

# NUTR 701 Doctoral Comprehensives Examination

## School of Human Nutrition Ph.D. Comprehensives Exam Guidelines

**Important: Candidates must familiarize themselves with the following documents:**

**McGill's Policy on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

<https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest>

**McGill's Policy on Conflict of Interest**

<https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/academicrights/conflicts>

### Overview

The NUTR 701 Doctoral Comprehensives Examination is an oral defense of the candidate's research proposal. The candidate is required to demonstrate global knowledge in human nutrition and competency in both the general and domain-specific areas of the proposed research. Candidates are asked to review this document as well as McGill's Ph.D. Comprehensives Policy:

[http://www.mcgill.ca/study/university\\_regulations\\_and\\_resources/graduate/gps\\_gi\\_phd\\_comprehensives\\_policy](http://www.mcgill.ca/study/university_regulations_and_resources/graduate/gps_gi_phd_comprehensives_policy)

**IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CANDIDATE TO CONSULT THE CURRENT VERSION OF THE PH.D. COMPREHENSIVES POLICY IN THE MCGILL UNIVERSITY REGULATIONS AND RESOURCES WEBSITE.**

### Timing within the Ph.D. Program

Candidates are required to complete the Ph.D. Comprehensives Exam by the end of Ph.D. III.

It is the shared responsibility of the candidate and the candidate's supervisor to ensure that the scheduling of the Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam complies with the timing policy. Candidates with the written support of their supervisor may petition the School's Graduate Program Director to defer the exam to either the Fall or Winter semesters of Ph.D. IV. **The petition must be submitted BEFORE the start of Ph.D. III and be supported by a strong rationale.**

### Prerequisites

To enroll in NUTR 701, the candidate must have completed all their required course work (e.g., graduate courses in statistics, and/or in research methods or equivalent courses prescribed by the admissions committee) and have established a working, fully functioning Ph.D. thesis supervisory committee.

For NUTR 701 forms, see Doctoral Comprehensive Examination section of PhD Program Requirements at:

<https://mcgill.ca/nutrition/programs/graduate/requirements-and-policies-graduate-studies>

#### 1. Pre-exam Research Proposal Evaluation by Candidate's Supervisory Committee

The candidate's supervisor is responsible for coordinating the **first** evaluation of the candidate's written research proposal. The PhD candidate must have completed and **submitted NUTR 701 Form 2 (Research Proposal) to his/her supervisory committee for evaluation by the committee within 4 months BEFORE the first day of the semester the candidate is registered for NUTR 701.** If the committee members consider the proposal to be acceptable, the supervisory committee will explicitly grant the candidate permission to register for NUTR 701 and undertake the Ph.D. comprehensives exam, and all committee members will individually complete the NUTR 701 Form 3 - Evaluation Form, and provide the forms to the candidate's supervisor, who

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will in turn send by email PDF copies of the scanned Form 3 documents directly to the course director anytime before but no later than the first day of the semester the candidate is registered for NUTR 701.

## 2. Required Course Materials from the candidate:

**NOTE: It is understood that the candidate is ready to take the exam ANYTIME after the ADD/DROP deadline of the semester for which the candidate has registered for NUTR 701.**

**The following 3 items must be uploaded in the NUTR 701 section of myCourses by the first day of the semester.**

- A. A PDF copy of the signed enrollment form (NUTR 701 Form 1) indicating the candidate has completed all the required course work. If the candidate has an approved deferral, submit a copy of the deferral approval letter along with the enrollment form.
- B. The candidate's research proposal (NUTR 701 Form 2 Research Proposal). **The candidate must use NUTR 701 Form 2 to prepare the exam document.** The development of the research project will normally be supervised by the candidate's Ph.D. research supervisor(s) with the help of the candidate's Ph.D. supervisory committee. However, it is expected that the candidate is responsible for writing the entire exam document submitted for oral examination in NUTR 701.
- C. The candidate's Progress Report dated **within 4 months BEFORE the first day of the semester the candidate is registered for NUTR 701.**

The Progress Report must EXPLICITLY include the following statement: **"The Supervisory Committee has read the candidate's research proposal and grants permission to the candidate to register for NUTR 701 and undertake the Ph.D. Comprehensives Examination."**

3. The NUTR 701 course director will review the submitted forms (NUTR 701 Forms 1, Form 2 and Form 3) to determine if the candidate is approved to continue in the course. Once approved by the course director to continue, the following conditions must be met before an exam can take place:

**SPECIAL NOTICE:** Due to physical distancing measures enforced by McGill University during the COVID-19 crisis, candidates are asked to consent to an online exam. Once approved to continue with the NUTR 701 course, fill out the consent form for an Online Doctoral Comprehensives Exam (visit the link pointing to the NUTR 701 forms), and submit the completed form in myCourses before scheduling the colloquium presentation. Note that students will also be required to deliver their colloquium presentation remotely.

