



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

College of Medicine

OFFICE OF THE VICE-DEAN RESEARCH
MEDICINE.USASK.CA/RESEARCH.PHP

HEALTH SCIENCES GRADUATE STUDIES MANUAL MAY 2026



Adapted from the 2016 Policies and Procedures of the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology,
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(Last update: May 2025 by Dr. Kiven Erique Lukong and Dr. Stephan Milosavljevic)



Recent Changes

June 2018:

Minimum Stipends introduced (page 6)
Extension to **Scholarship eligibility for PhD Students** (page 6)
Health Sciences Graduate Scholarship (HSGS) introduced (page 7)
Changes to the **Health Sciences Travel Award** (page 9)
Clarification on the role of the **Research Advisory Committee Chair** (page 14)
Comprehensive Exam Formats clarified (page 16)

July 2022:

Introduction of **Mental Health Stream** (page 2)
Addition of Health Sciences **Mission, Vision, and Values** (page 2)
Modification to include **MPT students to qualify for direct-entry PhD** (page 4)
Link to **Application Portal** updated (page 5)
Link to **CGPS Grad Hub** (page 5)
Employment Expectations amended (page 6)
College of Medicine Course List (page 10)
Requirement of **MD-PhD and MPT-PhD students to complete 6 credit units** (page 10)
Addition of **3 credit unit limit for HSC 898** special topic courses (page 10)
Modification to **RAC discretion of additional course work for MD- and MPT- PHD students** (page 10)
HSC 990: timeline for MSc and PhD students clarified; update to number of symposiums offered per year; addition of student responsibility to complete requirement (page 11)
CGPS changes to **Research Advisory Committee structure** (page 14)
Co-Supervisor membership clarified (page 14)
Mandatory requirement of the Student-Supervisor Agreement added (page 15)
Update to **CGPS thesis defense process and timeline** (page 28)
Update to outdated links (various pages)

March 2023:

update to **Minimum Stipends** (page 6)
75th Anniversary Recruitment Scholarship introduced (page 8)

May 2025:

TA opportunities (page 6)
Scholarship awards increase (pages 7-8)
Travel awards clarity (page 9)
Professional Development (page 9)
HSC 990 Symposium Series (page 11)
RAC meetings (pages 12-13)
Conflict resolution (page 15)
Candidacy Assessment replaces the Comprehensive Examination (page 19)
Leaves of Absence (page 30)



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Introduction

The Health Sciences Graduate Program is a unique, research-based program within the College of Medicine, open to students from all departments. MSc and PhD projects in the program primarily investigate translational and/or clinical aspects of human disease, health, healthy living, and/or translational research but may also include more biomedical research projects with clinical translation.

Within the Health Sciences Graduate Program, a Mental Health Stream has recently been introduced in conjunction with the Department of Psychiatry. The stream description, potential supervisors, and course offerings can be found [here](#).

VISION

To establish the Health Sciences Graduate Program as a unique research-based multi-disciplinary program that will continue to attract, retain, train and recognize a diverse group of outstanding graduate students and mentor and transform them into leaders in their respective fields.

MISSION

To enable diverse groups of graduate students to broaden their perspectives on health sciences research and enhance their career options in an ecosystem where wellness and inclusion are prioritized, excellence is promoted and rewarded, researchers and instructors are committed and dedicated, and where integrity and quality of the graduate programs are valued.

VALUES

- Excellence and innovation
- Honesty and integrity
- Mutual respect and collaboration
- Wellness and social responsibility
- Transparency and fairness
- Scientific accountability
- Leadership accountability
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Inclusion with respect

Program Objectives

Upon completion of the Health Sciences Graduate Program, it is anticipated that both MSc and PhD graduates will have acquired extensive knowledge, confidence, and understanding in their area of research. The Health Sciences Graduate Program aims to foster students' curiosity and desire to learn while developing critical research skills relevant to their field. A graduate student in the current research climate should expect an increasing focus on interdisciplinary and collaborative efforts, both of which are essential criteria for working across disciplines in the Health Research field. At the MSc level, a student must demonstrate the ability for independent thought, advanced study, and research. At the PhD level, a student must exhibit these desirable qualities and demonstrate, upon graduation, that they can sustain a research program.



Like all graduate programs at the University of Saskatchewan, the Health Sciences Graduate Program follows the policies and procedures set forth by the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS). This manual, however, outlines specific policies and procedures for the Health Sciences Graduate Program, in addition to those enforced by CGPS.

It is an expectation of CGPS and the Health Sciences Graduate Program that all individuals participating in a Graduate Program in any capacity are familiar with the [policies and procedures](#).

The Health Sciences Graduate Program administration is based within the College of Medicine's Vice Dean Research Office (OVDR). Inquiries regarding the program should be directed to ovdr.grad@usask.ca.

Application and Admission Information

Students who are interested in the Health Sciences Graduate Program should visit the Program's website for more detailed information at:

<https://medicine.usask.ca/students/graduate-programs/health-sciences.php>

The Health Sciences Graduate Program offers **one formal intake** start date, which coincides with most of the major scholarship and award deadlines for the College of Medicine. Students and Supervisors are encouraged to utilize this session to maximize funding opportunities.

Primary Intake, September Start Date:

Application Deadlines (must have all documents received by this date):

	September Intake
International Students	January 15 th
Domestic Students	January 15 th
Approximate Notification	March 15 th

Out-of-Cycle Applicants:

The Health Sciences Graduate Program also accepts applicants out of cycle for all sessions. Out-of-cycle applicants must follow a unique application process initiated by their proposed College of Medicine Supervisor. The proposed Supervisor must contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca a minimum of three months before the session start date. Potential students must have their completed applications submitted no later than two months before the session start date.

	September Intake	January Intake	May Intake
International Students	July 1 st	November 1 st	March 1 st
Domestic Students	July 1 st	November 1 st	March 1 st
Approximate Notification	August 1 st	December 1 st	April 1 st

Any out-of-cycle applications received without prior notification from a supervisor will be removed.



All inquiries regarding start date and admissions policies and procedures should be directed to ovdr.grad@usask.ca.

Entrance Requirements

Master of Science (MSc) Entrance Requirements:

- A four-year bachelor's degree, or equivalent, from a recognized college or university in a relevant academic discipline pertaining to the proposed field of study.
- A cumulative weighted average of at least 70% (equivalent to the USask grade system) over the last two years of study (i.e., 60 credit units) is required.
- Language Proficiency Requirements: Proof of English proficiency may be required for international applicants and those whose first language is not English.
 - Please see the official College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies [policies](#) for detailed information regarding English language proficiency requirements and minimum scores.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Entrance Requirements:

- Master's degree, or equivalent, from a recognized university in a relevant academic discipline
- A cumulative weighted average of at least 70% (USask grading system equivalent) during the last two years of study (i.e., coursework required for the Master's program)
- Language Proficiency Requirements: Proof of English proficiency may be required for international applicants and for applicants whose first language is not English.
- The Health Sciences Graduate Program does **not** offer direct entry to the PhD program for students possessing only a Bachelor's degree. Promising students have the option to apply for the MSc program and complete a qualifying examination to transfer to a PhD program. For more details on this process, please refer to the following resources: [here](#).
- An exception to this rule exists for:
 1. MD students who have applied to the MD-PhD program.
 2. Master of Physical Therapy (MPT) students who have completed their program and are interested in pursuing PhD thesis-based graduate studies.

All complete applications for the Health Sciences Graduate Program are reviewed by the program committee. Please note that meeting the minimum entrance requirements does not guarantee admission to the program.

Applying to the Health Sciences Graduate Program

Prior to beginning an online application, prospective students must secure a College of Medicine faculty Supervisor in their area of research interest. Information about faculty can be obtained from the College of Medicine [faculty directory website](#), and prospective students may visit [here](#) for more information about contacting potential Supervisors. Please note that supervisors within the College of Medicine may not accept students who qualify with the minimum entrance requirements. Applicants for all College of



Medicine awards and many external awards must have and maintain an average of 80% (see the section on Funding below). This may influence a potential supervisor's decision to accept new students.

a supervisor agrees to supervise a potential graduate student, the student may begin an online application for admission to the Health Sciences Graduate Program.

