

School of Computer and Information Sciences

Comprehensive Examination Policy

1. Introduction.

- a. All CIS masters students must complete a comprehensive examination as part of the University of South Alabama's requirements for completing the master's degree. **"A comprehensive examination is required and may be repeated no more than twice."** (UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA GRADUATE SCHOOL POLICY, DEGREE REQUIREMENTS: REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER'S DEGREE, item 5., 2004-2005 hardcopy, page 35 OR online at <http://www.southalabama.edu/bulletin/graduate.htm>)
- b. Students must have a PASS of the Comprehensive Examination requirement within the five year time limit for completing the requirements for the masters degree.
- c. The School of CIS Comprehensive Examination Committee is responsible for managing and reporting Comprehensive Examination results to the Dean of the School of CIS, Director of the CIS Graduate Studies, and the Dean of the Graduate School.
 - i. School of CIS Comprehensive Examination Committee members:
 1. Dr. David Langan, Committee chair (Computer Science)
 2. Dr. Roy J. Daigle, (Information Systems)
 3. Dr. Michael Doran (Computer Science)
 4. Dr. J. Harold Pardue (Information Systems)
 - ii. Dean of the School of School of CIS: Dr. David L. Feinstein.
 - iii. Director of CIS Graduate Studies: Dr. Roy J. Daigle.
 - iv. Interim Dean of the Graduate School: Dr. Keith Harrison.
- d. Two Comprehensive Examination formats are used.
 - i. A Written Comprehensive Examination is required of students who choose the **Course Only Concentration**.
 - ii. An Oral Comprehensive Examination is required of students who complete either the **Thesis Concentration** or **Project Concentration**.
- e. Each Written or Oral Comprehensive Examination addresses the four core courses for the student's major.
- f. [Computer Science Core Courses](#) (2004-2005 Bulletin) are:

- i. CSC 520 Computer Architecture
- ii. CSC 522 Performance Evaluation of Algorithms
- iii. CSC 525 Complexity Theory
- iv. CSC 527 Software Engineering Principles
- g. Information Systems Core Courses (2004-2005 Bulletin) are:
 - i. ISC 551 Human/Computer Interface Design
 - ii. ISC 560 IS Analysis and Design
 - iii. ISC 561 IS Database Management
 - iv. ISC 565 IS Project and Change Management

2. Written Comprehensive Examination.

a. Eligibility:

- i. All students in the Course Only Concentration must pass a Written Comprehensive Examination within the five year time limit for completing the requirements for the masters degree.
- ii. Students are eligible to take the examination as soon as possible after successfully completing each core course of the student's major with a minimum grade of B and CIS 518 with a grade of S.
- iii. Students who have failed the Written Comprehensive Examination at least once but who have not yet repeated the Written Comprehensive Examination twice, are eligible to retake the Written Comprehensive Examination.

b. Application, Scheduling, and Administration:

- i. The Written Comprehensive Examination is administered on the first Saturday after classes begin in the Fall and Spring semesters. It is not administered in a Summer semester.
- ii. Students wishing to sit for the Written Comprehensive Examination must apply online to the Director of CIS Graduate Studies by the Friday of the last week of classes in the semester prior to which the examination is to be taken (roughly, about the end of July for the Fall administration and about the 15th of December for the Spring administration).
- iii. The site for the online application may be found by following the Links for Students selection on the School of CIS web site, <http://cis.usouthal.edu> .

- iv. The Written Comprehensive Examination is administered in two three hour sessions: a morning session, which consists of examination items for two of the core courses and an afternoon session, which consists of examination items for the other two core courses.
- v. There are two test items for each of the two core courses involved in each session.
- vi. Morning Session:
 1. Examinees should arrive no later than 8:15 am.
 2. Examinees will present a photo id to the examiner and sign the attendance roster.
 3. The administration of the Written Comprehensive Examination begins promptly at 8:30 am and ends promptly at 11:30 am—THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS!
 4. Each examinee will submit two responses—one for each core course part of the session.
 - a. There are two test items for each of the core courses. Each examinee must respond to exactly one of the two test items. Only one examinee response for each of the core courses will be accepted and assessed.
 - i. CSC morning session core courses are
 1. CSC 520, Computer Architecture and
 2. CSC 527 Software Engineering Principles.
 - ii. ISC morning session core courses are
 1. ISC 551 Human/Computer Interface Design and
 2. ISC 560 IS Analysis and Design.
 - b. Since the session is three hours long, there is an average of $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours for each but it is up to the examinee to decide how to distribute the three hours to the two required responses.
 - c. Examinees are instructed to label each page of the two examination responses with the minimal information needed to evaluate the response. Names should not appear on any page. For

Example: The fourth page of examinee J00123456's response to item 2 for the CSC 520 part would be labeled:

CSC 520-Item 2, Page 4, J00123456

- d. There will be no formal break during the examination.
- e. At 11:30 am, the examiner will instruct examinees to stop work immediately and to submit their two responses to the examiner. THERE WILL NOT BE ADDITIONAL TIME FOR THE EXAM.

vii. Afternoon Session:

1. Examinees should arrive no later than 12:15 pm.
2. Examinees will present a photo id to the examiner and sign the attendance roster.
3. The administration of the Written Comprehensive Examination begins promptly at 12:30 pm and ends promptly at 3:30 pm—NO EXCEPTIONS!
4. Each examinee will submit two responses—one for each core course part of the session.
 - a. There are two test items for each of the core courses. Each examinee must respond to exactly one of the two test items. Only one examinee response for each of the core courses will be accepted and assessed.
 - i. CSC afternoon session core courses are
 1. CSC 522 Performance Evaluation of Algorithms and
 2. CSC 525 Complexity Theory.
 - ii. ISC afternoon session core courses are
 1. ISC 565 IS Project & Change Management and
 2. ISC 561 IS Database Management.
 - b. Since the session is three hours long, there is an average of $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours for each but it is up to the examinee to decide how to distribute the three hours to the two required responses.

