



**Department of Health, Aging & Society**

**PhD Social Gerontology Handbook**

**2016-2017**

**McMASTER UNIVERSITY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, AGING & SOCIETY**  
**Ph.D. IN SOCIAL GERONTOLOGY**

**This Handbook covers the period from September 2016 to August 2017**

The Department of Health, Aging & Society offers a Ph.D. degree program in Social Gerontology. The PhD in Social Gerontology allows students to take a critical social science perspective and an interdisciplinary approach to the study of aging. Students who complete the PhD in Social Gerontology will acquire theoretical and methodological expertise in social gerontology with a specific emphasis on an interdisciplinary social science perspective on aging and the condition of later age.

**I. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

To be eligible for admission to the Ph.D. program, applicants are normally required to have:

- a) a completed Master's degree with an average of at least B+ in a related aging and/or social sciences discipline;
- b) demonstrated interest and experience in critical approaches to aging;
- c) be available for full-time study.

Applicants will be assessed on the basis of their qualifications and how well their interests align with the research interests and availability of faculty.

**II. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS**

Students will be required to complete six (6) one-term courses, which include:

- a) HLTH AGE 701 Social Science Perspectives on Health and Aging,  
HLTH AGE 716 Quantitative Research Methods in Studies of Health and Aging  
HLTH AGE 714 Qualitative and Historical Methods in Studies of Health and Aging
- b) HLTH AGE 713 Critical Perspectives on Aging
- c) Two elective courses offered by Health, Aging & Society or another department/  
academic unit (provided that permission has been obtained from those departments or  
academic units).

### **Additional Information**

1. Students entering the PhD program who have already taken any of the following courses: HLTH AGE 701, 716, 714, and 713, or their graduate level equivalent from another program/university, can apply for exemption through the Department of Health, Aging & Society. All students must complete a minimum of 6 half courses to fulfill the course requirements of the program. Students who have been granted exemption for any of the required courses stated above (or their graduate level equivalent) must take at least one course offered by Health, Aging & Society. Other courses may be taken in another department or academic unit (provided that permission has been obtained from those departments or academic units). Course selection should be discussed with the supervisor.
2. All doctoral students will be required to participate in a non-credit research and professional development seminar (one term in length).

### **III. GRADUATE COMMITTEE**

The graduate programs offered by the Department of Health, Aging & Society are administered by a Graduate Committee, which operates with powers delegated to it by the department and its exact role may vary over the years. The Graduate Committee will consist of five members, which include three faculty members and two graduate student representatives, at least one of whom should be at the doctoral level.

**Note:** Graduate student representatives of the Graduate Committee will not evaluate graduate admission applications and scholarship rankings. However, their input may be sought on individual cases by the Graduate Committee.

The Graduate Committee will meet at least once per term during the main academic terms (September-April) and as needed during the summer term. The Chair of the Graduate Committee will report on activities at the regular monthly meeting of the department.

### **IV. SUPERVISOR/SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**

Upon entry into the program each student will be assigned an academic supervisor based on her/his original statement of interest. In addition to taking primary responsibility for overseeing the student's dissertation research, the supervisor's role includes providing information about the program structure, course contents, comprehensive examination requirements and other topics relevant to the student's successful progress through the program.

Not later than six months following the student's arrival, a supervisory committee will be appointed by the Graduate Committee, on the recommendation of the student and the supervisor. This committee will consist of at least three members. Two, including the supervisor, must be full-time permanent faculty members of the Department of Health, Aging & Society. A third

member, whose scholarly interests correspond with the student's main research interest may be from outside the department.

While the supervisor and student have a mutual obligation to meet on a regular basis, each Ph.D. supervisory committee will have a formal regular meeting at least once per academic year (September-August) to discuss the student's progress. Each Ph.D. supervisory committee must report annually on the student's progress and the Graduate Chair must forward such reports to the School of Graduate Studies. The report formally documents the supervisory committee's assessment of the progress of the student's program.

For the complete general regulations in regard to supervision pertaining to Ph.D. students, please see Sections 2.7 (Supervision), 2.7.1 (Graduate Work Supervision Guidelines for Faculty and Students), and 4.5 (Ph.D. Supervision) of the current edition of the School of Graduate Studies Calendar.