Graduate Program applications are submitted through CGPS via: <https://grad.usask.ca/admissions/how-to-apply.php#Beforeyouapply>

Current and former University of Saskatchewan students can submit their applications through [PAWS](#).

For detailed information about the required admission documentation, please visit the [Health Sciences Graduate Program website](#).

International Applicants

International students will require a study permit to live and study within Canada. Please note that obtaining a study permit may take up to six months, depending on where the application is submitted. For a more accurate application processing time based on your permanent residence, visit the [IRCC](#) website. Visit the Government of Canada website to begin the [study permit application process](#). Issues obtaining a study permit should be communicated to ovdr.grad@usask.ca as soon as possible. Applications may be granted one deferral to the next term. Delays of more than one term will require applicants to reapply.

For further details, please visit the [International Student and Study Abroad Centre](#).

Projected living costs for one year in Saskatoon are approximately \$25,000 to \$30,000 CAD. For details the breakdown of living and tuition costs, please email ovdr.grad@usask.ca.

After Applying

Prospective students will be notified regardless of their admission status. The Health Sciences Graduate Program must adhere to the University of Saskatchewan policy by recommending that potential graduate students be accepted into the program by the CGPS. The CGPS makes the final decision regarding admission to each individual program. If recommended to the CGPS by the Health Sciences Graduate Program, students will receive instructions to forward their official transcripts and English language test results (if applicable) to the CGPS prior to their official admission into the Health Sciences Graduate Program.

Prospective students can [check their application status](#) to ensure that all documentation has been submitted properly. However, the OVDR staff appreciate your patience regarding application processing. Applications will not be withdrawn without first contacting the potential student.

The [CGPS Grad Hub](#) can also be helpful for onboarding and beginning your Health Sciences Graduate Program.



Funding

It is the expectation of the College of Medicine and the Health Sciences Graduate Program that the amount and duration of a student's funding has been discussed with their proposed supervisor prior to submitting their application to the Health Sciences Graduate Program. According to the admission guidelines, the details of this discussion are a required application document that be signed by both the student and the supervisor. Furthermore, graduate students are expected to apply to external and internal funding opportunities for which they are eligible. It is beneficial for both the student and the Supervisor if some or all of the stipend for the student is derived from scholarship or assistantship funds. Support from extramural sources generally provides a higher stipend than support from intramural (University of Saskatchewan) sources. Effective September 1, 2023, all incoming full-time students **must** receive a stipend of \$18,000/year for their first two years of study at the Master's level and \$20,000/year for their first four years at the doctoral level. In the case of a transfer from the Master's to the doctoral level, the doctoral stipend of \$20,000 must be provided for at least two years.

The program recognizes an informal "part-time" status for individuals who are engaged in other healthcare-related professional employment and training commitments. These individuals may request an exemption from the minimum stipend upon admission. Students and supervisors are encouraged to discuss potential strategies for further support beyond these timeframes before admission, noting that most opportunities, including the Health Sciences Graduate Scholarships, require matching funds from the supervisor.

Employment Expectations

Students supported by scholarship and/or grant funds are not encouraged to obtain employment outside their program. The expectation is that such students treat their Graduate Program as a full-time job, spending a minimum of 40 hours per week completing coursework and research. All employment and external funding must be clarified upon entry, as it may affect a student's eligibility to apply for additional funding. **Students are not permitted to engage in separate, paid departmental or non-departmental employment (including teaching) accounting to more than 20 hours/week while receiving scholarship and/or grant funds.** Additional restrictions may be placed on the employment of international students. Such students should familiarize themselves with the legal requirements of their visas.

Teaching Assistant (TA) Opportunities

The Health Sciences Graduate Program at the University of Saskatchewan supports the professional development of its students and recognizes the value of teaching experience. These TA opportunities should be viewed as a means of developing essential skills, including teaching, communication, and time management, which are invaluable for future academic and professional careers. While the program does not offer dedicated Teaching Assistant (TA) positions, students are encouraged to seek TA opportunities in other departments on campus. However, students in the Health Sciences Graduate Program should meet/note the following conditions:

1. **Satisfactory academic progress:** Students must be making satisfactory progress in their thesis research endeavours, as determined by their supervisor.



2. **Consultation and approval:** Students must discuss their intent to pursue TA opportunities with their supervisor and the program's graduate chairs before accepting any offer.
3. **Reporting offers:** Students must report their TA offers to the program coordinator at ovdr.grad@usask.ca for record-keeping purposes.
4. **Workload limit:** The maximum allowable hours for TA work are **20 hours per week**, per broader CGPS guidelines. This limit ensures students balance their teaching duties with their research and academic obligations.
5. **Non-Interference with Research:** TA responsibilities must not interfere with the student's research progress or ability to meet academic milestones.
6. **Contractual terms:** TA positions are paid according to [the collective agreement](#) between the University of Saskatchewan and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), and the duties assigned must align with the terms specified in the employment contract.

Scholarship Opportunities

Health Sciences graduate students may be eligible for several funding opportunities. Students are encouraged to seek out beyond those listed in this manual, and questions regarding funding should be directed to ovdr.grad@usask.ca. For more, please visit the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies [Award Index](#) and the [College of Medicine Funding Opportunities](#).

Please note that the College of Medicine adheres to the following general policies:

All recipients must have a minimum of 80% GPA in the last two years of complete study or the last 60 credits units, be in good academic standing, and be fully qualified/full-time.

Scholarship holders must not exceed the time in the program:

- MSc without Thesis: 24 months
- MSc with Thesis: 36 months
- PhD: 60 months
- PhD Transfer: 60 months

For questions regarding these policies, please contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca.

Health Sciences Graduate Program Opportunities

The Health Sciences Graduate Scholarship

The Health Sciences Graduate program is pleased to offer the Health Sciences Graduate Scholarship (HSGS). The HSGS consists of a limited number of matching scholarships targeting students in the upper years of their program. MSc students are eligible for funding in year two; PhD students are eligible for funding in years three and four. The scholarships at both levels will be awarded to the strongest applicants, of program type, and both are considered matching scholarships requiring supervisor support. The award amounts are as follows:

- MSc: \$25,000 total
 - \$12,500 awarded/ minimum \$12,500 provided by the student's Supervisor
- PhD: \$30,000 total
 - \$15,000 awarded/ minimum \$15,000 provided by the student's Supervisor



The 75th Anniversary Recruitment Scholarship is also available in conjunction with the increased minimum stipend requirements for MSc and PhD students in the Health Sciences Graduate Program. For more information, please see the [Health Sciences Graduate Student Funding Policy here](#). The award amounts are as follows:

- MSc: \$25,000 total for 1 year
 - no match is provided by the student's Supervisor
- PhD: \$30,000 total for 1 year
 - no match is provided by the student's Supervisor

The 75th Anniversary Recruitment Scholarships must be awarded to both MSc and PhD students in units of \$20,000/year. MSc and PhD awards will be topped up to \$25,000/year and \$30,000/year, respectively, using other funding available through the HSGS.

The HSGS and 75th Anniversary Recruitment Scholarship competition runs each spring, following the college-wide CoMGRAD competition. For more details regarding these opportunities, please visit the [College of Medicine Funding Opportunities](#).

College of Medicine Opportunities

College of Medicine Graduate Student Awards (CoMGRAD)

The purpose of these awards is to provide support to graduate students and faculty supervisors from the College of Medicine (CoM) who demonstrate a passion for research that has been or will be, translated into advancements in science. This project is administered by the Office of the Vice Dean Research the CoM's profile by increasing dynamic research projects being completed by competitively selected individuals. The CoMGRAD serves as the Health Sciences entry award.

In its inaugural year, the CoMGRAD was a stand-alone, fully funded award supported by the College of Medicine's Vice Dean Research Office. Since then, the CoMGRAD has been adapted to offer a larger number of qualified students the opportunity for funding. The CoMGRAD is now a cost-sharing award to which the applicant's supervisors are expected to contribute. The award amounts are as follows:

- MSc: \$25,000 total
 - \$12,500 awarded/ minimum \$12,500 provided by the student's Supervisor
- PhD: \$30,000 total
 - \$15,000 awarded/ minimum \$15,000 provided by the student's Supervisor

Furthermore, the funding for the CoMGRAD provided by the Vice Dean Research Office will be paired with the College of Medicine Donor Awards, giving students engaged in research in specific areas greater flexibility for funding. As a College, we are grateful to have donors who support graduate student research, and we are excited to create more opportunities for success.

