MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
MERIDIAN
SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS
Health Service Psychology

Guidelines for the Doctoral Preliminary/ Comprehensive Examinations

Doctor of Psychology (PsyD)

Guidelines for the Doctoral
Preliminary/Comprehensive Examinations (PCE)

To assure full understanding of the PCE policies and procedures, the student must read this guideline, *Mississippi State University (MSU) Graduate Catalog*, which can be obtained at http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/. Also, the student should review the MSU Student Honor Code Operational Procedures Manual, which can be obtained at https://www.honorcode.msstate.edu/pdf/New_SHC_Operational_Procedures.pdf.

This manual is intended to provide guidance to the doctoral student regarding the preliminary examination process that is required prior to the student's internship and as a component of the requirements for the doctoral degree of psychology in Combined Health Service Psychology (CHSP). This set of examinations is intended to evaluate the CHSP doctoral student across the discipline specific knowledge and profession wide competencies in health service psychology identified by the CHSP core faculty and the American Psychological Association (APA) Commission on Accreditation's (CoA) Standards of Accreditation (SoA) and those expectations presented in the *MSU-Meridian Combined Health Service Psychology Programs Graduate Student Handbook*.

The purposes of the doctoral examinations are for the CHSP doctoral student to demonstrate: (a) thorough mastery of the current field of study supported by literature and/or related research; (b) understanding of the relationships among the various areas of the field of study and/or related fields of study; (c) the ability to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate knowledge gained in relation to problems encountered in the field(s) of study; and (d) the ability to present answers in an organized and grammatically acceptable fashion.

As such, with the overarching theme of the MSU-M CHSP Doctoral Program, the student will be expected to show evidence of professional orientation and data-driven problem-solving abilities within the following articulated objectives in four major areas:

1. **Assessment**.
   Objective. Students must demonstrate knowledge and skills relative to the evaluation process and procedures with competencies in: (a) individual-level assessment, and (b) system-level assessment.
2. **Consultation and Intervention**.
   Objective. Students must demonstrate knowledge and skills relative to the provision of service through competencies in: (a) consultation, systems, and program evaluation; and (b) the provision of intervention services with skills relevant within health service psychology.
3. **Research and Statistics**.
   Objective. Students must demonstrate knowledge and skills relative to: (a) research design, implementation, and interpretation; (b) use of appropriate statistical procedures within research applications; and (c) theoretical framework related to current literature.
4. **Professional Issues and Supervision**.
   Objective. Students must demonstrate knowledge and skills relative to ethical and professional practice, supervision, and teaching of health service psychology.

Written Preliminary/Comprehensive Examination (WPCE)

The WPCE is scheduled during the early fall semester to facilitate students' application for internship opportunities. The student is to complete the WPCE independently and should not seek input from their major professor or other faculty. Should the student determine that clarification is needed regarding the assigned topic, they should petition the program director who will then seek input from the CHSP core faculty regarding the student's request. Also, the student will be required to sign a statement indicating he/she will adhere to the MSU Student Honor Code (see attached form). See below for additional requirements.

AT LEAST 2 WEEKS BEFORE THE WPCE IS SCHEDULED, the student must apply through the CHSP Program Director and Department's Graduate Coordinator to take the WPCE as directed on the program calendar. Doctoral students should read the information regarding both the written and oral portions of the Preliminary/Comprehensive Examination in the *MSU Graduate Bulletin*. Also, to be eligible to take the PCE for the Doctor of Psychology in CHSP degree, students must:

1. be within six-hours of completing all didactic course work* (exclusive of practicum/internship and capstone research hours);

2. have completed all research skill requirements (i.e., completion of research course work, presentation at a national conference or submission of a manuscript for publication);

3. have met the minimum level of achievement for all required discipline specific knowledge areas;

4. have the Capstone topic approved by their advisor (the formal capstone proposal does not have to have been approved); and

5. be enrolled for a minimum of one semester hour of credit during the semester in which the preliminary/comprehensive examination is administered.

