**Comprehensive examinations**

Comprehensive examination requirements and administration of the thesis/dissertation process vary by program and academic school. Graduate students should refer to the guidelines established by their programs regarding specific program requirements. In addition, graduate students should refer to the thesis and dissertation manual found on the Graduate School website (http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/student/thesis.html) for guidelines regarding the preparation and submission of theses and dissertations and for scheduling the final defense.

Master's degree candidates may have a thesis requirement — or its equivalent in the form of a research project, performance, exhibit or other production. In some programs, master's degree candidates may elect a non-thesis option. In such cases, the program may allow a candidate to change from the thesis to the non-thesis option, or vice versa, once. Such action requires written approval of the department head and the faculty adviser and/or the student's advisory committee.

All doctoral candidates are required to prepare dissertations and the associated additional submission requirements as articulated in the thesis and dissertation manual.

At the time of defense, a thesis or dissertation must be approved by members of a student’s advisory committee with no more than one dissenting committee member. A committee member’s approval is given by signing the ETD approval form (http://graduate.vcu.edu/student/thesis.html). A disapproving committee member must also sign the approval form as a dissenting member and must provide a written dissenting opinion to be sent to the Graduate School.

At the time of defense, a thesis or dissertation must be approved by members of a student’s advisory committee with no more than one negative vote. A committee member’s approval is given by signing the ETD approval form (http://graduate.vcu.edu/student/thesis.html). A disapproving committee member must also sign the approval form as a dissenting member and must provide a written dissenting opinion to be sent to the Graduate School.

**Graduate faculty and affiliate graduate faculty roles and responsibilities**

VCU Graduate School Bylaws (http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/media/graduate-school/docs/pdf/110401-01GraduateSchoolWebsiteBylawsPDF.pdf) articulate eligibility criteria for membership on the graduate faculty and provisions for affiliate graduate faculty appointments. All members of a graduate advisory or thesis or dissertation committee must be a member of the graduate faculty. 

Upon satisfactory completion of all program requirements for admission to candidacy, doctoral matriculants will take written and/or oral comprehensive examinations administered by their major departments or schools. Successful completion of the examinations shall entitle students to advance to doctoral degree candidacy status. Candidates are then allowed to proceed with the research and preparation of their dissertations and any other doctoral degree requirements designated by their departments.

In the event of failure, students may be permitted to retake comprehensive examinations one time only. The re-examination requires the approval of the appropriate graduate program committee.

Revised 5/14/2013
University Graduate Council

**Graduate advisory committees**

Graduate advisory committees shall be appointed for each master’s degree candidate for whom there is a requirement to produce a thesis or its equivalent in the form of a research project, performance, exhibit or other production. The committee will coordinate and supervise the preparation of the thesis or its equivalent. The committee shall have a minimum of three faculty members, one of whom should be from a discipline other than the discipline of the candidate. The chair of the committee will be designated as the candidate’s faculty adviser. Departments/program directors will appoint advisers for master’s degree candidates for whom a thesis or its equivalent is not required. Every member of the committee must hold graduate faculty or affiliate graduate faculty appointment. The chair and at least one other committee member must hold VCU graduate faculty status. It is expected that all members of the committee will be present at any thesis proposal and thesis defense. In the event that a single member of the committee is unable to attend, the committee may meet with the written approval of the graduate program director. If more than one member of the committee is unable to attend, the defense must be rescheduled. The chair must be present for the defense of a thesis proposal and the final thesis.

A graduate dissertation committee shall be appointed for each doctoral candidate. The committee will have a minimum of four faculty members, including a chair, who will serve as the candidate’s faculty adviser. At least two members must be from within the candidate’s discipline and at least one from another discipline. Every member of the committee must hold graduate faculty or affiliate graduate faculty appointment. The chair and at least two other committee members must hold VCU graduate faculty status. It is expected that all members of the committee will be present at the dissertation proposal and dissertation defense. In the event that a single member of the committee is unable to attend, the committee may meet with the written approval of the graduate program director. If more than one member of the committee is unable to attend, the defense must be rescheduled. The chair must be present for the defense of a dissertation proposal and the dissertation defense.

Upon satisfactory completion of all program requirements for admission to candidacy, doctoral matriculants will take written and/or oral comprehensive examinations administered by their major departments or schools. Successful completion of the examinations shall entitle students to advance to doctoral degree candidacy status. Candidates are then allowed to proceed with the research and preparation of their dissertations and any other doctoral degree requirements designated by their departments.

In the event of failure, students may be permitted to retake comprehensive examinations one time only. The re-examination requires the approval of the appropriate graduate program committee.

Revised 5/14/2013
University Graduate Council

**Theses/dissertations**

Graduate advisory committees shall be appointed for each master’s degree candidate for whom there is a requirement to produce a thesis or its equivalent in the form of a research project, performance, exhibit or other production. The committee will coordinate and supervise the preparation of the thesis or its equivalent. The committee shall have a minimum of three faculty members, one of whom should be from a discipline other than the discipline of the candidate. The chair of the committee will be designated as the candidate’s faculty adviser. Departments/program directors will appoint advisers for master’s degree candidates for whom a thesis or its equivalent is not required. Every member of the committee must hold graduate faculty or affiliate graduate faculty appointment. The chair and at least one other committee member must hold VCU graduate faculty status. It is expected that all members of the committee will be present at any thesis proposal and thesis defense. In the event that a single member of the committee is unable to attend, the committee may meet with the written approval of the graduate program director. If more than one member of the committee is unable to attend, the defense must be rescheduled. The chair must be present for the defense of a thesis proposal and the final thesis.