Below are examples of donor-specific funding opportunities, which vary each year. While still regarded as a CoMGRAD award, students may receive support through these funds. By indicating that an applicant is eligible for these research-specific funds, they will broaden their range of funding possibilities.



- The James Regan Research Award: funding cardiology research
- The Eunice Bilokreli Research Award: funding for cancer, skeletal disease, or neuroscience research with priority given to leukemia, childhood arthritis, and dementia, respectively
- The SCPOR Research Award: funding patient-oriented research

For more details regarding this opportunity, please contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca.

College of Medicine Conference Travel Award

College of Medicine graduate students and postdoctoral fellows are encouraged to participate in national and international scientific conferences and workshops, particularly those specifically related to their area of research. Participation in such events is an important element in the training of biomedical and health researchers. The Conference Travel Fund has been established to assist individuals with the costs incurred in attending scientific meetings. MSc students and post-doctoral fellows are eligible to apply once per program, while PhD students can apply twice.

Please note that these awards depend on the availability of funds. Awards are granted on a first-come, first-served basis to eligible students until the funds for the year have been exhausted. Please note that the call for new applications is in **May of each year**.

For more information regarding this opportunity, please visit [College of Medicine Funding Opportunities](#).

College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Funded Awards

College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Opportunities

Dean's Scholarship

These scholarships are offered to *entering* students who have outstanding academic records, show research promise, and are registering for the first time in a thesis-based graduate program. They are matching scholarships. Applications are accepted in December and February.

For more information regarding this opportunity, please visit the [University of Saskatchewan Dean's Scholarship](#).

Tri-Agency Opportunities

Tri-Agency student scholarships are awarded by Canada's three research-granting agencies: the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). For current USask students, the application process, candidate nominations, and administration of the awards are handled by the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS).

For more information regarding these opportunities, please visit [Tri-Agency Scholarships](#).



Professional Development Opportunities

Graduate students in the College of Medicine are strongly encouraged to participate in professional development workshops offered by the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS). These workshops are designed to enhance career readiness and equip students with practical skills for effective career planning. Notable sessions include **“Effective Interviewing Skills”** and **“Individual Development Planning for Grad School.”**

The CGPS offers the **Graduate Professional Skills Certificate** program to further support your professional growth. This innovative, non-credit program is tailored for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows and focuses on strengths-based professional skills development. To earn the certificate, students can enroll in two tuition-free courses: **GPS 984** and **GPS 974**. These courses offer flexibility (they are available in both in-person and online formats) and accommodate diverse schedules and learning preferences. Course offerings can be explored through the Registration channel in PAWS.

These workshops and courses will provide participants with actionable strategies for excelling in job interviews, including insights into addressing common interview questions. They are open to all graduate students and postdocs at the USask.

For more information, visit the [CGPS Professional Development webpage](#). Alternatively, you can contact **Dr. Kenisha Blair-Walcott, CGPS Professional Development Specialist**, or email career.services@usask.ca. Take advantage of these opportunities to enhance your skills and prepare for success in your academic and professional journey.

Program Outline

Coursework

Current information about the program coursework is available in the [University of Saskatchewan Course and Program Catalogue](#). The College of Medicine Course List is accessible [here](#).

Health Sciences MSc students will complete a minimum of 9 credit units, while PhD students must complete at least 3 credit units. Students transitioning from the MSc program to the PhD program will be required to complete a minimum of 3 additional credit units after successfully passing their qualifying examination, bringing the total to 12 credit units. Effective September 1, 2022, all MD-PhD and MPT-PhD students will need to complete a minimum of 6 credit units. We recommend that these students enrol in courses to enhance their research knowledge, such as CLR 800, FDSC 808, or a statistics course. All students taking an HSC 898 course instructed by their supervisor are limited to a maximum of 3 credit units. Any additional coursework beyond the minimum credit unit requirements will be determined by the student's research advisory committee; this also applies to MD-PhD and MPT-PhD students.

Furthermore, students are expected to fulfil certain “non-credit” requirements for their program. These non-credit requirements include, but are not limited to, HSC 990, HSC 994/996, GPS 960, GPS 961/962, and a comprehensive exam (PhD students).

It is recommended that students attempt to complete their coursework within the first year of their program, allowing for maximum time for research and writing in subsequent years.



Some noteworthy points about the Health Sciences Graduate Program required coursework:

- Students must remain registered in their respective research courses (HSC 994/HSC 996) every term for the duration of their program.
- Students must remain registered in their seminar course (HSC 990) each winter/fall session for the duration of their program. Attendance is mandatory, and absences must be accounted for. **Failure to maintain attendance will jeopardize a student's status within the Health Sciences Graduate Program and may render them ineligible to apply to College of Medicine scholarship initiatives.** Students must remain registered in their respective research courses (HSC 994/HSC 996) every term for the duration of their program.
- Students must remain registered in their seminar course (HSC 990) each winter/fall session for the duration of their program. Attendance is mandatory, and absences must be accounted for. **Failure to maintain attendance will jeopardize a student's status within the Health Sciences Graduate Program and may render them ineligible to apply to College of Medicine scholarship initiatives.**
- Late registration for a course may be necessary if a student has missed the registration deadline. Please fill out the [Late Registration Form](#), which will be submitted to CGPS. Note that a \$35 late registration fee is required.
- **HSC 990 seminar series:**
Students are expected to present their research in the HSC 990 seminar series. MSc students are required to present at least once during their program, typically in year 2. PhD students must present at least twice; they may present their research proposal (Year 2) and their research results in a subsequent presentation (Year 3). Six HSc symposiums will be held annually—in September, November, January, March, May, and July—each lasting two hours and featuring presentations from three students. Students will be contacted by the Graduate Program Coordinator (ovdr.grad@usask.ca) regarding upcoming HSC 990 symposium dates and times in advance. The coordinator will pre-select the students who will present by considering factors such as their time in the program, the number of previous presentations, and the proximity to their thesis defense. Presenting research is a critical part of a student's development as a researcher and working professional. The HSC 990 presentations allow students to hone their skills before their final defense. Students do not need to have finished collecting data or completed their research project to present. They are welcome to share their work at any stage, from the initial proposal or theoretical framework to any point throughout the research process.

Program Duration

The Health Sciences Graduate Program advises that MSc students should complete their program within **two years**, and PhD students should finish theirs **within four years**. According to CGPS, the maximum duration for a Master's student is four years, while for a Doctor of Philosophy, it is six years. If a student is unable to complete their program within this time for any reason, they must request a program extension. For more information on [extensions](#), [types of leaves](#), and [withdrawal](#) procedures, please refer to the linked CGPS policies. Always remember to contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca before completing or submitting any paperwork.



Program Transfers

Transfer from a Master's program to a PhD program shall take place after the first year and no later than the end of the second year in the program.

Recommendations for the transfer must be initiated through a formal meeting of the student's Advisory Committee, which shall forward its recommendation to the CGPS via the academic unit. The following conditions must be met:

- 1) The student demonstrates significant potential in both academic achievements and research capabilities.
- 2) The student has completed at least nine credit units at the 800-level and has achieved a minimum average of 80% with no grade below 70%.
- 3) There is evidence of good writing and oral communication ability.
- 4) There is evidence that the student possesses the necessary research skills and knowledge to successfully complete a PhD dissertation.
- 5) The student has successfully completed the PhD Qualifying Examination before being recommended for transfer. This examination, for the purpose of transfer, can only be taken once. A student who fails the Qualifying Examination, or any part of it, cannot be recommended for transfer.

CGPS policy 4.4.5

Research Advisory Committee

The Health Sciences Graduate Program relies on the expertise of our College of Medicine and University of Saskatchewan faculty to guide and mentor graduate students. Students will receive guidance not only from their supervisor but also from a group known as their Research Advisory Committee (RAC). A student's RAC should be determined during the application process, and the proposed membership should be included in the supervisor's letter of support. This committee should promptly meet with the student to complete a Program of Studies form, which is to be submitted to ovdr.grad@usask.ca within four weeks of the program start date. Committees and students should keep the add/drop deadline in mind to avoid incurring late registration fees.