## **V. NON-CREDIT RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR**

Participation in the seminar will normally take place at the beginning of the second year in the program, while students are preparing for the comprehensive examination and dissertation proposal. The seminar will act as a forum in which students can acquire and share practical skills and knowledge relevant to the research enterprise, such as scholarship, proposal, grant and report writing, research reviewing, the preparation of conference papers and articles for publication in scholarly journals, research networking, and the preparation of application letters and resumé/CV.

## **VI. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**

The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to ensure that the student has a sufficient knowledge of the relevant scholarly literature in her/his area of research interest and that she/he is able to synthesize and communicate the literature in a critically insightful way. The student will take a comprehensive examination in her/his area of concentration. This examination will be completed between 12 and 20 months after beginning the Ph.D. program. The required minimum course work must be completed before taking the Ph.D. comprehensive examination.

The examination will consist of:

- a written examination
- an oral examination
- a research proposal (which is also evaluated during the oral examination)

### **Comprehensive Examination Committee**

The Chair of the Graduate Committee will appoint a Comprehensive Examination Committee, which will consist of four members, as follows:

Chair (faculty member in the department)  
Supervisor  
Two members of the supervisory committee

### **Pre-examination meeting**

Normally, at least three months but in no case less than 10 weeks in advance of the intended date of writing the examination, the Comprehensive Examination Committee will meet with the student to review a proposed reading list, and to schedule the various components of the examination.

See *Appendix B* for Suggested PhD Comprehensive Exam and Research Proposal Planner.

### **Reading List**

The reading list should be prepared in consultation with the supervisory committee. The student and the members of the Comprehensive Examination Committee should ensure the list covers broader understanding and knowledge of the subject. In the first meeting, the examination committee members will provide suggestions and feedback on the reading list. The reading list should include approximately 50-100 cited sources from journal articles, books and book-chapters. The final reading list will be circulated to the examination committee members for approval.

### **Written Examination**

The written examination will consist of six questions of which the student will answer three. One of the three questions should address the particular research interest of the student. The questions are derived from a pool of 12-15 questions submitted by the Examination Committee. The written examination will be a two-week, open book take-home examination.

The answer to each question should be roughly 8-10 pages (double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, and 1-inch borders). Footnotes/endnotes are discouraged, but should be included in the 10-page limit, if used.

Clearly identify the question that is being answered at the beginning of each answer by typing in the question number. It is not necessary to retype the question as part of your answer or to attach a separate cover sheet. A copy of all of the exam questions is given to the Examination Committee with your returned answers.

Where you refer to specific works (e.g., World Health Report, 2013) or authors on your reading list (e.g., Andrews et al., 2011), there is no need to provide the full citations in a reference list. If you refer to a specific item that is not on the reading list, you must provide the full citation at the end of your answer.

Students are not allowed to use material that they have prepared prior to the exam, for example, by "cutting and pasting."

Students are discouraged from quoting at length the work of other researchers. The use of key terms or phrases is acceptable. Any quotation should be properly attributed.

For the duration of the examination, the student must not discuss (verbally, by e-mail, or in any other way) the content of the examination with any other person.

### **Research Proposal**

The research proposal serves to identify a viable project of research, the topic and focus of which is situated effectively in the relevant scholarly literature.

#### **Deadlines:**

A first draft of the research proposal is due for submission to the department via the Graduate Administrative Assistant, one week prior to the first meeting with the Comprehensive Examination Committee.

A second draft of the fully developed proposal is due two weeks before the written comprehensive examination.

The student will incorporate the feedback/comments given by the Comprehensive Examination Committee members in the final proposal and submit it to the department via the Graduate Administrative Assistant two weeks after the written comprehensive examination.