- A. Scheduled a Colloquium Presentation: The candidate, in consultation with the supervisor, will schedule a time in the SHN Colloquium to present a 40 minute overview of the research proposal. Scheduling must be completed no later than the end of the first month of the semester. Presentations must be completed after the ADD/DROP deadline but before the day of the NUTR 701 exam within the same semester the candidate is registered for NUTR 701. The presence of the supervisor during the candidate's presentation in Colloquium is mandatory.
- B. Selection of the Exam Date: At the start of the semester, the candidate will be advised by the course director, based on course director constraints, which day(s) of the week will available for scheduling of the exam. Only one NUTR 701 exam will be scheduled per day. The candidate will provide this information to their supervisor who will then reserve a day that ensures that all the examining committee members are available, with the course director. Scheduling must be completed no later than the end of the first month of the semester. The

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candidate and supervisor must inform all committee members that the exam is scheduled to last four hours and that all members of the examining committee must be in attendance for the full 4 hours. There will be no exceptions. **It is the responsibility of the candidate, the supervisor and examining committee members to understand and commit to this course requirement.** If these terms cannot be met, then the candidate will be asked to drop NUTR 701 before the Add/Drop deadline and a formal letter explaining the reason(s) will be given to the candidate with copies sent to the candidate's supervisor(s) and the School Graduate Program Director. It is then expected that the candidate will make ample preparations and register for NUTR 701 in the following semester. No NUTR 701 exams may be scheduled in the last two weeks of the Fall or Winter semester as per University policy on exam scheduling.

- C. Selection of the External Examiners: Once approved to proceed with NUTR 701, the NUTR 701 course director will ask the candidate's supervisor to nominate two (2) external examiners selected from the School or McGill University faculty who have already agreed to be available for the date and time chosen for the NUTR 701 examination and are not in conflict of interest. This nomination will be submitted in writing (via email) to the course director before the end of the first month of the semester in which the candidate is enrolled. As a rule, all examiners must be present at the examination in person. In extenuating circumstances, **one (1) external examiner** may be approved by the School (committee consisting of the NUTR 701 course directors, GPD and Director) to participate via remote connection.

## The NUTR 701 Examining Committee

The NUTR 701 examining committee is chaired by the NUTR 701 course director and is comprised of the candidate's supervisor, one (1) member of the candidate's Ph.D. thesis supervisory committee and two (2) additional examiners not associated with the candidate's doctoral research. All members of the examining committee will participate in examining the candidate for a maximum time of 25 min each. The NUTR 701 course director has the option of participating in asking questions. The candidate may petition the NUTR 701 course director, in writing and at least 30 days before the exam, to invite a **McGill faculty member** as a neutral observer during the exam. The neutral observer may not ask questions or provide comments during the exam, may not participate in examining committee deliberations nor be in conflict of interest.

## Format of the NUTR 701 - Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam

**All NUTR 701 exams are held at the Macdonald campus – no exceptions.** [Note: Due physical distancing measures and other special provisions implemented by McGill during the COVID-19 crisis, students are asked to consent to an online examination. Online examinations will require students to rehearse with the course coordinator on the use of paper or white boards when asked to provide sketches or drawings of biological processes and pathways during the examination. A student can request to have an in-person examination in lieu of an online examination. However, all examiners and the course coordinator must also agree to the in-person examination.] The duration of the exam is 4 hours, which includes the pre-exam meeting of the examining committee, candidate's presentation, question/answer period, examining committee deliberations and announcement of the exam results. **The scheduling of the exact date, time, room location, and the audiovisual equipment required by the candidate are the responsibility of the candidate and candidate's supervisor.**

**All the pertinent details with regards to the room location, time of exam and email addresses of all examiners must be communicated to the NUTR 701 course director as soon as possible, no later than end of the first month of the semester.** Failure to provide all the needed information will result in the cancellation of the exam and rescheduling of the exam to the following Fall or Winter semester. The course director will use this information to confirm by email 2 weeks before the oral comprehensive exam, the time and room location with the candidate and examining committee members. In the case of a remote examiner, it is recommended that the candidate's

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supervisor test the reliability of the mode of communication to ensure connectivity throughout the exam. Back up plans should be in place should there be poor connectivity with international participants.