- c. Examinees are instructed to label each page of the two examination responses with the minimal information needed to evaluate the response. Names should not appear on any page. For Example: The third page of examinee J00654321's response to item 1 for the ISC 561 part would be labeled:
ISC 561-Item 1, Page 3, J00654321
- d. There will be no formal break during the examination.
- e. At 3:30 pm, the examiner will instruct examinees to stop work immediately and to submit their two responses to the examiner. **THERE WILL NOT BE ADDITIONAL TIME FOR THE EXAM.**

c. Performance Assessment:

- i. Examinee responses to the four core course areas will be distributed among School of CIS graduate faculty to assess for Pass or Fail. Only one examinee response for each of the core courses will be accepted and assessed.
- ii. For each examinee, the number of Passes and Fails will be tallied.
 - 1. If the tally of an examinee's responses is 4 Passes, then a PASS of the Comprehensive Examination requirement for the examinee will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School.
 - 2. If the tally of an examinee's responses is 3 Passes and 1 Fail, then the examinee is scheduled for an Oral Subject Examination. A committee of three (3) School of CIS graduate faculty will be assigned the responsibilities for conducting the Oral Subject Examination, assessing the examinee's performance on the Oral Subject Examination, and reporting the result to the School of CIS Comprehensive Examination Committee.
 - a. The examinee will communicate with the Chair of the Oral Subject Examination to schedule a

date, time, and place which are convenient to the examinee and the Oral Subject Examination committee members.

- b. Typically, the Oral Subject Examination will be scheduled no earlier than two weeks and no later than three weeks from the date of the written exam.
 - c. Although the Oral Subject Examination will focus initially on the core course material for which a Fail was given, the Oral Examination Committee may ask questions regarding other core courses in the examinee's major.
 - d. At the conclusion of the oral examination, the examinee will be asked to exit the examination room. Each committee member will vote for Pass or Fail of the Oral Subject Examination. Once the final result has been determined, the committee will inform the examinee of the committee's decision.
 - i. The majority vote determines the final assessment of the Oral Subject Examination.
 - ii. If the majority vote for the Oral Subject Examination is Pass, then a PASS of the Comprehensive Examination requirement for the examinee will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School.
 - iii. If the majority vote for the Oral Subject Examination is Fail, then a FAIL of the Comprehensive Examination requirement for the examinee will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School.
3. If the tally of an examinee's responses is 2 or more Fails, then a FAIL of the Comprehensive Examination requirement for the examinee will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School. If the examinee can

repeat the Comprehensive Examination, then the examinee should prepare for the next opportunity to complete this portion of the requirements for the master's degree.

3. Oral Comprehensive Examination.

a. Eligibility:

- i. All students in the Thesis Concentration or Project Concentration must pass an oral comprehensive examination.
- ii. Students must have completed all core courses for the major with a minimum grade of B and CIS 518 with a grade of S and must have successfully defended the thesis/project.
- iii. Students who have failed the Oral Comprehensive Examination at least once but who have not yet repeated the Oral Comprehensive Examination twice, are eligible to retake the Oral Comprehensive Examination.

b. Application, Scheduling, and Administration:

- i. The Oral Comprehensive Examination can only be administered after the thesis/project has been successfully defended and within the five year time limit for completing the requirements for the masters degree.
- ii. Oral Comprehensive Examinations are administered on an individual basis during any semester, usually immediately following the student's successful defense of the student's thesis/project.

c. Performance Assessment:

- i. The thesis/project committee is assigned the responsibilities for conducting the Oral Comprehensive Examination, assessing the examinee's performance on the Oral Comprehensive Examination, and reporting the result to the School of CIS Comprehensive Examination Committee.
- ii. Although the Oral Comprehensive Examination will focus initially on the relation between the thesis/project and the core course material for the examinee's major, the Oral Comprehensive Examination Committee may ask questions regarding other core courses in the examinee's major.

iii. At the conclusion of the Oral Comprehensive Examination, the examinee will be asked to exit the examination room. Each committee member will vote for Pass or Fail of the Oral Comprehensive Examination. Once the final result has been determined, the committee will inform the examinee of the committee's decision.

1. The majority vote determines the final assessment of the Oral Comprehensive Examination.
2. If the majority vote is Pass, then a PASS of the Comprehensive Examination requirement for the examinee will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School.
3. If the majority vote is Fail, then a FAIL of the Comprehensive Examination requirement for the examinee will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School.

4. Consequences of a FAIL of the Comprehensive Examination.

- a. If the examinee can repeat the Comprehensive Examination, then the examinee should prepare for the next opportunity to complete the Comprehensive Examination requirement within the five year time limit for completing the requirements for the masters degree. Examinees who fail an Oral Examination and who are eligible to repeat the written Comprehensive Examination are required to respond to all four core area on the repeat of the Written Comprehensive Examination.
- b. If the examinee has already repeated the comprehensive twice, then a recommendation for Dismissal from the School of CIS Graduate Program will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School from the Director of the School of CIS Graduate Program. An examinee who is dismissed from the School of CIS Graduate Program is not permitted to reapply for admission to the program for a different major in the program.