Research Advisory Committee Progress Meetings

1) Initial Mini-RAC Meeting

In the first month of starting their program, each student must attend a brief (15–30 minute) mini-RAC meeting. This meeting provides an opportunity for students to meet their committee and RAC members and ask any initial questions. During this session, the HSC 200 Program of Study form will be reviewed, outlining required courses, electives, and RAC structure. This form is only required at the first mini-RAC meeting unless changes are needed later (see "Program of Studies," page 14).

- 2) Students must also coordinate with the OVDR office to schedule their annual RAC meetings. At least one week before each meeting, students are required to submit specific documentation to their RAC.

3) Ongoing RAC Meetings

In addition to the initial meeting, students must meet with their RAC twice annually:



- **Primary Meeting (May each year):**

This is the main yearly meeting and includes the following requirements:

- Students must schedule the meeting through the OVDR.
- At least one week in advance, students must submit an 8–10 page research progress report. This report should include the project background, rationale, objectives, methods, data, analysis, and any challenges. It must be written by the student and approved by the supervisor before sharing.
- will commence with a brief presentation by the student lasting approximately 15 to 20 minutes, aimed at providing an overview of completed coursework and research progress. The Committee Chair is responsible for directing the meeting, recording minutes and ensuring documentation is completed, including the **GSR 210 Annual Progress Report**, which must be submitted to ovdr.grad@usask.ca within two weeks of the meeting. Meeting minutes should also be recorded and submitted, either within the GSR 210 report or separately.
- RAC members are encouraged to provide feedback and ask questions.

Additional meetings can be scheduled as needed to address:

- Research or academic concerns
- MSc-to-PhD transfers
- Permission to write
- Comprehensive exams
- Student wellness

Regular, informal interaction with RAC members is also encouraged.

Note for Supervisors: Failure to hold a student's annual RAC meetings and submit the GSR 210 Annual Progress Report may result in ineligibility to apply for College of Medicine scholarship and award initiatives, or may limit a supervisor's ability to bring new students into the Health Sciences Graduate Program.

- **Secondary Meeting (November each year):**

A shorter meeting focused on reviewing the student's academic and research progress.

- **Student Wellness Meetings:**

These can be held at any time to address emerging issues or support student wellness. In wellness-related cases, the OVDR must be informed and a report must be submitted to ovdr.grad@usask.ca. See the [FOM Wellness Resources](#) for further support.

Administration of the Research Advisory Committee

The RAC for each graduate student functions to approve the Program of Studies (coursework and research program) and ensure that the student satisfies all of the requirements of the Health Sciences Graduate Program. The RAC also provides a source of information and counsel for graduate students. In this way, the graduate student will be exposed to a variety of opinions and ideas and can obtain help from individuals with particular expertise required for some aspect of the research project.



Research Advisory Committee Structure

The Health Sciences Graduate Program follows the traditional RAC structure outlined in CGPS [policies and procedures](#). Changes have been made to the structure of the RAC, effective May 1, 2026. An MSc student will have a minimum of two committee members: the supervisor (and co-supervisor if applicable) and at least one additional faculty member. The supervisor may chair the RAC meetings. However, despite this change by CGPS, the Health Sciences Graduate Program has the authority to and will still require that all **MSc students must have a minimum of three committee members** to ensure a fair voting structure. A PhD student will have a minimum of three committee members: 1) **The Supervisor** (and co-supervisor if applicable), at least one faculty member known as the 2) **Cognate** member from a department external to the student and a regular member of the faculty of the CGPS, and 3) one Additional faculty member. The supervisor may chair the RAC meetings. A summary of the changes to advisory committees can be found on the [CGPS website](#). Students in the early stages of their program may also adopt these changes.

When a student has more than one supervisor, they will function as a single voting member. For co-supervisors, MSc students must have at least four committee members, while PhD students will also require a minimum of four committee members.

In the Health Sciences Graduate Program, both the student's supervisor and the faculty member must be part of the [College of Medicine Faculty](#). Additional committee members may be from outside the College of Medicine, and all RAC members must hold the appropriate CGPS appointment.

Research Advisory Committee Functions

- 1) Offer advice and guidance to the graduate student regarding his or her selection of credit coursework and other non-credit training requirements.
- 2) Approve the Initial Program of Studies provided by the graduate student approximately four weeks following his or her enrollment in the program, approve the Annual Progress each May, and approve any major direction changes in the research program. Contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca for the Program of Studies and Annual Progress Report templates.
- 3) Meet with the graduate student to discuss experimental strategy, procedures, experiments conducted, raw data obtained, interpretations, and problems encountered. These meetings should, in essence, be a forum for the exchange of ideas between the student and the committee members.
- 4) The RAC Chair must submit the meeting minutes and accompanying paperwork that document the approval of the graduate student's program and progress to the Graduate Program Coordinator. Contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca for a meeting minutes template.
- 5) Approve or deny requests to transfer from the MSc program to the PhD program and conduct the Qualifying Examination.
- 6) Establish the composition of the Candidacy Assessment Committee for PhD candidates.
- 7) Approve the graduate student's request to begin writing the thesis.
- 8) Serve on the Examining Committee for the thesis defense.

Supervisor

The primary role of the Supervisor is to oversee and guide the graduate student's research on a daily basis. The Supervisor should be actively engaged in the student's research program and remain fully informed about the student's progress. The Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that each student under their



supervision has the opportunity to complete their degree requirements in an organized and timely manner.

All new students must complete the [Student-Supervisor Agreement](#) from CGPS with their supervisor. This agreement must be completed and submitted to ovdr.grad@usask.ca within 12 months of the student's graduation, and it will be treated as a non-course requirement.

Functions of the Supervisor

- 1) Ensure that the graduate student is paid the support outlined in the initial statement of financial commitment form. For a copy of this form, please contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca.
- 2) Provide technical expertise and academic advice to the graduate student during the selection and design of the research project.
- 3) Provide the graduate student with the facilities, equipment, materials, and supplies that are necessary to perform the thesis research.
- 4) Invite faculty members, in consultation with the graduate student, to serve on the Research Advisory Committee.
- 5) Serve on the Research Advisory Committee.
- 6) Suggest changes in research direction, if necessary, in a timely fashion.
- 7) Assist students in preparing research proposals, scholarship applications and the thesis.
- 8) Provide any documentation necessary to support these activities (e.g., letters of recommendation) in a timely fashion.
- 9) Invite faculty from outside the department (MSc) or outside the university (PhD) to serve on the thesis Examination Committee.

Conflict Resolution Process

In the event of a conflict between a student and their supervisor, every effort should first be made to resolve the matter informally through direct and respectful communication. If such efforts do not result in a resolution, either party may bring the concern to the Chair of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC), provided this individual is not the supervisor. The RAC Chair may provide guidance or facilitate additional discussions to mediate the issue. Should the matter remain unresolved, it should be referred to the Health Sciences Graduate Chair and/or the Program Director (the Assistant Dean, Graduate Studies, College of Medicine) through the Graduate Program Coordinator.

Similarly, if a student encounters challenges they feel uncomfortable addressing directly with their supervisor, they are encouraged to contact the RAC Chair, who can offer advice or mediate discussions as appropriate. Students may also consult other RAC members for advice and support, particularly when direct engagement with the supervisor is not feasible or advisable. The Health Sciences Graduate Program is committed to fostering a collegial and inclusive academic environment, and students are encouraged to seek guidance promptly to ensure timely and constructive resolutions. All members of the RAC serve as a resource for students and are available to help mediate concerns with professionalism and confidentiality.



Program of Studies

Within four weeks of a student's program start date, they must meet with their supervisor and RAC. This is not a formal RAC meeting. The supervisor should initiate the meeting, which will include introductions and the selection of a program of study. It is expected that the student's RAC will determine which courses are necessary for developing a well-rounded student. A student may also request the addition of specific courses, which must be approved by their RAC. Registration in courses that have not been approved by a student's RAC will result in additional tuition charges. If requested, the Health Sciences Graduate Program Coordinator will attend this meeting to provide guidance and answer program-related questions.

The Program of Studies form containing the above information should be signed by both the student and supervisor and submitted to ovdr.grad@usask.ca. Failure to submit the Program of Study form may result in ineligibility to apply for College of Medicine scholarship/award initiatives.