A graduate dissertation committee shall be appointed for each doctoral candidate. The committee will have a minimum of four faculty members, including a chair, who will serve as the candidate’s faculty adviser. At least two members must be from within the candidate’s discipline and at least one from another discipline. Every member of the committee must hold graduate faculty or affiliate graduate faculty appointment. The chair and at least two other committee members must hold VCU graduate faculty status. It is expected that all members of the committee will be present at the dissertation proposal and dissertation defense. In the event that a single member of the committee is unable to attend, the committee may meet with the written approval of the graduate program director. If more than one member of the committee is unable to attend, the defense must be rescheduled. The chair must be present for the defense of a dissertation proposal and the dissertation defense.

Upon satisfactory completion of all program requirements for admission to candidacy, doctoral matriculants will take written and/or oral comprehensive examinations administered by their major departments or schools. Successful completion of the examinations shall entitle students to advance to doctoral degree candidacy status. Candidates are then allowed to proceed with the research and preparation of their dissertations and any other doctoral degree requirements designated by their departments.

In the event of failure, students may be permitted to retake comprehensive examinations one time only. The re-examination requires the approval of the appropriate graduate program committee.

Revised 5/14/2013
University Graduate Council

**Graduate faculty and affiliate graduate faculty roles and responsibilities**

VCU Graduate School Bylaws (http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/media/graduate-school/docs/pdf/110401-01GraduateSchoolWebsiteBylawsPDF.pdf) articulate eligibility criteria for membership on the graduate faculty and provisions for affiliate graduate faculty appointments. All members of a graduate advisory or thesis or dissertation committee must be a member of the graduate faculty or hold an appointment as an affiliate graduate faculty member. All graduate faculty may chair thesis committees; however, only graduate faculty holding the Ph.D. or equivalent degree may chair a dissertation committee. An affiliate graduate faculty member may advise and serve, but not chair, thesis or dissertation committees.

Appointment to affiliate graduate faculty status must clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities and the duration of the appointment. Appointment for purposes of serving on a graduate advisory or thesis and dissertation committee authorizes the affiliate graduate faculty member to fully participate in all activities defined for the group by the individual program guidelines, except for chairing the committee. If the administration and evaluation of comprehensive examinations is explicitly articulated as a responsibility of the graduate advisory or thesis or dissertation committee, then any affiliate graduate faculty appointed to the committee may administer and evaluate the comprehensive examination. If comprehensive examinations are administered and evaluated by a different committee, then an affiliate graduate faculty member may advise and evaluate the comprehensive examination only if such a responsibility is articulated clearly in the recommendation for affiliate graduate faculty membership by the academic school dean and approved by the graduate dean.

Revised 5/10/2011
University Graduate Council
Grades of satisfactory (S), unsatisfactory (U) or fail (F) in thesis and dissertation courses

All thesis and dissertation credits are to be graded each semester as satisfactory (S), unsatisfactory (U) or fail (F). There is no limit to the number of these credits a student may take while pursuing completion of the degree. Receipt of the grade of U is formal notification to the student of unsatisfactory progress. A grade of U is a permanent grade and associated credits do not count toward a degree. Future satisfactory performance following a grade of U is reflected in the assignment of the grade of S in subsequent semesters. A grade of S or U is not included in the calculation of the GPA. A student who receives a final grade of F in the thesis or dissertation will be dismissed from the graduate program. A student who receives three Us in a thesis/dissertation course will be dismissed from the program.

Revised 5/10/2016
University Graduate Council

Electronic theses/dissertations – mandatory

Electronic theses and dissertations are digital representations of the traditional work completed by graduate students in partial fulfillment of requirements for graduate degrees. An ETD can be a simple textual document converted to a standard electronic format such as Adobe PDF or a complex combination of images and formats.

The VCU Graduate School thesis and dissertation website, as developed by the University Graduate Council and VCU Libraries, serves as a guide for the preparation of electronic graduate theses and dissertations for graduate students in all programs within the university. Information and a video tutorial are available online at guides.library.vcu.edu/etd (http://guides.library.vcu.edu/etd).

Thesis/dissertation submission deadlines

All requirements for theses/dissertations must be completed by the deadline published in the Academic Calendar (http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu) of the semester in which the candidate plans to graduate, including:

- Final defense of thesis/dissertation
- ETD approval form with all approval signatures, including the graduate dean’s and, if applicable, documentation of IRB or IACUC approval number
- Submission of the ETD to the VCU Scholar’s Compass according to instructions in the VCU Graduate School thesis and dissertation manual (http://graduate.vcu.edu/student/thesis.html) (Candidate should confirm with adviser/program director all internal schedules for submission of copy, defense and approval.)
- Survey of Earned Doctorates (All doctoral students must complete the SED. In order to complete the survey, go to: https://sed.norc.org/survey. Refer to the Graduate School thesis and dissertation manual (http://graduate.vcu.edu/student/thesis.html) for further information.)
- Publication with ProQuest (All doctoral dissertations must be published with ProQuest. Dissertations are submitted directly by the student through the UMI/ProQuest’s ETD administrator site (http://www.etdadmin.com/cgi-bin/school?siteld=242) for VCU. Submitting to ProQuest does not satisfy the university’s requirement of submission. You must submit to the VCU Scholar’s