#### **Guidelines of the research proposal:**

The proposal should outline and explain the project's theoretical perspective and relevance, key research questions, hypotheses or argument, and the appropriate methodology. The research proposal should be between 15 and 25 pages (including references, excluding figures and appendices) and should follow the guidelines for tri-council research grant submissions to either SSHRC or CIHR. The proposal should always be prepared in close and regular discussion with the supervisor and other members of the supervisory committee. Suggested guidelines for the proposal are as follows:

1. Introductory statement of the research problem (1-2 pages)
2. Literature review (4-6 pages)
3. Detailed statement of research problem including research questions to be addressed (2-4 pages)
4. Description of research methods and how they will be used (4-7 pages)
5. Tentative chapter outline (roughly 1 page)
6. Tentative timeline or schedule of work (maximum 1 page)
7. References (2-4 pages)
8. Appendices- figures, illustrations, instruments (optional & not part of 25-page limit)

## **Oral Examination**

One week after the submission of the written examination, there will be an oral comprehensive examination which involves:

Student presentation of the research proposal (open forum to which other members and associate members of the department, including graduate students, are invited)

Examination Committee will ask the student questions related to both the written examination questions and the research proposal. This portion of the oral examination is a closed session.

The questioning period will last for a MAXIMUM of three hours.

Approximately equal time will be spent on questions related to the written examination questions and the proposal.

At the conclusion of the oral comprehensive examination, the Committee will make one of the following three judgments by majority vote, taking into account the student's performance on the written and oral components separately:

Pass with distinction

Pass

Fail

If the result of the Comprehensive Examination is “fail”, the student must be given a second opportunity to take the examination, or those portions on which the failure occurred. This second opportunity is given in place of any ‘re-read’ of a comprehensive exam, which is explicitly excluded from the Student Appeal Procedures, and in recognition of the fact that the failure may occur on the oral part of the examination. If a student chooses to withdraw from the program prior to that second opportunity, the result “fail” will remain on the student’s record. A second failure will result in the student being withdrawn at the end of the month in which the decision is rendered.

## **VII. THESIS PREPARATION**

A guide for the preparation of theses may be obtained from the School of Graduate Studies website at:

[http://graduate.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/resources/guide\\_for\\_the\\_preparation\\_of\\_masters\\_and\\_doctoral\\_theses-november2014.pdf](http://graduate.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/resources/guide_for_the_preparation_of_masters_and_doctoral_theses-november2014.pdf)

## **VIII. THESIS DEFENCE**

The candidate's theses must be defended in an oral examination. For the policies and procedures concerning thesis defence, see Section 4.4 (Thesis) of the current edition of the School of

Graduate Studies Calendar. Also see: <http://graduate.mcmaster.ca/doctoral-degree> (click “Defend”).

## **IX. SUGGESTED PROGRAM TIMELINE** (*See Appendix A*)

## **X. APPEAL PROCEDURE**

Students have a right to fair and equitable procedure for lodging complaints arising out of University regulations, policies and actions that might affect them directly. See Section 6.3 (Appeal Procedures) of the current edition of the School of Graduate Studies Calendar.

## **XI. NORMAL COMPLETION TIME**

The expected duration of the Ph.D. program is twelve terms (4 years). The suggested courses of study and normal financial support are based on this expectation.

## **XII. SCHOLARSHIPS AND FUNDING**

The majority of graduate students at McMaster receive competitive funding packages that may include financial support such as teaching assistantships, university graduate scholarships, as well as external scholarships and bursaries.

## **XIII. EXTERNAL SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITIONS**

- Ontario Graduate Scholarships (OGS)
- SSHRC Doctoral
- CIHR Doctoral

## **XIV. OTHER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

For a complete listing of the policies and procedures pertaining to the Ph.D. degree programs, students are advised to consult the current edition of the School of Graduate Studies Calendar at <http://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/index.php?catoid=20>.

## **XV. FACILITIES**

Graduate student offices are located in Kenneth Taylor Hall (KTH) on the 2nd floor. Each office has 6 workstations and is equipped with one (1) desktop computer plus a printer. Each office is shared between AT LEAST 6 graduate students. TAs working for the Department may also use



each office. **NOTE:** Since program duration for PhD students is longer than for MA students, designated PhD student workstations have been allocated in each office. PhD workstations are clearly marked and are for the use of PhD students only. MA students (and TAs) share available workstations in each office. Office keys are obtained at the main office of the department (KTH-226) on or after the Orientation Session in September. A deposit of \$13.00 for keys is required (deposit will be refunded when key is returned). Office assignments and keys will be available during the Orientation Session in September.