*A student enrolled in more than six (6) hours of course work during the term but who will have completed all course work (excluding practicum, capstone project and internship courses) by the end of the semester term may be eligible to take the Written Preliminary Examination during the semester administration of the examination (assuming that all other prerequisites for eligibility have been satisfied).

WPCE Content. The student must obtain approval from his or her major advisor and Department Graduate Coordinator to take the WPCE. The WPCE is constructed as a publication quality manuscript developed independently by the student. Once approval to take the WPCE has been obtained, the student should develop a topic to be approved by their major advisor that will result in an outline of the contents of the manuscript (see example on page 11). Generally, it is recommended that this topic be related to the student's capstone topic. It is highly recommended that the student meets with their major professor to obtain guidance in the development of the outline. This outline must be submitted to student's capstone major advisor and the program director according to the dates established by the program for the fall semester. The faculty will, through examination of the outline and faculty consensus, identify an aspect of the outline for the

student to focus upon for the written comprehensive exam. It is expected that the student will provide a comprehensive examination of a topic related to the submitted outline leading to a 20 to 25 page manuscript (excluding the title page, reference section, and support figures/tables) that demonstrates the student's ability to identify the most important aspects of a topic (e.g., themes, theories, and trends), and integrate interpretations of research of that topic within a cohesive written product. Through discussions between the advisor and the student's capstone committee members, a topic for the WPCE will be determined, and the CHSP program director and/or the student's major advisor will provide the student with a letter/email identifying the topic and granting approval for the WPCE. This letter/email and the student's submitted outline will be placed in the student's file. Once approval of the outline is granted, the student will have four (4) weeks to complete the manuscript (see the program calendar for exact due dates). The format should follow APA style. The manuscript should have the attached title page as the first page (see example on page 12), and references should be complete and comprehensive. Any included tables and figures can either be incorporated into the manuscript or placed at the end (as is required under APA guidelines). For the WPCE, it is expected that all submitted work will be produced by the student themself. Use of a Generative AI tool to complete the WPCE constitutes academic dishonesty and will be reported as an Honor Code Violation. The student will need to submit electronic copies to their major advisor and the program director by the date specified in the outline approval letter and on the program calendar. The program director will provide copies to all members who serve on the student's capstone committee and any outside scorer for grading.

Withdrawal from WPCE. A student may elect to withdraw from the WPCE process prior to the deadline submission. If the student elects to withdraw from the WPCE process, the student must provide a notification in writing via email or letter to his/her major advisor and the program director 5 calendar days prior to the submission deadline. **Any student who elects to withdraw from the WPCE process will be required to resubmit a new application and outline for a new topic.**

WPCE Grading Process. The student's capstone committee will read the submitted manuscript using the attached scoring rubric. Grading will be obtained in the following manner: The faculty will independently read and score the manuscript. The Total Score will be averaged across all graders. A mean Total Score of 2 or above is considered passing. If a student obtains a non-pass Total Score and there is a greater than 1-point difference between any of the scores, the ratings from an outside scorer will be used to provide an outside evaluation of the student's work. This grade will be added to the scores of the other faculty, and all scores will be averaged. Submitted work may be filtered through an AI writing and/or plagiarism detection tool. ***If there is evidence that the student received assistance with the writing during the process or is suspected of academic dishonesty, then the student's actions will be reported to the MSU Student Honor Code Office and the notification of the WPCE results may be delayed.*** **Any student who fails to submit the WPCE by the deadline outlined in the letter/email and the approved outline will receive a score of non-pass.**

Evaluation Criteria for WPCE

The capstone committee and the outside reviewer will review the written document/manuscript and students will be graded across 4 major areas with regard to the WPCE which include the following:

1. **Introduction and Conceptual Framework for the Manuscript (20%).** Provide an

introduction of the topic, a brief rationale for the importance of the topic, and review of the major components included in the manuscript. The conceptual framework identifies the major concepts for the reader and shows their relationships to one another. It is important to note that this information will be discussed in more detail in the literature review section of the manuscript. *The student should also prepare the reader by discussing the major components that will be included in the manuscript*. **The goal of this component of the manuscript is to demonstrate the ability to provide an overview of a topic of interest to the student and that the overview will prepare and guide the reader for the elements to follow within the manuscript.**

2. **Review of Major Theories, Models, Concepts, and Terms (20%).** The student should provide an expanded discussion of the major theories, theoretical framework, professional models, and basic concepts related to the topic. *The student should clearly integrate key theories and research models as appropriate to the topic*. Finally, this section should address any important key terms used in this literature base and may include professional jargon, technical language, or specific words or phrases unique to the topic. **The goal of this component of the manuscript is to succinctly identify and examine key aspects (e.g., theories, models, concepts) as a foundation for the topic.**

3. **Review of Important Research Bases and Related Studies (40%).** The student should review relevant <u>key</u> research studies related to the selected topic. When conducting this review the student should identify pivotal areas for in-depth coverage and integrate the findings or, perhaps, relevant aspects of the key research in a manner that is not simply a sequential listing of studies and their findings. *The student should focus on at least two themes within the research related* to: (a) overall purpose of the study and related research questions and/or hypotheses, (b) participants and setting, (c) methodology, design, and/or statistical procedures used to address the research questions or hypotheses, (d) independent variables, procedures, and materials, (e) dependent variables including operational definitions, (e) reliability and treatment integrity information (if reported), (f) results including a discussion of statistical and visual analyses, (g) discussion of the practice and research implications of the study as well as how the findings support or refute previous research efforts, (h) limitations including threats to internal and external validity, and (i) suggestions for future research provided by the researcher(s). **The goal of this section of the manuscript is to exhibit the ability to identify <u>key research</u>, to provide comprehensive coverage of the <u>relevant research</u> on a topic of importance to the student and <u>evaluate and integrate research</u> into a cohesive manuscript.**

4. **Summary, Clarity, Organization, and Adherence to APA Style (20%).** The student should provide a summary section that integrates all of the important literature into the specific focus on the proposed research topic. The faculty will also evaluate the student's clarity in presenting the written material and adherence to the current guidelines established for theses and dissertations at Mississippi State University as well as the current edition of the APA style manual. **The goal of this component of the manuscript is to demonstrate skills relevant to the written product (e.g., organization and coherence in the presentation of information, ability to provide summaries, adherence to editorial standards of the field of health service psychology).**

The following scale provides the ratings appropriate to the quality of the required elements:

1 = “Below Expectations”: Student does not meet expectations at the doctoral level (e.g., the area has not been adequately addressed as outlined within the requirements and goals of the component).

2 = “Meets Expectations”: Student meets expectations at the doctoral level (e.g., the requirements and goals for the component were adequately addressed).

3 = “Exceeds Expectations”: Student demonstrates exceptional skill that exceeds expectations at the doctoral level (e.g., exceptional skill demonstrated with regard to the requirements and goals for the component).

Faculty may choose to use incremental scoring (e.g., 2.5 for areas that meet expectations at a high level). Students will receive the average of the faculty’s scores for each component and must attain an overall average threshold of 2.0 “Meets Expectations” or higher to pass the WPCE.

Failure to Pass the WPCE

If a student fails the examination, he or she will be required to take the entire examination again at the next WPCE administration. Before students take the examination a second time, they must meet with their advisor to develop a written remediation plan designed to assist in passing the WPCE. This plan may include taking additional course work, auditing courses, scheduling regular meetings with their advisor (notably the advisor cannot offer editorial comments to the manuscript beyond those made within the WPCE process in response to the original submitted manuscript), completing and summarizing assigned readings, writing position papers, etc. These remediation steps are extremely important and the documented plan and accompanying evidence (as appropriate) will be placed in the student’s file. *A student who fails the WPCE twice will be dismissed from the program.*

Appeal Process

If the student fails to pass and wishes to appeal the findings, he or she would have to follow School of Health Professions and MSU guidelines to appeal a failed WPCE (see *MSU Graduate Catalog*).

