

PhD Program Candidacy Exam

Subject: PhD Candidacy Exam

Effective Date: 11/1997

Scope: This policy applies to PhD program students.

Date Reviewed/Revised: 01/2025

Next Scheduled Review Date: 01/2028

Responsible Office: Department of Research

Responsible Executive(s):

- PhD Program Director
- Associate Dean for Research, Chair, Department of Research

I. POLICY AND GENERAL STATEMENT

Policy: The candidacy examination serves as a basis for determining the student's readiness for pursuing dissertation research. The student should demonstrate a command of the theoretical and methodological issues related to research. The candidacy examination is viewed as a continuing step in the educational process, building on previous course work and leading to the development of the dissertation proposal, proposal defense and the dissertation completion.

II. DEFINITIONS

The candidacy examination consists of a written examination and an oral examination. It is expected that together, the written and oral examinations will evidence a command of extant knowledge, and theoretical and methodological issues in the area of research. The exam questions may address:

- A comprehensive review of related literature
- An understanding of health issues, population health/disparities and policy implications
- A summary of theoretical/conceptual foundations
- A critique of methodologies and data analysis strategies
- A synthesis of the knowledge and identification of gaps
- A clear direction for future research in the discipline

The **written exam** is developed by the Candidacy Examination Committee, and the student's response will reflect the most current edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) format.

The **oral examination** focuses on the student's ability to verbally articulate knowledge and understanding of the information gained to date. The oral examination is broader than the written examination to aid in the determination of the student's adequate mastery of the theoretical and methodological foundations to conduct the dissertation research.

Upon successful completion of both components of the Candidacy Exam, the student is admitted as a doctoral **candidate**. This designation indicates that the student has demonstrated a

command of theoretical and methodological knowledge that is foundational to their dissertation work.

The **candidacy examination committee** consists of Research Department faculty who are assigned to the Candidacy Exam course each year.

III. PROCEDURE

Timing in Program: The required candidacy examination is conducted with the approval of the academic advisor or dissertation chair after the student has completed the following courses: N7501, N7530, N7540, N7541, N7542, N7543, N7505 or Statistics Equivalent, N7506 or Statistics Equivalent, N7550 is a co-requisite course. A student may be advised to complete electives and/or cognates prior to taking the candidacy examination. The candidacy examination process takes approximately 13 weeks. Students register for the 1-credit Candidacy Examination (N7590) during the semester the examination is to be taken.

The candidacy examination has two parts, a written and an oral exam. The student must pass both the written and oral examination to be admitted to candidacy.

Prior to the semester in which the student plans to register for the candidacy examination, the student meets with the advisor to discuss their eligibility for the Candidacy Examination. The Candidacy Examination Committee will consist of three Research Department faculty assigned to the Candidacy Examination (N7590) course each year. Advisors are not eligible to serve on their student's candidacy exam committees.

At the start or prior to start of the semester when the student will enroll for candidacy examination, the student meets with the Candidacy Committee to clarify the candidacy examination process and receive the dates for the completion of the written examinations and estimated date for the oral examination.

Process for Candidacy Examination (See Figure 1 & Figure 2): The written exam will be completed on-campus (no later than the 6th week of the semester). The written exam will consist of three questions, proctored and administered in-person over 3 days at the Cizik School of Nursing. Students will receive one question per day and will have 4 hours to formulate their written response to each question. All students will receive the same questions.

The candidacy examination requires independent, original work. The student may not seek assistance from others in completion of the written exam. Students may use resources (e.g., computers, textbooks, articles, etc.) to complete the exam, but must do so independently, without cooperating with other students, consulting faculty, or individuals outside the university.

Within 4 weeks of receiving the written exam, the members of the examination committee will determine whether or not the student passes the written exam. If the student passes the written exam, the date of the oral exam is confirmed (within 1-2 weeks of passing the written exam). If the student fails the written exam, the student fails the candidacy exam, and meets with the Chair of the examination committee to receive feedback; the student may not proceed to the oral examination if they fail the written exam. If eligible, the student may retake the candidacy examination in another semester.

The oral examination allows the student to further demonstrate their command of requisite knowledge for dissertation completion. The oral exam will take place on-campus, and must be completed independently by the student. Students may not bring reference materials or equipment to the oral exam; and a maximum of 1 hour will be allotted for oral exam completion. Committee consensus regarding the student's ability to articulate mastery of foundational research knowledge will constitute a passing grade.