### **Graduate Student Mailboxes and Photocopier Codes**

Mailboxes for graduate students, as well as the department photocopier, are located in the department lounge (KTH-215). The access code to the lounge will be available to all graduate students in September. Individual photocopier codes for each graduate student will also be provided in September.

## **XVI. DEPARTMENTAL CONTACTS**

Graduate Committee

Dr. Gavin Andrews (Chair)

Dr. Amanda Grenier

Dr. Michel Grignon

Department Administrator: Lori Ewing

Main administrative contact for all graduate programs:

Kristine Espiritu

Graduate Administrative Assistant

Kenneth Taylor Hall Room 226

Telephone: 905-525-9140 ext. 27035

E-mail: [espirit@mcmaster.ca](mailto:espirit@mcmaster.ca)

Department website: <http://www.healthagingandsociety.mcmaster.ca>

**Appendix A – Suggested Program Timeline**

**Department of Health, Aging & Society – McMaster University**

**PhD in Social Gerontology – Model Timetable**

| <b>4-year Schedule: September Admission (Full Time)</b> |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
|   | <b>Fall Term<br/>(September-December)</b>   | <b>Winter Term<br/>(January-April)</b>   | <b>Spring/Summer<br/>Term (May-August)</b>   |
| <b>Year I</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 courses</li> <li>• SGS 101 &amp; SGS 201</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 courses</li> <li>• <b>March:</b> Supervisory Committee established</li> <li>• Supervisory Committee meeting &amp; formal annual report <b>(before May)</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• Discuss/submit brief research proposal to supervisor</li> <li>• Prepare draft Reading List in consultation with supervisor</li> </ul> |
|   | <p><b>PhD in Health Studies – 6 one-term courses required:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HLTH AGE 701</li> <li>• HLTH AGE 716</li> <li>• HLTH AGE 714</li> <li>• HLTH AGE 713</li> <li>• Two elective courses*:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 electives from HLTH AGE</li> <li>OR</li> <li>• 1 elective from HLTH AGE and 1 elective from another department/academic unit**</li> <li>OR</li> <li>• 2 electives from another department/academic unit**</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>* course selections MUST be discussed with the student's supervisor</i></p> <p><i>**obtaining permission for courses in another department/academic unit is the student's responsibility</i></p> |  |  |

|                | <b>Fall Term<br/>(September-December)</b>  | <b>Winter Term<br/>(January-April)</b>   | <b>Spring/Summer<br/>Term (May-August)</b>   |
|----------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Year II</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• Non-credit Research &amp; Professional Development Seminar (Program Milestone)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• Supervisory Committee meeting &amp; formal annual report <b>(before May)</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• Dissertation research preparation/work</li> </ul> |
|                | <p><b><u>Comprehensive Exam and Research Proposal: completed by the end of Winter Term</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Grad Committee appoints Comprehensive Exam Committee – 4 members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair (faculty member in the Department)</li> <li>• Supervisor</li> <li>• Two (2) members of supervisory committee</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Student prepares Reading List AND 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of Research Proposal in consultation with Supervisory Committee</li> <li>3. Student submits proposed Reading List and 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of Research Proposal to Grad Administrative Assistant <b>ONE WEEK <u>BEFORE</u> Pre-Examination Meeting</b> for distribution to Comprehensive Exam Committee</li> <li>4. <b>PRE-EXAMINATION MEETING:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Must take place 3 TO 2 ½ MONTHS <u>BEFORE</u> the Written Comprehensive Exam</b></li> <li>• Comprehensive Exam Committee meets with the student to review proposed Reading List and to schedule various components of the examination</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. <b>ONE (1) WEEK <u>AFTER</u> Pre-Examination Meeting:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit Final Reading List to Grad Administrative Assistant for the approval of Comprehensive Exam Committee</li> </ul> </li> </ol> |  |  |