Oral Preliminary/Comprehensive Examination (OPCE)

OPCE Content. The student's capstone committee will conduct the OPCE. Each committee member will be given an opportunity to question the student using a prepared list by the CHSP core faculty that has been determined to be relevant to the field of health service psychology, specifically clinical, counseling and school psychology. The OPCE needs to be scheduled immediately (typically within 2 weeks, see the program calendar for exact dates) after notification from the CHSP program director that the WPCE has been passed.

The student is expected to demonstrate knowledge in the four major areas listed on page 1 (i.e., assessment, consultation and intervention, research and statistics, and professional issues and supervision). Adequate performance in the OPCE requires the ability to think quickly, orally express ideas and thoughts fluently and competently, and express opinions in a well-articulated, logical, and comprehensible manner. The student will be expected to demonstrate (a) thorough familiarity with psychology literature; (b) understanding of the relationships among the various areas of related fields; (c) general knowledge and training including the ability to apply, synthesize, and evaluate relevant knowledge; and (d) specific professional orientation to the field of psychology.

The student's capstone committee will meet immediately at the completion of the student's OPCE to evaluate the student's performance across all aspects of the examination process. The committee will determine whether the student's performance shows adequate understanding of the required knowledge- and skill-base to be allowed to move forward with internship requirements. If the committee agrees that the student demonstrates all appropriate knowledge/skills, they will provide the student with documentation to show successful completion of the OPCE.

Withdrawal from OPCE. A student may elect to withdraw from the OPCE process prior to the scheduled time. If the student elects to withdraw from the OPCE process, the student must provide notification in writing via email or letter to his/her major advisor and the program director prior to the scheduled time. **Any student who elects to withdraw from the OPCE process will be required to contact the program director to schedule an alternative time.**

OPCE Grading Process. The student's capstone committee will evaluate the student using the attached scoring rubric. Grading will be obtained in the following manner: The faculty will independently score the student's oral responses to all questions collectively. The Total Score will be averaged across all graders. A mean Total Score of 2 or above is considered passing. ***If there is evidence or suspicion of academic dishonesty, then the student's actions will be reported to MSU Student Honor Code Office.*** **Any student who fails to participate in OPCE at the scheduled time and fails to submit a notification of withdrawal in writing will receive a score of non-pass.**

Evaluation Criteria for the OPCE

The capstone committee will evaluate the students with questions across four major areas (i.e., assessment, consultation and intervention, research and statistics, and professional issues and supervision) with regard to the OPCE which include the following:

1. **Provide an Understanding of Conceptual Framework for Oral Defense (20%).** Provide

an introduction of the topic/question, a brief rationale for the importance of the topic/question, and review of the major components. The conceptual framework identifies the major concepts and shows their relationships to one another. **The goal of this component is to demonstrate the ability to provide an overview of a topic and that the overview will prepare and guide the listener for the elements to follow within the oral defense.**

2. **Reference Major Theories, Models, Concepts, and Terms in Oral Defense (20%).** The student should provide an expanded discussion of the major theories, theoretical framework, professional models, state/federal regulations, and basic concepts related to the topic/question. The student should clearly integrate key theories and research models as appropriate to the topic/question. Finally, the student should discuss any important key terms used in this literature base and may include professional jargon, technical language, or specific words or phrases unique to the topic/question. **The goal of this component is to succinctly identify and examine key aspects (e.g., theories, models, concepts) as a foundation for the topic.**

3. **Reference Relevant and Important Research Bases and Related Studies in Oral Defense (40%).** The student should discuss relevant key research studies related to the selected topic. When discussing the topic/question, the student should identify pivotal areas for in-depth coverage and integrate the findings or, perhaps, relevant aspects of the key research in a manner that demonstrates the ability to defend responses with empirical evidence and/or state/federal legislation. **The goal of this component is to exhibit the ability to identify key research, to provide comprehensive coverage of the relevant research on a topic of importance to the student and integrate this research into an oral response.**