Research

Research should begin as soon as feasible, where appropriate. A supervisor is responsible for providing all necessary research resources, including, but not limited to, laboratory space, research materials, instrumentation, instruction, and guidance.

Students should become familiar with the University of Saskatchewan's [intellectual property rights](#). They may not possess exclusive ownership of materials, data, or other intellectual property resulting from their research. Other parties that may have an interest in the intellectual property derived from the research project include the Supervisor, collaborators, the University of Saskatchewan, and the financial sponsors of the research.

Scientific Development

It is crucial for a student's academic maturity that they are exposed to and participate in the research and scientific discussions of their peers. The active participation of graduate students in seminars, discussions, and study groups contributes greatly to this process. The Health Sciences Graduate Program strives to produce well-rounded, collaborative researchers. To support this, Health Sciences graduate students must comply with the following requirements:

- Attend all Health Sciences 990 seminars for the entire duration of their program. Students are encouraged to participate actively, asking questions and contributing to discussions. Failure to attend seminars without a valid reason (e.g., conference, illness, etc.) may threaten your status within the program and limit your eligibility to apply for College of Medicine scholarships and initiatives. MSc students are expected to present at least once during their program, and PhD students are expected to present at least twice. Students will be contacted regarding their presentations.
- Students should participate in study groups or journal clubs related to their area of research. These groups typically comprise faculty and students, offering an informal setting where students can discuss and evaluate the current scientific literature, particularly in their areas of interest.



- Students should participate in local, regional, national, and international scientific meetings whenever possible. Ideally, graduate students should present an abstract of their work at a national or international scientific meeting at least once during their program. Students should discuss with their supervisor whether funding is available for travel to scientific meetings to present their work. Travel funds may also be available from the College of Medicine and other sources to assist students who attend meetings. At an absolute minimum, students should take advantage of opportunities to present their work at local and regional forums (e.g., Health Science Research Day).
- Informal discussions of scientific ideas are a cornerstone of the research culture. Students should seek opportunities to discuss their work, new findings in the scientific literature, or any scientific topic of interest with peers, coworkers, or faculty members. Scientists pursue this profession because they enjoy the exchange and analysis of scientific ideas.

Examinations

Qualifying Examination

Students in the MSc program are not obligated to take the qualifying examination.

Students who have earned a relevant MSc degree from the University of Saskatchewan or another recognized university are considered qualified for study in the PhD program and are not required to take a qualifying examination. However, there may be exceptional cases in which international students must complete a qualifying exam prior to their official acceptance into the PhD program.

The qualifying examination is typically taken by MSc students who wish to transfer to a PhD program before preparing and defending their MSc thesis. This option is for promising students, who have demonstrated excellent progress within their MSc program. A student who wishes to transfer must complete the qualifying examination after all MSc coursework is complete but prior to the end of their second year in the program. Students must notify ovdr.grad@usask.ca at least 60 days before the potential date of their qualifying examination. As per CGPS policies, a student who fails a qualifying examination may take the exam again once approved by the Dean of CGPS. Failing a second time will result in disqualification, and the student must pursue their MSc. Students will be examined by their Supervisor and RAC.

Before applying to transfer from an MSc to a PhD, a student must:

- Complete a minimum of 9 credit units at the 800 (graduate) level
- Achieve a minimum average of 80% with no individual grade below 70%
- Demonstrated the research, writing and communication skills necessary to complete a PhD program successfully

The structure of the Health Sciences Graduate Program qualifying examination is as follows:

- The student will provide the Supervisor and RAC with a formal written proposal for the PhD project at least one week before the examination date.



- The formal written PhD proposal should contain the following components:
 - A. Descriptive Title, Student's Name, and Date
 - B. Background
 - C. Specific Aims
 - D. Rationale
 - E. Preliminary Results (MSc work)
 - F. Proposed Research Plan and Methodology
 - G. Significance
- The oral component of the examination will begin with a 15–20 minute presentation by the student, demonstrating their proposed research plan and methodology, followed by a rigorous questioning period by the RAC. The student must demonstrate a sufficient command of their research area.
- After successfully completing the qualifying exam, the student and the supervisor must inform ovdr.grad@usask.ca, and CGPS will be notified of the result through an e-form submitted by the Graduate Program Coordinator. A new Program of Studies form should also be completed and sent to ovdr.grad@usask.ca. This new form should indicate which course the student will take to complete their 12 credit units of coursework.
- Please note that upon successful transfer to a PhD program, the student's RAC must be evaluated to ensure that CGPS policies are followed.

Doctoral Candidacy Assessment

(See details in the HSC Candidacy Assessment Guidelines [here](#))

Purpose

As noted by CGPS, the purpose of the candidacy assessment is for doctoral students to demonstrate they have:

1. An adequate grasp of the current state of knowledge in the intended field of research.
2. The ability to conduct advanced original research independently using relevant methodologies.
3. The ability to communicate in ways appropriate to their research and practice (and, if applicable, other knowledge or skill requirements for the discipline).

Principles

The Candidacy Assessment should be a valuable and constructive process for the student, enhancing their career development and evaluating their progress as an independent thinker.

The assessment will:

- Examine the student's academic readiness for pursuing an academic career within their chosen field of scholarly interest.
- Evaluate the student's preparedness to conduct research in their specific study area.
- Demonstrate the student's ability to critically analyze and evaluate existing knowledge within the context of their research area.
- Exhibit the student's understanding of ethical considerations in human research.
- Showcase the student's working knowledge of statistical and methodological principles relevant to research.



All coursework required by the RAC must be completed before initiating the Candidacy Assessment. It is important to note that the **Candidacy Assessment is a distinct and independent requirement of the Ph.D. program** and is not intended to fulfill any other program requirements. Specifically, the written components of the assessment are not designed to overlap with or expedite progress toward completing the dissertation. Also, note that the Candidacy Assessment must be held at a meeting separate from the regular RAC meetings or a 'permission to write' meeting.

Each Ph.D. student must successfully complete the Candidacy Assessment before being considered a Ph.D. candidate. As noted earlier, the Candidacy Assessment must be completed within 24 months of the student's initial registration (or within 36 months for students transferring from a master's to a Ph.D. program). Students will be evaluated by their supervisor and the RAC. The examination panel will be chaired by the committee chair of the student's committee.

Candidacy Assessment Format

The Health Sciences Graduate program provides two assessment formats: the **Grant Proposal format** and the **Traditional format**. Both formats are described below. For more details, please contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca.

Grant Proposal Format

Topics

Topics for the proposal should align with the student's field of study but **must not be identical to their doctoral research**. The process is as follows:

1. **Proposal Development**

The student, in consultation with the supervisor, will propose three well-developed research topics. Each topic must include a title and a summary (300–500 words) that clearly defines the research question being addressed. Typically, developing these topics takes **2–4 weeks**.

2. **Submission to RAC**

- The supervisor and student must submit the proposed topics to the RAC at least **12 weeks before the anticipated oral examination date**.
- The RAC will review and vote to select one of the proposed topics. This decision will be finalized at least **11 weeks before the oral examination**.
- The RAC may also provide instructions or clarifications to refine the chosen topic.

3. **Proposal Preparation**

Once the topic is approved, the student has **60 days** to prepare a written proposal. During this time:

- The oral exam date and venue will be arranged in coordination with the OVDR graduate studies (ovdr.grad@usask.ca).
- The completed proposal must be submitted to the RAC approximately **2.5 weeks before the oral examination** (minimum of **two working weeks**).

4. **Evaluation Process**

- One week before the oral examination, RAC members will submit their evaluation (**Pass or Fail**) of the written proposal to the committee chair.
- The chair will notify the student of the written examination result at least **three business days before** the oral examination.



Format

Students must prepare a grant proposal based on the currently accepted formats for a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) application, with some modifications (see Guidelines below). It is important to **note that, unlike CIHR applications, the grant proposal will be assessed not on the transformative potential of the research but on how clearly and logically the proposal identifies a problem and seeks to address it.**

Guidelines for grant proposal preparation:

Formatting Guidelines:

- **Font:** Minimum 12-point Times New Roman in black.
- **Line Spacing:** Single spacing.
- **Margins:** Minimum of 2 cm (0.79 inch) on all sides.
- **Page Limit:** The research proposal section should not exceed 10 pages, including figures and tables.