The student is notified of the outcome of the candidacy examination immediately following the oral examination. The student may receive a grade of "Pass" or "Fail." All Candidacy Examination Committee members must agree on the final grade. Students must pass both components of the exam in order to pass the candidacy course; failure of any one, or both components (written or oral) will result in a failing grade for the course. The student who fails either/both exam components may retake the candidacy examination (written and oral) in another semester, if eligible.

Upon successful completion of the candidacy examination, the student is admitted as a candidate for the PhD degree. Students then proceed to dissertation proposal defense and dissertation.

Two attempts to pass the candidacy exam in different semesters are permitted, if eligible. In accordance with the grading policy of the PhD program, the student is dismissed from the PhD program if the second attempt is unsuccessful.

Fig 1. Candidacy Examination Flow Chart

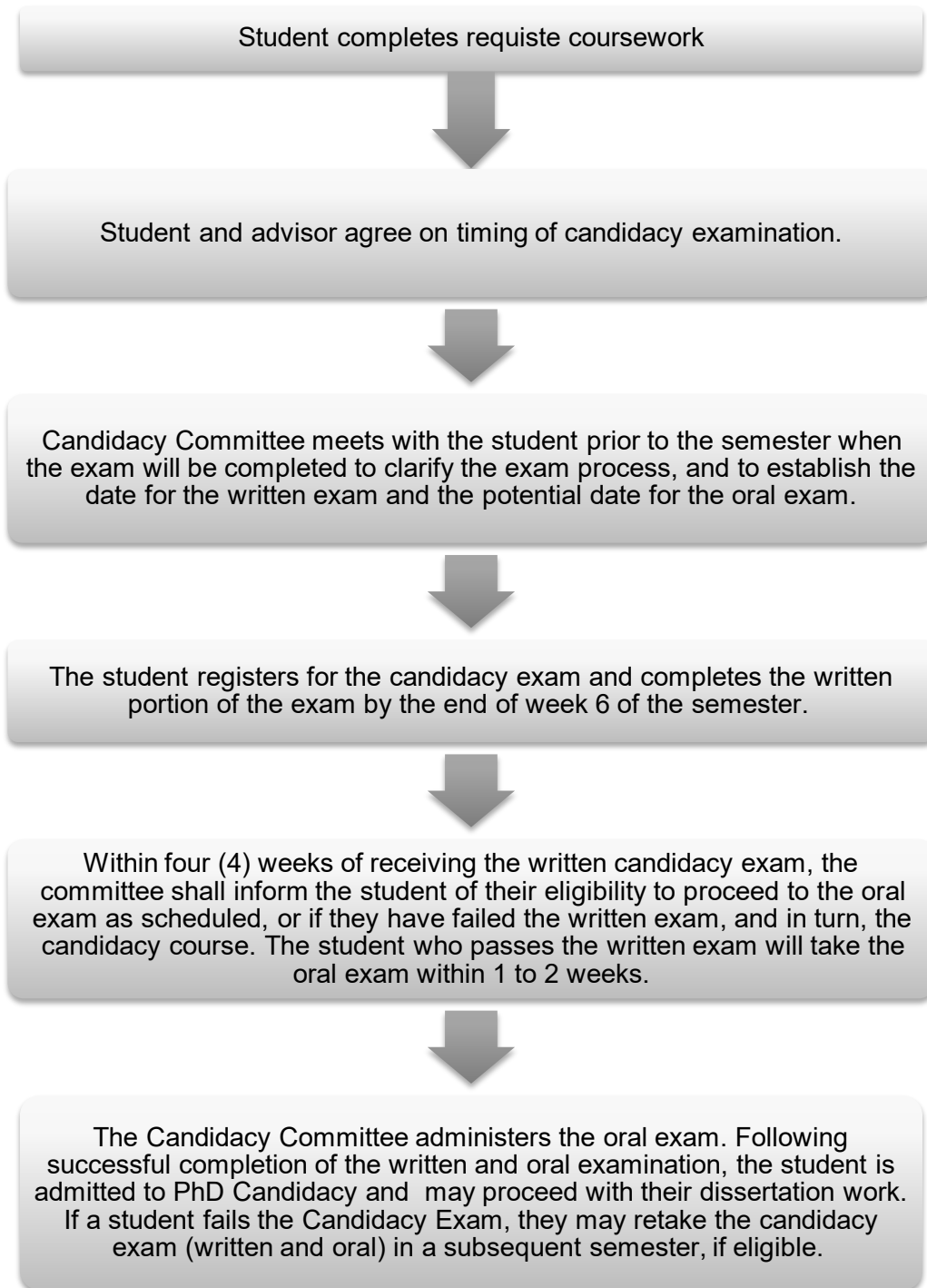
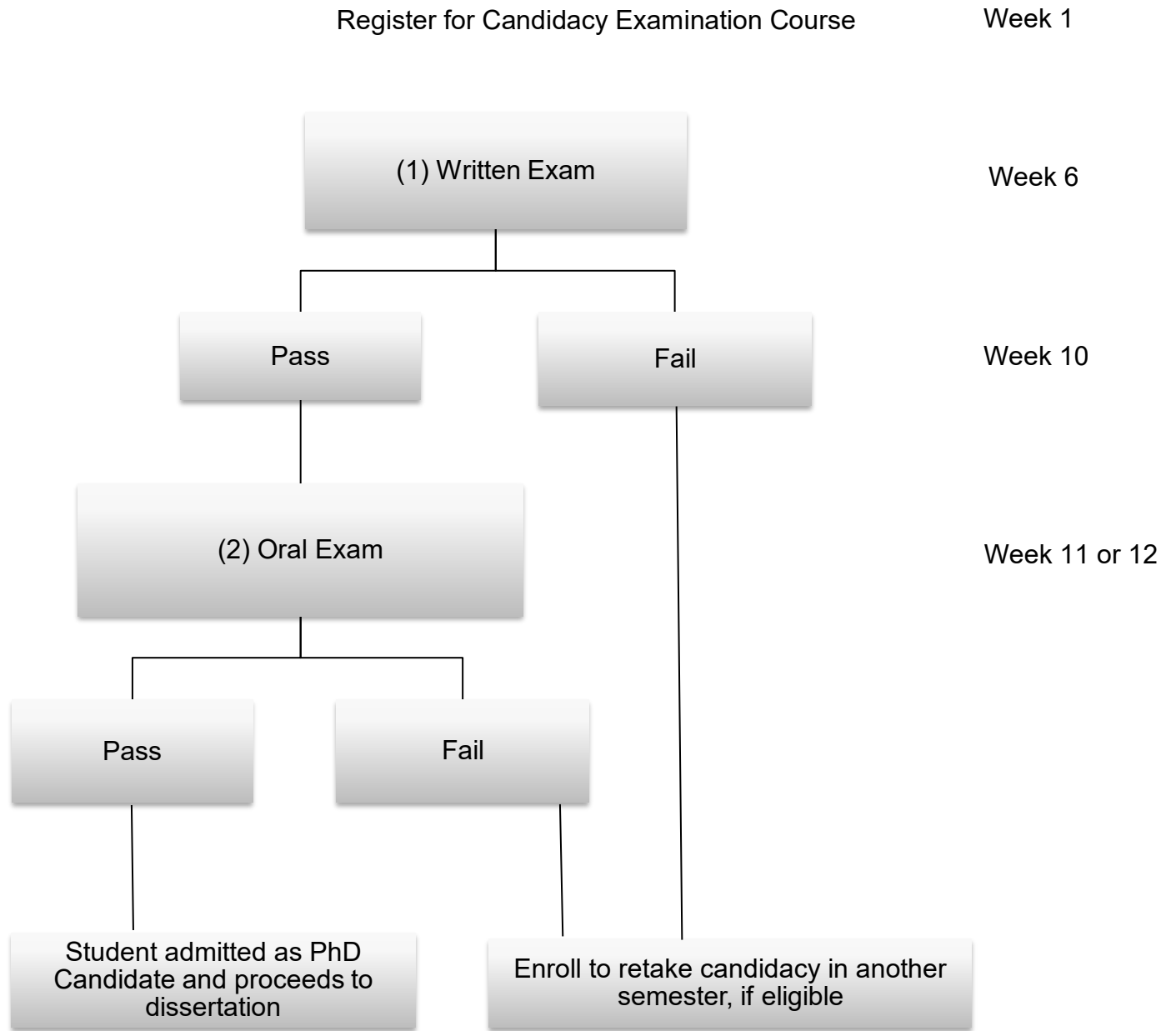


Fig 2. Flow Diagram for Candidacy Examination



IV. CONTACTS

List the phone number and email/web address of the office and/or person who is the subject matter expert on this policy and can answer questions regarding application and interpretation of the policy.

Contact	Telephone	Email/Web Address
Meagan Whisenant, PhD Program Director	713-500-2279	meagan.whisenant@uth.tmc.edu