*Pre-Exam Meeting:* In the pre-exam meeting held in the absence of the candidate, the candidate's supervisor will review the candidate's academic record and research progress and clarify his/her role in the development of the candidate's research proposal. The order of examiners will be determined by the course director.

The course director will formally start the exam by reviewing the examination procedures and the requirements of a PASS (see below) with the candidate. This is followed by 15 minute presentation by the candidate. The question/answer session starts with a round of questions spanning 15-20 minutes for each of the examiners followed by a 10 min break and then another round of follow-up questions spanning up to 5-10 minute for each of the examiners. **The maximum time limits are strictly enforced.**

## Assessment, Grading and Reporting

**NUTR 701 is a PASS/FAIL course.** During the oral exam, the candidate is required to: defend the information in the submitted document; demonstrate insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the current literature in the chosen subject area; make linkages to relevant concepts or other pieces of information; make interpretations of existing information in the literature; synthesize new ideas and to propose new directions or approaches that may serve to advance knowledge in the field or answer outstanding issues; demonstrate the ability to provide a cohesive and informative discussion which illustrates a clear thoughtful understanding of the subject area.

Assessment of the candidate's performance will be made immediately following the oral exam. The examining committee will excuse the candidate in order to deliberate on the candidate's performance and will render a PASS/FAIL grade based on majority decision. The decision will be communicated verbally to the candidate immediately after the committee's deliberations. The course director will prepare written report based on the committee's collective evaluation of candidate's submitted exam document and oral performance and made available to the candidate (within 14 days in the case of an unsuccessful first attempt). The report will indicate the grade assigned and feedback on both strengths and weaknesses in presentation and oral defense (ability to answer questions and quality of responses) as well as global competence in human nutrition. In the case of non-unanimous decision, a minority report section will be included in the full report.

PASS: The candidate demonstrates: ability to think critically (can analyze, conceptualize, synthesize, evaluate and apply information), to integrate information (can link information from diverse sources), to formulate hypotheses and appropriate study designs, to refine study designs or generate new ones, to prioritize issues and discuss them with originality, and is conversant in different aspects of nutrition research (e.g., having knowledge in different aspects of nutrition spanning nutritional biochemistry, nutritional assessment/measurement statistical issues, etc.). **Awarding of a PASS means that the Ph.D. comprehensives exam is successfully completed and a grade of "P" will appear on the candidate's transcripts.**

FAIL: Any of the following: the candidate may demonstrate ability to recall details from the literature but is unsure how to use this information to generate new information, or may recognize important issues but is unsure how to evaluate the issues, or is unable to differentiate irrelevant information from that relevant to the main topic at hand, or requires significant hints and guidance in recalling pertinent information as well as in formulating experimental strategies, or lacks the requisite basic knowledge of the proposed topic or human nutrition in general will result in an unsuccessful examination outcome. A candidate who does not successfully complete the doctoral comprehensives exam indicates minimal originality, minimal integration of relevant information, and/or failure to identify important issues within the selected research area of research and/or the general area of human nutrition will receive a **NOT PASSED** rating on the first attempt and will require the candidate to revise the exam document and repeat the oral exam ([refer to McGill's Ph.D. Comprehensives Policy](#)). **A Ph.D. comprehensives exam that is not passed on first attempt will result in a grade of "HH" on the candidate's transcript.** Remedial actions will be prescribed by the examining committee and indicated in the oral exam written report. **Completion of the second full oral exam must take place no later than the following semester after the**

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**first attempt.** The second exam will be chaired by the same NUTR 701 course director that chaired the first exam. The candidate must provide regular updates (every two (2) months) describing progress milestones to the course director (chair of examining committee) as well as the School's Graduate Program Director, and work with the candidate's supervisor in rescheduling of the second oral exam. In the event of an unsuccessful second attempt, ***or if the candidate does not repeat the exam in the semester following the first attempt,*** the "HH" will be converted into "F" and the candidate will be withdrawn from the University.