



**Joint Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Research on Substance Use  
Overview of Comprehensive Exam process  
April 27, 2018**

**Purpose of the Qualifying Exam:** The JDP IRSU requires that students take and pass a comprehensive take-home exam that demonstrates student competency and mastery of foundational knowledge that is critical to the field of substance use research. The Exam will also assess their level of competence in core program training areas and capacity for critical thinking to address real-world substance use research problems.

**Exam question content** will draw from required core coursework (Year 1, SDSU) and will be presented in three exam sections: Section I. Pharmacology, Section II. Multivariate Statistics, and Section III. Development of core sections of an R21 grant proposal (with emphasis on demonstrating knowledge of Behavioral Theories and Research methods). The exam must be passed--details follow--in order for the student to proceed with formalization of their dissertation committee and developing defending their dissertation proposal.

In order to take the exam, students must be in good academic standing (3.0 GPA) and have completed core residency requirements at SDSU (24 semester units) and UCSD (36 quarter units). Students on the typical program track will take their exam in the summer of their second year in the program, approximately three weeks after they finish the Spring Quarter at UCSD.

**2018 Exam Planning Calendar**

Week of May 7	<b>Comprehensive Exam Study Guides</b> provided to students
June 15	UCSD Spring Quarter ends
June 18 - July 6	Students prepare for Qualifying Exam
July 2-6	Students sign and submit Qualifying Exam Integrity Form indicating that they will complete the exam independently and not consult with peers or others.
<b>July 9 – 13 Qualifying exam week 1 (proctored)</b>  <b>Monday July 9 Pharmacology</b> 12:00 noon – 4:00 PM <b>Wednesday July 11 Multivariate Statistics</b> 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM	On two different days students will come to SDSU to take a proctored, sit-down exam of approximately 4 hours. Pharmacology will be on July 9 <sup>th</sup> and Multivariate Statistics will be on July 11 (room confirmation forthcoming)
<b>Qualifying exam week 2 (take-home)</b>  July 16-23	Students will be provided with a research topic and exam guidelines and write an R21-style grant proposal emphasizing research methods and theory. Students receive e-mail with exam on Monday July 16 Exam due by electronic submission by 12:00 Noon on Monday July 23
July 23 – Aug 3	<b>Exam grading period</b>
Week of August 6th	<b>Students notified of results:</b> will receive written feedback and points total points for each section

**Overview of Exam Structure and Examination Process:** The exam is constructed with a 200-point total, 50 points possible each for Pharmacology portion and Statistics and 100 points possible for the grant proposal portion (theory and research methods). Passing the exam requires achieving:

- At least 70% (35/50 points minimum for Pharmacology and Multivariate statistics exams, respectively).
- At least 70% (70/100 points minimum total) for grant proposal portion.
- If a student scores **below 70%** on any section of the exam, they will receive a “not passed” result and will work with exam faculty to re-take the exam.

**A “Conditional pass” may be assigned by JDP exam faculty in circumstances where faculty feel that further work may be needed, but that a “no pass” is not warranted.** For example, students who score 70% or above may be asked to revise or address the area where further demonstration of competence may be needed. A “Conditional Pass” may be assigned by the faculty reviewer if the reviewer deems that there are examination deficiencies which do not warrant a full re-taking a section of the exam. For conditional passes generally, depending on the nature, breadth and depth of deficiencies in responses, exam faculty will work with individual students with approaches to ameliorate the target areas that need improvement. For example, students may be assigned a partial re-writing of the exam and would work with faculty to determine dates and parameters. Additional areas where strengthened insights need to be achieved will also be noted in the formal summary.

**Students who did not pass and need to re-take any portion of the exam will work with faculty on a case-by-case basis to determine dates. Typically, students will be given two weeks (14 days) to complete and submit the re-taken exam** (dates will be decided upon mutually between the student and faculty).

**Exam Review and Grading:** Faculty with expertise on exam topics will review and grade the exam over a period of two -three weeks. Once faculty review and score their respective section, results will be summarized and presented to the Program Directors for review.

Students will receive detailed feedback on each section as well as an exam summary. The Summary will also be provided to the student’s Program Mentor(s) and a copy maintained in the student's file. The exam summary will detail strengths as well as deficiencies noted in the examination.

**Student Exam Follow-up Meeting with Mentor:** Within 2 weeks of receiving exam results, students will meet with their Program Mentor(s) to discuss the exam results, potential remediation actions and plan for next steps in the program.

If a student fails any or all of the sections of the qualifying examination (less than 70% on any given section), they must retake the deficient section or sections within two months of receiving their graded exam. If they do not pass the second time, they will meet with the Program Mentor(s) and Co-Directors to determine remediation plans.

**Question format and preparing for the exam:** A study guide for each of the four sections will be provided in early May of the year exam will be taken. Generally, qualifying examination questions will be in the format of posing methodological or research questions and asking the student to provide a detailed response considering specific aspects of substance use research (e.g., study design, approach, population characteristics, type of data available or to be collected, analysis considerations and approaches, etc).

Scenarios that pose research questions may also provide data to the student and ask for possible interpretations. Student interpretation of the data should demonstrate that a student not only has knowledge of the specific details needed to respond to the questions, but also demonstrate their ability to apply that understanding to design an appropriate research study or test an intervention. For Pharmacology, for example, the types of questions may relate to receptor theory, drug metabolism, half-life, impairment, short- and long-term consequences of use that are relevant to research and development of potential avenues of intervention.