|                        |   |  |  |
|------------------------|---|--|--|
|                        | <p>6. <b>TWO (2) WEEKS BEFORE Written Comprehensive Exam:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of Research Proposal to Grad Administrative Assistant for circulation to Comprehensive Exam Committee</li> </ul> <p>7. <b>WRITTEN COMPREHENSIVE EXAM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open book, take-home examination</li> <li>• Duration: two weeks</li> <li>• 6 questions: Student answers 3.</li> </ul> <p>8. <b>ORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Occurs ONE WEEK AFTER the Written Comprehensive Exam</b></li> <li>• Student presents Research Proposal in an open forum</li> <li>• Comprehensive Exam Committee will ask the student questions related to both the written examination questions and the research proposal in the closed session of the oral examination</li> </ul> <p>9. <b>Final Research Proposal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student incorporates feedback/comments given by Comprehensive Exam Committee</li> <li>• <b>Must be submitted to the Grad Administrative Assistant ONE WEEK AFTER the Oral Comprehensive Exam</b></li> </ul> |  |  |
|                        | <p><b>Fall Term<br/>(September-December)</b></p>  | <p><b>Winter Term<br/>(January-April)</b></p>  | <p><b>Spring/Summer Term<br/>(May-August)</b></p>  |
| <p><b>Year III</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• Dissertation research &amp; preliminary data analysis</li> <li>• Drafts (i.e., literature review; methodology) submitted to supervisor</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• Supervisory Committee meeting &amp; formal annual report (<b>before May</b>)</li> <li>• Dissertation research &amp; preliminary data analysis</li> <li>• Drafts (i.e., literature review; methodology) submitted to supervisor</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• Dissertation research &amp; preliminary data analysis</li> <li>• Drafts (i.e., literature review; methodology) submitted to supervisor</li> </ul> |

|                | <b>Fall Term<br/>(September-December)</b>   | <b>Winter Term<br/>(January-April)</b>  | <b>Spring/Summer<br/>Term (May-August)</b>  |
|----------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Year IV</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• Supervisory Committee meeting &amp; formal annual report</li> <li>• Completion of data analysis</li> <li>• Revised drafts of most of dissertation, with chapters submitted for review to supervisor</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• <b>January-February:</b> Revised drafts of remainder of dissertation, with chapters submitted for review to supervisor</li> <li>• <b>End February:</b> Submission of complete draft of dissertation to Supervisory Committee</li> <li>• <b>Early March:</b> With approval of Supervisory Committee, student initiates PhD defence process electronically and submits final draft of dissertation to Graduate Studies (<i>Check School of Graduate Studies web site for Oral Thesis Examination procedure for Doctoral Students</i>)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SGS 700 (placeholder course)</li> <li>• <b>May:</b> Oral Examination of Dissertation (<i>Check School of Graduate Studies web site for Oral Thesis Examination procedure for Doctoral Students</i>)</li> </ul> |

## Appendix B – Suggested PhD Comprehensive Exam and Research Proposal Planner

McMaster University

Department of Health, Aging & Society

### PhD Comprehensive Exam and Research Proposal Planner

|  |  |                            |  |
|--|--|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Student Name:</b>                                     |  | <b>Program:</b>            |  |
| <b>Comps Exam Chair:</b><br><i>(Dept Faculty Member)</i> |  | <b>Supervisor:</b>         |  |
| <b>Committee Member 1:</b>                               |  | <b>Committee Member 2:</b> |  |

| <b>ACTION</b>  | <b>DATE</b> |
|--|-------------|
| Proposed Reading List AND First Draft of Research Proposal Submitted to Grad Admin Assistant<br><i>(1 week BEFORE Pre-Examination Meeting)</i> |             |
| Pre-Examination Meeting<br><i>(3 to 2 ½ months BEFORE Written Comprehensive Exam)</i>  |             |
| Final Reading List Submitted to Grad Admin Assistant<br><i>(1 week AFTER Pre-Examination Meeting)</i>  |             |
| Second Draft of Research Proposal Submitted to Grad Admin Assistant<br><i>(2 weeks BEFORE Written Comprehensive Exam)</i>                      |             |
| Written Comprehensive Exam Begins<br>- Take-home examination<br><i>(Duration: 2 weeks)</i>   |             |
| Written Comprehensive Exam Due<br>- Submit to Grad Admin Assistant   |             |
| Oral Comprehensive Exam<br><i>(1 week AFTER Written Comprehensive Exam)</i>  |             |
| Final Research Proposal Submitted to Grad Admin Assistant<br><i>(1 week AFTER Oral Comprehensive Exam)</i>                                     |             |