mass Communication

MC 7002 Mass Communication Philosophy and Principles

MC 7021 Mass Communication Theory

The afternoon session covers any remaining required core courses and courses in the student's specific area of concentration – such as public relations, advertising, journalism, political communication, etc. For example, these courses may include:

MC 7005 Public Opinion

-AND-

Two MC track or elective courses

Generally, students may expect three essay questions in the morning session, and three in the afternoon. If that is the case, students should assume they have approximately one hour to answer each question. However, students may also receive a case study followed by several specific questions, or other type of exam question or format.

During the written exam, be sure to save work frequently during the exam period to avoid the loss of any work in the event of a problem, power disruption, etc.

The oral examination must be scheduled within two weeks of the written examination.

### **How can I get more information?**

Questions can be addressed to the Chair of the comprehensive examination committee or to the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, Dr. Yongick Jeong.

### **How do I sign up for the examination?**

You must request permission to take the comprehensive examination from the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies no later than the beginning of the semester in which you expect to take the examination, and notify the Chair of the examination committee of your intention to take the exam. In addition, a Request for Final Examination must be submitted to the Graduate School per the directions in the “logistics” section of this document.



Please note: If any degree requirement is not satisfied by your courses and any approved petitions, you will not be permitted to take the comprehensive examination. Petitions to waive or substitute courses must have been approved prior to the exam. You must also complete all forms for graduation and submit them to the Graduate School by the appropriate deadlines.