

UCSD CSE M.S. Comprehensive Exam

Fall 2016 Curriculum

Revised: October 17, 2016

Who?

Students planning to complete their M.S. in CSE degree via the *Comprehensive Exam* option under the Fall 2016 curriculum. In general, this includes only those who matriculated in Fall 2016 or later. Although, technically, students matriculating prior to Fall 2016 may elect to graduate under the Fall 2016 curriculum, doing so it likely to be an option for very few, if any, such students. This is because the comprehensive exam was not integrated into courses prior to Fall 2016, so prior coursework cannot contribute to the integrated exam.

What?

The comprehensive exam is an alternative to the *thesis* option. It is a practical exam designed to evaluate each student's ability to apply what they have learned. In order to ensure that the exam is relevant and presented in context, it is integrated into host courses and, in most cases, the associated work serves dual purposes, contributing independently to each of the student's course grade and comprehensive exam score.

Students are required to successfully pass (3) three courses worth of exam material in (5) five or fewer attempts. Because of this, potentially associated coursework is not automatically counted toward the exam. Students must register in advance via the published Web form, typically during the 4th week of the quarter. Once registered, the attempt is counted, even if the student drops the class or, for whatever reason, does not complete the exam component.

The exam material typically takes the form of a specific class assignment, or part thereof, which has been approved, in advance, by the exam committee. Offerings are designed to facilitate completion of the exam without presenting a significant scheduling burden upon students.

The choice of courses is subject to various constraints prescribed by the exam committee. In general, students may not choose more than one course in an area, e.g. AI, databases, systems and networking, etc.

Why?

The University of California requires that Masters degree programs include a comprehensive exam and/or a thesis. This exam is one way to satisfy that requirement. Students who are interested in, or want to explore, a career in research might be better served by undertaking a thesis under the mentorship of a faculty member. But research is a serious undertaking and can be a significant, and sometimes uncertain, time commitment. For those for whom a thesis is not appealing, this exam provides a flexible, integrated capstone experience. If you'd like to talk about which option might be best for you, or help finding a research mentor, please contact your academic or faculty advisor.

When?

The exam is offered continuously by integration with regular courses. Prior to the start of each quarter, the exam committee will publish a preliminary list of courses expected to contain exam components. Prior to the opening of registration for the exam each quarter, this listing will be finalized. Pass/Attempted scores will be released within 3 weeks of the work being graded by the course staff, after review and acceptance by the exam committee.

Where?

Because the exam is integrated into existing coursework, there is no additional venue. Just participate in class, as normal and you'll be given instructions.

How...?

...to prepare for the exam?

Because the exam components are hosted by courses, you don't need to do anything special to prepare for the exam. Prepare as you would for course work, as guided by the course staff, using TAs and other course support, as permitted by the course's policies.

...to sign up for the exam and choose areas?

A link will be provided to you via email, most likely during the 4th week of the quarter.

...to take the exam?

Relax. Do your best. Don't stress. Show your work. It is just like doing the rest of your coursework. We hope it is interesting, challenging, and thought provoking.

...to receive your results?

The course staff will likely provide you with your grade for the work as part of their normal process. Official confirmation of the exam's contribution to your comprehensive exam will likely take a little longer, because it is a separate process.

...to review your graded exam?

The material is managed by the course staff, as are other assignments within the course.

...to appeal your score?

If you would like to appeal the Pass/Accepted grade associated with any exam component, you may do so. Appeals are made in writing and should be given to the MS Program Faculty Committee (students may email cse-ms-advisors@eng.ucsd.edu for additional information). Appeals are initially reviewed by the original grader or supervising faculty member. Subsequently, upon request, the appeal may be provided to the exam committee for a second level review. If requested, the third and final level of review within the department is to the department chair. In each case, the same initial request will be reviewed, so it is important that it raise all issues and be complete.

Fine Print

- Students are required to successfully pass (3) three courses worth of exam material in (5) five or fewer attempts.
- For students who matriculated under a curriculum earlier than Fall 2015, it is important to note that, the "Project Option" is considered by the University to be a comprehensive exam option. No determination has been made as to whether a student who does not pass the AY2016 comprehensive exam may then choose to attempt the pre-Fall 2015 project-option comprehensive exam.
- The program is free to make changes and exceptions at any time, as it, alone, deems to be in the best interest of the students and the program.
- Within a single quarter, students may not attempt more than one course worth of exam material in the same area or more than three courses worth of exam material, across areas.

Frequently Asked Questions (And, Their Answers, too!)

Q: Is there a similar document for the new, 2015 curriculum?

A. Yes. It can be found here: <http://vlsicad.ucsd.edu/~abk/MSCOM-2016-2017/>

Q. Is there a similar document for those under 2014 and prior curricula?

A. Prior to the 2015 curriculum the comprehensive exam was integrated into the project option. Information about the project option can be found here (<http://cse.ucsd.edu/node/58>), under “Comprehensive, Standard Plan”.

Q. I matriculated in 2014 or 2015. Can I take the new 2016 comprehensive exam?

A. If you otherwise meet the requirements of the 2016 curriculum, this may be possible. But, it is unlikely to make sense. The challenge is that you would need to satisfy the new exam requirement with additional classes, because the classes offered to date were not packaged to include comprehensive exam material.

Q. If I meet the requirements of the 2015 curriculum and pass some, but not all, of the components of the 2015 curriculum’s written comprehensive exam, will I be able to complete the rest of the exam by taking classes under the new AY2016 curriculum?

A. No. One may not mix and match curriculum years. You must meet all of the requirements of the curriculum under which you matriculated, or all of the requirements of a newer curriculum.

Q. If I don’t pass the comprehensive exam after five (5) attempts, what are my options?

A. If you can find an advisor, you can undertake a thesis. Beyond that, no determination has been made as to whether a student who matriculated prior to AY2016 and attempts, but does not pass, the AY2016 comprehensive exam may choose to subsequently attempt the pre-Fall 2015 project-option comprehensive exam or AY2015 written comprehensive exam. Please do not expect that either will be an available option for you.

Q. Can I take more than one course of exam material in the same area in the same quarter, to make really sure I pass? Can I take more than three (3) courses of exam material in the same quarter to make sure I pass?

A. No. Within a single quarter, students may not attempt more than one course worth of exam material in one area or more than three courses worth of exam material, across areas. If you want to repeat an area, it needs to be during a subsequent quarter.

Q. If I do not pass one course’s exam materials, can I repeat the course and try again?

A. No. You need to pick another course. It can be in the same area, so long as you have not already passed another course in that area, and aren’t concurrently attempting another course in that area.

Other Questions?

Feel free to contact to contact the MS Program at cse-ms-advisors@eng.ucsd.edu