Proposal Structure:

1. **Title Page**
 - **Project Title:** A concise and descriptive title of the proposed research.
 - **Candidate Information:** Name, department, and supervisor.
 - **Date of Submission:** The date the document is submitted.
2. **Lay Abstract:**
 - **Summary:** A brief overview of the research project written in non-technical language, highlighting the significance and potential impact. This section should be approximately 200–300 words (or ½ page)
3. **Introduction:** (2-3 pages)
 - **Background and Rationale:** A comprehensive review of existing literature, identifying gaps that the proposed research aims to address.
 - **Objectives/Hypotheses:** Clear statements of the research goals and hypotheses to be tested.
4. **Research design and methodology:** (4-6 pages)
 - Provide a detailed description of the research design under 2-4 experimental aims. Each aim may include:
 - **Rationale:** Why this study is important
 - **Study Design:** Type of study (e.g., experimental, observational).
 - **Participants/Sample:** Criteria for selection and recruitment strategies.
 - **Data Collection:** Methods and tools for gathering data.
 - **Data Analysis:** Statistical or qualitative methods to be used.
5. **Significance and Impact:** (~1/2 page)
 - Discuss how the research will advance knowledge in the field and its potential implications.



6. **Knowledge Translation Plan:** (~1/2 page)
 - Provide strategies for disseminating findings to stakeholders and the broader community.
7. **Conclusion:** (~ ¼ page)
 - A concise recapitulation of the overall goals and research objectives.
 - Future directions that discuss potential follow-up studies or applications of the research findings.
8. **References:** (Not part of the page limit)
 - CIHR does not mandate a specific citation style; however, consistency is crucial. Commonly used styles include APA, Vancouver, and Chicago.
 - Ensure that all in-text citations correspond to full references listed at the end of the document.

Note:

1. No budget/justification section is required
2. No CCV_required
3. There is no assessment rubric (but evaluations are encouraged to note their comments for discussions if necessary)
4. *Consultation regarding formatting and structure is allowed. However, supervisors and others cannot critique, edit, or provide content prior to submission.*

Results of Written Examination (Grant Proposal Format Only)

Before the oral examination, RAC members will determine a grade based on either consensus or majority vote (if consensus cannot be reached). The RAC will utilize the CGPS Grading System – Literal Descriptors (appended below) with a minimum pass mark of 70% when assessing the overall grade for the exam. Committee members will evaluate the student's written examination as:

- I. **Pass:** the written examination (grant) is acceptable in its current form. Here, acceptable should correspond to 1) Excellent, 2) Exceptional, or 3) Good in the University of Saskatchewan grading system. The member is satisfied with the student's knowledge and is prepared to continue with the oral examination. There may be areas where the reviewer has questions about the grant that need clarification. So long as the lack of clarity does not result in the grade being assessed at a less than "good" (<70%), the written exam should still be considered a pass, and these issues can be brought up and clarified at the oral exam.
- II. **Fail:** the student's work is deemed inadequate. The member is unwilling to continue the examination as they feel the student is unprepared for Ph.D. candidacy.

The student must receive a pass (majority decision of the RAC) on the written component prior to proceeding with the oral exam.

Note:

In the event of a **Fail** being received for the written component:

- The oral component will not be undertaken.
- The student has a maximum of one year to take the examination again. Generally, a second attempt will occur within 2-3 months.



Oral Examination Preparation

The oral exam will take place three weeks following the submission of the grant proposal. During the oral exam, the student is expected to be able to discuss key areas or fields of research that are related to their own field(s) of study by answering questions posed by the examination committee based on or supplementing, the written grant proposal. The scope of the oral exam is not restricted to the grant proposal but may also explore the student's ability to demonstrate a breadth and depth of understanding in the chosen topic area.

The oral examination requires the participation of all committee members (a hybrid format is acceptable in exceptional cases). Should a student's committee consist of more than the minimum number of voting members per CGPS policy, they are still all required to participate and vote for the Candidacy Assessment. Additional examiners may be added at the committee's discretion.

Process of the Oral Examination

The oral examination will involve the student delivering a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation to the RAC. Following the presentation, RAC members will conduct two rounds of questioning to assess the student's comprehensive understanding of the field and the proposal. The examination typically lasts 2–3 hours and will proceed as follows:

1. **Round 1:** Each RAC member is allotted up to 20 minutes to evaluate the candidate through questions and discussion.
2. **Round 2:** There is no set time limit per examiner. An examiner may conclude their questioning once they are satisfied with the candidate's responses.

After the conclusion of Round 2, the student will be asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates and renders a decision.

The candidate may request a 15-minute break at any point during the examination. Additionally, the chair will check with the committee at the end of Round 1 to determine if a break is needed

Expectations from the student:

The PhD student is expected to meet the following criteria during their written and oral candidacy assessment:

1. *Demonstrate subject mastery:* Clearly discuss the underlying theories, concepts, and issues relevant to the grant proposal topic.
2. *Articulate the research problem:* Present the research problem in a coherent and well-structured manner, ensuring clarity and precision.
3. *Justify the research significance:* Provide a compelling rationale for the importance of conducting research in the proposed area.
4. *Develop a comprehensive research plan:* Prepare a detailed and structured research plan suitable for a grant application, as outlined in the provided guidelines.
5. *Exhibit critical thinking:* Respond to questions with thoughtful, well-reasoned answers that showcase critical thinking skills and advanced problem-solving abilities.



6. *Demonstrate research competency:* Display qualities expected of an advanced research student, such as motivation to learn, intellectual curiosity, and professionalism
7. *Demonstrate communication competency:* Effectively convey ideas and arguments through both written and oral formats, demonstrating clarity, precision, and adaptability in communication.

Traditional Examination Format

In this format, the student will prepare three papers, each approximately 10 double-spaced pages, prior to the oral examination. Four topics relevant to the student's research will be identified through consultation between the student and their RAC. At least two of these topics must include methodological content, such as research design, statistical analysis, or specific methodologies. Only one of the three papers may focus specifically on the student's thesis area. From these four topics, **the student will select three**, ensuring that at least one involves methodological content.

An examiner will be assigned for each selected topic. If the RAC lacks the necessary expertise to evaluate particular topics, additional faculty members from the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) may be temporarily appointed to the RAC as examiners. Each examiner will formulate a question related to their assigned topic, which the student will address in the corresponding paper. The student will have **60 days to** complete the three papers. During this period, **the oral exam date and venue will be organized with the assistance of the Office of the Vice-Dean Research (OVDR) (ovdr.grad@usask.ca).**

The completed papers must be submitted to the RAC at least two and a half weeks (minimum of 10 working days) before the oral exam. Each examiner will review their assigned paper and submit a **Pass or Fail decision** to the RAC Chair at least one week prior to the oral exam. The student must receive a Pass for all three papers to proceed to the oral examination. The Chair will inform the student of the written examination result no later than three business days before the oral exam.

Important timelines:

~16-14 weeks prior to oral exam	RAC decides the four topical areas and examiners
~12 weeks prior to oral exam	Student is provided with potential questions
~11 weeks prior to oral exam	Student identifies three questions and has 60 days to complete the papers. Oral exam date scheduled.
~2.5 weeks prior to oral exam	Papers circulated to examiners for evaluation
1 week prior to oral exam	Examiners notify Chair of evaluation (Pass or Fail) for their questions
3 business days prior to oral exam	Chair will notify student of evaluation (Pass or Fail)

Format of Written Examination

The student will prepare a paper of approximately 10 double-spaced pages in length (not including references) to address each question. The papers may be referenced in a style appropriate to the student's research area and agreeable to the RAC.



It is expected that the papers will be original works of the student with minimal input¹ from the supervisor and others. Students have access to the Writing Centre Workshops for help editing the written component of their comprehensive exam by clicking on the following link:

<https://library.usask.ca/studentlearning/writing-help/>

Prior to the oral examination, each examiner will determine a grade based on the assessment of the question. The examiners will consider the CGPS Grading System – Literal Descriptors (appended below) with a minimum pass mark of 70% when determining the overall grade for the exam. Committee members will rate the student's written examination as:

- I. **Pass:** the written examination (paper) is acceptable in its current form. Here, acceptable should correspond to 1) Excellent, 2) Exceptional or 3) Good in the University of Saskatchewan grading system. The member is satisfied with the student's knowledge and is prepared to continue with the oral examination. There may be areas where the reviewer has questions about a paper that need clarification. As long as the lack of clarity does not result in the grade being assessed as less than "good" (<70%), the written exam should still be considered a pass, and these issues can be raised and clarified during the oral exam.
- II. **Fail:** the student's work is deemed inadequate. The member is unwilling to continue the examination as they feel the student is not sufficiently prepared for Ph.D. candidacy.

