# Report and Recommendations from the Epidemiology Curriculum Committee: Milestone Exams in Doctoral Study

**Doctoral Core Subcommittee**

The goals of the milestone exams should address the following University of Pittsburgh regulations regarding graduate study (shaded) and consensus faculty opinion.

1. **Overview Exam**: the student presents the dissertation topic and research plan. The meeting should allow for the committee members to provide guidance in the conceptualization and methodology of the plan.
   1. The committee should assess:
      1. If the student has the skills necessary to move forward with the proposed work
      2. If the dissertation topic is feasible and is relevant to the topic area
      3. If the proposed research plan is appropriate to address the specific aims
   2. A basic literature review may be included in this exam to demonstrate how the proposed research fills a void in the existing literature in the topic area.
   3. Data may be included in this exam, but is not required for the conduct of the overview exam. Where applicable, the use of data to demonstrate feasibility or support for proposed evaluations is encouraged.

# Comprehensive exam:

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|  | The student presents material to demonstrate mastery of the | |  | |
| general topic of study and depth and breadth of knowledge in the area of specialization | | | |  |
| in that topic area. The student must also show the ability to use the research methods of | | | | |
| epidemiology appropriately for the dissertation plan. | |  | | |

* 1. The committee should assess:
     1. If the student has shown a mastery of knowledge of the important concepts in the general topic area and the area of specialization of the research plan.
     2. If the student has a fundamental understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the methods in the research plan
  2. The literature review in the comprehensive exam should address strengths and weaknesses of the topic area and identify gaps in knowledge in this topic area.
  3. If a systematic review is performed, it may count as one of the three papers in the 3-paper dissertation format; provided that it is of publishable quality.

1. **Final Defense**: The doctoral candidate presents the completed dissertation project and defends the validity of the work under examination from the committee members. The presentation should present results of the dissertation and a discussion of the meaning of these results in the topic area of study.
   1. The committee should assess:
      1. If the candidate has demonstrated full proficiency in all aspects of the dissertation research.
   2. An open session is held for the presentation of the research. Members of the public and university community are invited, as well as committee members.
   3. A closed session for the final defense must also be held with only members of the doctoral committee and the candidate present. The closed session is conducted to allow sufficient time for the evaluation of the parameters of the final defense.
   4. A closed session of the doctoral committee should be conducted. The committee should arrive at a decision on the results of the exam based upon material and discussion provided in both the open and closed sessions.