4. **Demonstrate Clarity, Data-based Problem Skills; Well Organized and Integrated Arguments in Oral Defense (20%).** The student should provide an overall summary that integrates all of the important literature into the specific focus on the proposed area. The faculty will also evaluate the student's clarity in presenting oral responses and adherence to adequate use of grammar during oral responses. **The goal of this component is to demonstrate skills relevant to the oral response (e.g., organization and coherence in the oral presentation of information, ability to provide summaries, and adherence to rules of grammar).**

The following scale provides the ratings appropriate to the quality of the required elements:

1 = "Below Expectations": Student does not meet expectations at the doctoral level (e.g., the area has not been adequately addressed as outlined within the requirements and goals of the component).

2 = "Meets Expectations": Student meets expectations at the doctoral level (e.g., the requirements and goals for the component were adequately addressed).

3 = "Exceeds Expectations": Student demonstrates exceptional skill that exceeds expectations for doctoral students with the advance status (e.g., exceptional skill demonstrated with regard to the requirements and goals for the component).

Faculty may choose to use incremental scoring (e.g., 2.5 for areas that meet expectations at a high level). Students will receive the average of the faculty's scores for each component and must attain an overall average threshold of 2.0 "Meets Expectations" or higher to pass the OPCE.

Failure to Pass the OPCE

If a student fails the OPCE, he or she will be required to retake the OPCE. Before students take the examination a second time, the student is required to attend a meeting with his or her advisor to develop, and file with the CHSP program director, a written remediation plan designed to assist in passing the OPCE. This plan may include taking additional course work, auditing courses, scheduling regular meetings with the advisor, completing and summarizing assigned readings, writing position papers, etc. These remediation steps are extremely important and the documented plan with accompanying documentation (as appropriate) will be placed in the student's file. A student who fails the OPCE twice will be dismissed from the program.

Appeal Process

If the student fails to pass and wishes to appeal the findings, he or she would have to follow School of Health Professions and MSU guidelines in an attempt to appeal a failed OPCE (see the *Graduate Catalog*).

There are a number of policies and rules regarding the OPCE. They appear most succinctly in the *Graduate Catalog*. Once again, students are urged to know these rules and policies.

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MSU Student Honor Code

"As a Mississippi State University student I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do."

During the PCE process, it is expected that all submitted work has been produced by me. Use of a Generative AI tool to complete the written and/oral assignments constitutes academic dishonesty and I understand that any violation will be reported as an Honor Code Violation.

My signature below indicates that I will adhere to the MSU Student Honor Code, and I have carefully and thoroughly read all the requirements outlined in the *MSU-Meridian Combined Health Service Psychology Program Guidelines for the Preliminary/Comprehensive Examinations*.

_____ _____
Graduate Student's Signature Date

_____ _____
Major Advisor's Signature Date

Sample WPCE Outline

I. Trauma and the School Setting (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, & Santos, 2015; Little, & Akin-Little, 2013)

II. Interpersonal Problem Solving Model (D'Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971)

III. Overview of Trauma
- a. Common types of trauma (Brock et al., 2016)
  - i. Human-caused
  - ii. Natural disasters
  - iii. Summary
- b. Protective and Risk Factors
  - i. Protective Factors
    1. Coping Strategies (Hofman, Hahn, Tirabassi, & Gaher, 2016; Park, Chang, & You, 2015)
  - ii. Risk Factors
    1. Environmental Factors (Eslinger, Sprang, & Otis, 2015)
  - iii. Proximity Exposure to Trauma
    1. Physical (Pynoos, Frederick, Nader, Arroyo, Steinberg, Eth, & ... Fairbanks, 1987)
    2. Emotional (Galea, Ahern, Resnick, Kilpatrick, Bucuvalas, Gold, & Vlahov, 2002)
- c. Child and Adolescent Outcomes of Trauma (Armsworth & Holaday, 1993; Deković, Koning, Stams, & Buist, 2008; Overstreet & Mathews, 2011; Porche, Fortuna, Lin & Alegria, 2011)
  - i. Academic (Porche, Costello, & Rosen-Reynoso, 2016)
  - ii. Behavioral (Snyder, Roberts, Crusto, Connell, Griffin, Finley, & Kaufman, 2012)
  - iii. Emotional (Hopfinger, Berking, Bockting, & Ebert, 2016)
  - iv. Social (Powell & Bui, 2016)