A passing grade for all three papers is required for the oral exam. If a grade of fail is given for one or more papers, the oral exam will be postponed, and the student will be given 2 weeks per failed paper to address the examiner's comments. If, at this time, a passing grade is received, an oral exam will be scheduled as soon as possible.

If a failing grade is received on the second attempt, the student will not proceed to the oral exam, and the assessment will be deemed failed. On the first attempt, a failing grade results in a designation of "**failed with a requirement for reexamination,**" accompanied by additional work as determined by the committee. However, if a failing grade is received on the second attempt, the outcome is "**failed with a recommendation to discontinue.**"

Oral Examination Preparation

The oral exam will take place within three weeks after submitting the papers. During the oral exam, the student is expected to be able to discuss the areas under examination as well as fields of research that are related to their own field(s) of study by answering questions posed by the examination committee based on or supplementing, the written part of the exam. The scope of the oral exam is not restricted to the papers but may also explore the student's ability to demonstrate a breadth and depth of understanding in the chosen topic area.

The oral examination requires the participation of all committee members (a hybrid format is acceptable). Should a student's committee consist of more than the minimum number of voting members as per CGPS

¹ *Acceptable assistance includes consultation regarding formatting and structure. Supervisors and others cannot critique, edit, or provide content prior to submission.*



policy, they are still all required to participate and vote for the comprehensive examination. Additional examiners may be added at the committee's discretion.

Process of the Oral Examination

The oral exam will consist of two rounds of questions with the objective of ensuring that the student has a mature grasp of the topical areas and the field as a whole. The examination will last no more than three hours (normally 2-3) and will normally proceed as follows:

Round 1: Each member (depending on committee size) has 10-20 minutes to evaluate the candidate.

Round 2: Generally briefer than round 1. If the examiner is satisfied, they may pass.

Following completion of round 2, the student will be asked to leave, and the committee will meet to render a decision.

At any time during the examination, the candidate may request a 15-minute break. The chair will ask the committee if a break is required after round 1.

Expectations from the student:

The student is expected to meet the following criteria during their written and oral candidacy assessment:

1. *Demonstrate subject mastery:* Clearly discuss the underlying theories, concepts, and issues relevant to the three papers and their thesis research area
2. *Exhibit critical thinking:* Respond to questions with thoughtful, well-reasoned answers that showcase critical thinking skills and advanced problem-solving abilities.
3. *Demonstrate research competency:* Display qualities expected of an advanced research student, such as motivation to learn, intellectual curiosity, and professionalism
4. *Demonstrate communication competency:* Effectively convey ideas and arguments through both written and oral formats, demonstrating clarity, precision, and adaptability in communication.

Results of Oral Examination (Both comprehensive examination Formats)

Upon completion of the oral exam, the RAC will assign a grade based on consensus or majority vote if consensus cannot be achieved. The RAC will take into account the CGPS Grading System – Literal Descriptors (appended below), requiring a minimum pass mark of 70% in determining the grade for the oral exam. The RAC will choose one of the following four outcomes based on the student's performance:

- I. **Pass:** the student's answers are acceptable in their current form. Here, acceptable should correspond to 1) Excellent or 2) Exceptional in the University of Saskatchewan grading system.
- II. **Conditional Pass:** the student's answers are defensible yet may be lacking in some regard. Here, defensible should correspond to Good in the University of Saskatchewan grading system. Specifically, the examiner(s) may request that students address a focal deficit of their knowledge conveyed by their written work and answers within the oral exam. The extent of further work must be achievable within a two-week period following the exam and may include a revision to the written portion or a brief oral presentation. The expectations for further work must be



precisely conveyed to the student. If the shortcoming cannot be addressed in this brief timeframe, a decision of **Failed** with requirement for reexamination should be given.

- III. **Failed with the requirement for reexamination** and as identified by the committee, completion of additional work; or
- IV. **Failed with a recommendation to discontinue.**

A student who fails the candidacy assessment is allowed a second examination (within a maximum of 12 months) with the permission of the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research. This second examination will typically occur within 2 to 3 months of the first examination. If the student fails a second time, they will be required to withdraw from the program.

PhD students successfully completing the comprehensive examination are referred to as PhD candidates.

Grading the Candidacy Assessment

The RAC/examination committee will evaluate either the written and/or oral components of the student's performance in the light of the CGPS literal descriptors below. Based on his/her evaluation each committee will specify whether the student has demonstrated an overall standing of at least 70 – 79 which is "Satisfactory to Good" on the Literal Descriptors.

CGPS Grading System – Literal Descriptors

Relationship between Literal Descriptor and Percentage Score

90-100 Exceptional

A superior performance with consistent strong evidence of

- a comprehensive, incisive grasp of subject matter;
- an ability to make insightful, critical evaluation of information;
- an exceptional capacity for original, creative and/or logical thinking;
- an exceptional ability to organize, to analyze, to synthesize, to integrate ideas, and to express thoughts fluently;
- an exceptional ability to analyze and solve difficult problems related to subject matter.

80-89 Very Good to Excellent

A very good to excellent performance with strong evidence of

- a comprehensive grasp of subject matter;
- an ability to make sound critical evaluation of information;
- a very good to excellent capacity for original, creative and/or logical thinking;
- a very good to excellent ability to organize, to analyze, to synthesize, to integrate ideas, and to express thoughts fluently;
- a very good to excellent ability to analyze and solve difficult problems related to subject matter.

70-79 Satisfactory to Good

A satisfactory to good performance with evidence of

- a substantial knowledge of subject matter;
- a satisfactory to good understanding of the relevant issues and satisfactory to good familiarity with the relevant literature and technology;



- a satisfactory to good capacity for logical thinking;
- some capacity for original and creative thinking;
- a satisfactory to good ability to organize, to analyze, and to examine the subject matter in a critical and constructive manner;
- a satisfactory to good ability to analyze and solve moderately difficult problems.

60-69 Poor

A generally weak performance, but with some evidence of

- a basic grasp of the subject matter;
- some understanding of the basic issues;
- some familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques;
- some ability to develop solutions to moderately difficult problems related to the subject matter;
- some ability to examine the material in a critical and analytical manner.

<60 Failure

An unacceptable performance.

URL: <http://www.usask.ca/calendar/gradstudies/additional/grading/>

Appeals

Appeals of comprehensive examination committee decisions will defer to the University of Saskatchewan procedures on Student Appeals in Academic Matters:

A graduate student who has a concern or question about the evaluation of her or his work or performance should consult with the chairperson of her or his advisory committee (or the department or college graduate advisor where no committee exists), the head of the department or the Dean of a non-departmentalized college or the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research before invoking formal procedures. If, after these consultations, the student is unsatisfied, he or she may petition the Ph.D. Committee (Ph.D. students) or the Academic Committee (all other students) of the College of Graduate Studies and Research for a formal ruling on the matter. If the concern relates to a written examination, essay or research paper, the student may request, or the Committee may institute a re-read procedure similar to that described for undergraduate students. If the concern involves any other form of assessment, the Committee shall consider and rule on it.

The ruling by the Ph.D. or Academic Committee of the CGPS on a matter of substantive academic judgment will be final. This includes decisions on the acceptability of the thesis and the results of oral examinations.

For the Health Sciences Graduate Program, the chain of reporting is as follows:

RAC Chair → Health Sciences Graduate Chair (Assistant Dean Graduate Studies, College of Medicine) → CGPS (Associate Dean).

The website provides more detailed information about the Health Sciences Graduate Program comprehensive examination. Please note that each exam format has very specific timelines that must be adhered to.



Academic Integrity Statement

The University of Saskatchewan is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Student Conduct & Appeals section of the University Secretary Website and avoid any behavior that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.

For more information on what academic integrity means for students, see the Student Conduct & Appeals section of the University Secretary Website at:

http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/pdf/dishonesty_info_sheet.pdf.

Thesis Preparation and Defense

Writing and editing the thesis document should be a well-planned process that takes several months to complete. Once both the student and their supervisor agree that the research work is complete, they will arrange a meeting with the student's RAC to seek permission to write the thesis. This permission must be granted by the majority before the student is allowed to proceed. The meeting for permission to write may take place during a regularly scheduled RAC meeting or may be specifically arranged for that purpose.

Structure of the Permission to Write RAC Process

- 1) The student will present a complete outline of the proposed thesis (essentially a table of contents), and preliminary figures of all included results
- 2) The RAC will discuss the research progress, the student's knowledge and understanding of their research area, and the quality and quantity of the results
- 3) The RAC will either grant the student permission to discontinue research and focus on data analysis or request additional research work (to be specified)

Once a student has been approved to begin writing their thesis, they should consult the [CGPS website](#) for detailed information regarding form, format and style. When the thesis is complete, students must submit it to their RAC for internal review and approval. Only once each RAC member has approved the thesis may the defense be scheduled and the thesis forwarded to the External Examiner.

Defense Timeline

These timelines are strictly enforced by both the Vice Dean Research office and CGPS. Failure to adhere to these timelines will result in the rescheduling of the defense. Questions regarding the defense timeline and/or requirements should be directed to the Graduate Program Coordinator at ovdr.grad@usask.ca.



Master's Students:

- **Minimum of four weeks before the scheduled defense:** submit the completed thesis to RAC members for internal review and approval. Note: It will take at least one week, if not longer, for the RAC to review and approve the student's thesis before submission to CGPS. Students should consult with RAC members well in advance to ensure their availability.
- **Minimum Three weeks before scheduled defense:** one copy of the approved thesis (in PDF format) is submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator (ovdr.grad@usask.ca). If the proposed External Examiner is not CGPS Faculty, please include their CV. The Graduate Program Coordinator will submit these items in e-form to the CGPS Service Desk for approval. Once approved, the examiner is required to have the thesis to review for a minimum of two weeks prior to the defense date.
 - o The Supervisor should make informal contact with the potential External Examiner
 - o Please note, the Graduate Program Coordinator may request a paper copy of the thesis from the student if preferred by the External Examiner
- **One week before the scheduled defense,** the Graduate Program Coordinator will forward all necessary defense documentation to the student's Committee.
- **Defense:** The oral defense will be conducted with an Examining Committee that includes the members of the RAC, plus the External Examiner. The CGPS no longer requires a non-voting Committee Chair to be appointed for the defense (effective May 1, 2022), but one may be added upon request from the student, supervisor(s), or any committee member. Please refer to the [CGPS defense policies](#) for more information.

Doctoral Students:

- **Minimum of six weeks prior to the scheduled defense:** submit the completed thesis to RAC members for internal review and approval. Note that one week is the minimum for this stage, and a longer period may be necessary for RAC approval. Students should consult with RAC members well in advance to ensure their availability.
- **At least five weeks prior to the scheduled defense,** a PDF copy of the approved thesis (a hard copy may be requested depending on the external examiner's preference, so please be prepared to provide this if requested) must be submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator (ovdr.grad@usask.ca), along with the CV for the top choice of potential External Examiner recommended by the student's Supervisor and RAC. The Graduate Program Coordinator will submit these items electronically to the CGPS Service Desk for approval. Once approved, the External Examiner and University Examiner are required to have the thesis to review for a minimum of four weeks before the defense date (thesis provided by CGPS).
 - o The Supervisor should make informal contact with the potential External Examiner.
- **Defense:** Effective May 1, 2022, the oral defense will be conducted with an Examining Committee (6 members) that includes the members of the RAC, the Examining committee chair (non-voting), the Supervisor(s), plus the External Examiner and the University Examiner. The Examining Committee is chaired by the Committee Chair. Please review the [CGPS policies](#) for appointment and roles of the External Examiner and the University Examiner.

For both a Master's and Doctoral defense, all defense paperwork must be submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator *immediately after the examination*, irrespective of any pending signatures or revisions.



For both programs, the Graduate Program Coordinator will perform a final check that the student has satisfied all other program requirements (i.e., submitted ethics, finished coursework, completed comprehensive, etc.) before submitting all documentation to CGPS for approval. Once the student has been approved by CGPS, the thesis will be forwarded to the External Examiner. The student and supervisor may have pre-scheduled the defense date or can request that the Graduate Program Coordinator do so. Both MSc and PhD thesis defenses are in the form of an oral examination, approximately three hours long. The defense begins with a formal twenty-minute summary presentation by the student, which is open to the public, followed by a closed question and answer period. If the student and committee agree that the information to be presented within the defense is too sensitive for a public presentation, they can agree to close the entire defense. This requires the unanimous consent of the RAC and the student. If unanimous consent cannot be reached, the aforementioned policy will remain in place. Student defenses will be advertised within the College of Medicine approximately one week prior to the scheduled date.

After a thesis defense, the Examining Committee will choose one of five outcomes. For more information please review the [College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Policies](#), or contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca.

External Examiners

The Examiner must have no conflict of interest (such as collaboration, personal relationships, etc.) with the student, Supervisor, or any member of the RAC. Once identified, the Examiner must refrain from contacting the student until the day of the oral defense. For more information regarding the selection criteria for Examiners, please refer to the relevant CGPS [policies and procedures](#).

Leaves of Absence

The Health Sciences Graduate Program adheres to the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) policies regarding leaves of absence. While the program does not maintain a separate leave policy, students are eligible to apply for leaves under the following categories:

- **Personal or Health Leave**
- **Maternity/Adoption and Parental Leave**
- **Professional Leave**
- **Leave to Pursue an Additional Program of Study**

Leaves must be formally requested and approved by the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies or Graduate Chair and, where required, the CGPS. During a leave, students are registered under a “maintenance of status” placeholder to retain student status and access to certain university resources and services, such as Student Wellness and the library.

Important Considerations:

- Financial support, such as stipends, scholarships, or assistantships, may be suspended unless otherwise permitted by the funding agency or source.
- Students on leave are not eligible for employment as teaching or research assistants.
- International students must consult with the International Student and Study Abroad Centre to assess potential impacts on their immigration status.



- Upon returning, students must notify CGPS to reactivate their registration and may be required to re-register in courses.

Short-term absences (2–6 weeks) that do not require a formal leave can be discussed with the supervisor or Graduate Chair to determine appropriate accommodations.

Students should refer to Section 13.1 of the CGPS Accommodations and Supports policy: [CGPS Leave Policy](#). Students can also contact ovdr.grad@usask.ca for guidance before submitting any leave requests.

Administration of the Graduate Program

Health Sciences Graduate Program Committee

The general functions of the Graduate Program Committee of the Health Sciences Graduate Program are to administer the graduate programs, to ensure that each graduate student fulfills the requirements necessary for an advanced degree in Health Sciences, and to ensure that the standards of the departmental graduate program are maintained. The Graduate Program Committee also serves the following specific functions:

- Assess applications for admission to the graduate program and submit recommendations for action to the Dean of CGPS.
- Guide the formation of RACs.
- Approve the program of coursework, initial research proposals, and any substantial alterations in the Program of Studies for each graduate student.
- Assess students' progress as reported to RACs to ensure that students can complete their degree requirements in a timely and orderly fashion.
- Assess the performance of students seeking transfer from the MSc to the PhD program and recommend discontinuance for students demonstrating unacceptably poor progress.
- Conduct Health Science program graduate scholarship competitions and administer programmatic graduate scholarship funds.
- Advise and provide necessary administrative support for scholarship competition external to the program.
- Advertise and promote the programmatic graduate program.
- Periodically review graduate program policy and institute or recommend improvements when appropriate.
- Prepare documentation for external review of the graduate program.

All members of the Graduate Program Committee shall be appointed by the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies. This includes a Committee Chair (Assistant Dean or designate), additional regular faculty members, and one graduate student representative. The Graduate Program Committee Chair is responsible for the daily administration of the Graduate Program and reports to the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies. The College of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Studies has ultimate authority for all matters before the Graduate Program Committee.