IV. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- a. DSM-5 Criteria for PTSD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)
- b. PTSD in children and adolescents (Evans & Oehler-Stinnett, 2006; Luthra et al., 2009)

V. Assessment of PTSD (Meyer, Gold, Beas, Young, & Kassam-Adams, 2015)

Example Title Page

CONDUCT PROBLEMS AND ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER IN ADOLESCENT PSYCHOPATHY

By

Excellent A. Student

A Written Examination Manuscript
Submitted to the Combined Health Service Psychology Faculty at
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Psychology
in Combined Health Service Psychology with a Concentration in Clinical, Counseling or School Psychology
in the Department of Health Service Psychology at the Meridian Campus.

Topic Approved:

_____	_____
Major Advisor's Name, Ph.D. Assistant/Associate Professor or Professor (Major Advisor)	Program Director's Name, Ph.D. Assistant/Associate Professor or Professor (Program Director)

Combined Health Service Psychology
Doctoral Written Examination Evaluation Sheet

(To be completed by Individual Committee Member)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

COMPONENT	RATING		
	1	2	3
Introduction and Conceptual Framework for the Manuscript (20%).			
Review of Major Theories, Models, Concepts, Terms (20%).			
Review of Important Literature Bases and Related Studies (40%).			
Summary, Clarity, and Organization (20%).			
Total Score of Overall Rating (Total of points for each section)			

Comments:

Faculty Reviewer: _____

Combined Health Service Psychology
Doctoral Written Examination Composite Evaluation Sheet

(To be completed by Program Director)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

COMPONENT	RATER					
	1	2	3	4	5	Ave
Introduction and Conceptual Framework for the Manuscript (20%).						
Review of Major Theories, Models, Concepts, Terms (20%).						
Review of Important Literature Bases and Related Studies (40%).						
Summary, Clarity, and Organization (20%).						
Total Score of Overall Rating (Average of the averaged points for each section)						

Comments:

Faculty Reviewers: _____

Combined Health Service Psychology
Doctoral Oral Examination Evaluation Sheet

(To be completed by Individual Committee Member)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

COMPONENT	Rating (1=Below Expectations; 2=Meets Expectations; 3=Exceeds Expectations)				
	Assessment	Consultation & Intervention	Research & Statistics	Professional Issues & Supervision	Ave Rating
Provided an Understanding of Conceptual Framework for Oral Defense (20%).					
Referenced Major Theories, Models, Concepts, and/or Terms in Oral Defense (20%).					
Referenced Relevant and Important Literature Bases, Related Studies, and Key Theorists/Research in Oral Defense (40%).					
Demonstrated Clarity, Data-based Problem Skills; Well Organized and Integrated Arguments in Oral Defense (20%).					
Total Score of Overall Rating					

Comments:

Faculty Reviewer: _____

Combined Health Service Psychology
Doctoral Oral Examination Composite Evaluation Sheet

(To be completed by Program Director)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

COMPONENT	RATER					
	1	2	3	4	5	Ave
Provided Conceptual Framework for Oral Defense (20%).						
Referenced Major Theories, Models, Concepts, and Terms in Oral Defense (20%).						
Cited Relevant and Important Literature Bases, Related Studies, and Key Theorists/Research in Oral Defense (40%).						
Demonstrated Clarity, Data-based Problem Skills; Well Organized and Integrated Arguments in Oral Defense (20%).						
Total Score of Overall Rating (Average of the averaged points for each section)						

Comments:

Signature of Program Director: _____