



**Department of Health, Aging & Society**  
**Ph.D. Social Gerontology Handbook**  
**2023-2024**

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**McMaster University**  
**Department of Health, Aging & Society**  
**Ph.D. in Social Gerontology**

**This Handbook covers the period from  
September 2023 to August 2024**

**Disclaimer:** *If there is a discrepancy between this Handbook and the School of Graduate Studies Calendar, the School of Graduate Studies Calendar prevails.*

The Department of Health, Aging & Society offers a Ph.D. degree program in Social Gerontology. The Ph.D. 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 Ph.D. 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 five (5) one-term courses, which include:

- a) HLTH AGE 716 Quantitative Research Methods in Studies of Health and Aging **AND** 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 (HLTH AGE 701, 715, or any other 700-level HLTH AGE course) OR by another department/academic unit (provided that permission has been obtained from those departments or academic units).

### **Additional Information**

1. Students entering the Ph.D. program who have already taken any of the following courses: HLTH AGE 714, 713, and 716, or their graduate level equivalent from another program/university, can apply for exemption through the Department of Health, Aging & Society.
2. Students who have been granted exemption for ALL THREE required courses stated above (or their graduate level equivalent) must complete a minimum of 3 half courses to fulfill the course requirements of the program. One of the three courses must be a HLTH AGE course. The other two courses may be HLTH AGE courses or courses from a department or academic unit other than Health, Aging & Society (provided that permission has been obtained from those departments or academic units). Course selection should be discussed with the supervisor.
3. Students who have been granted exemption for LESS THAN 3 required HLTH AGE courses (or their graduate level equivalent) must complete a minimum of 5 half courses to fulfill the course requirements of the program. One of the exempted courses must be replaced with a HLTH AGE course. Additional exempted courses may be replaced with other HLTH AGE courses or courses

from a department or academic unit other than Health, Aging & Society (provided that permission has been obtained from those departments or academic units). Course selection should be discussed with the supervisor.

4. All doctoral students will be required to participate in a non-credit research and professional development seminar over the course of two academic years. Participation in the seminar will normally take place in the first and second year of the program.

### **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 their 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. One member may be appointed from outside the University with the permission of the Vice-Provost & Dean of Graduate Studies.

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 [Graduate Work Supervision Guidelines](#), and Sections 3.1 (General Regulations on 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 in the first and second year of the program. 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 their area of research interest and that they are able to synthesize and communicate the literature in a critically insightful way. The student will take a comprehensive examination in their 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.

**The Comprehensive Examination Committee MUST complete the "Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam and Research Proposal Planner" (see *Appendix B*) and return the form to the Graduate Administrative Assistant.**



## **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 (double spaced, 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 (all six 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.

## **VIII. Thesis Defence**

The candidate's theses must be defended in an oral examination. For the policies and procedures concerning thesis defence, see Section 3.4.4 (Thesis Defence) of the current edition of the School of Graduate Studies Calendar. Also see the [Student Guide to the Thesis Defence Process](#) from the School of Graduate Studies.

## **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 5.3 (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. Travel Grants**

The Department has funds available to help offset costs (travel, etc.) for Health, Aging & Society graduate students who attend conferences/workshops related to their area of research. The maximum amount for the grant is typically \$250 per student.

If you are interested in applying for a conference travel grant, please contact the Graduate Administrative Assistant.

The Graduate Students Association (GSA) also accepts applications for a number of GSA Travel Assistance Grants awarded each semester (Fall, Winter, and Spring/Summer). For more information, visit the [GSA Travel Grants web site](#).

## **XV. Graduate Teaching Fellowships**

In order for the University to give Ph.D. students an opportunity to gain some teaching experience, a limited number of courses can be awarded to them as sessional instructors. This unique teaching position is referred to as a Graduate Teaching

Fellowship (GTF) (see *McMaster-CUPE Local 3906 Unit 2 Collective Agreement, Article 12.12: Teaching Experience for Ph.D. Students* for background information).

The Department receives an allocation of GTFs each academic year. Typically, Ph.D. students who are eligible for GTFs are deemed to be those who have completed their course work, their comprehensive examinations (or equivalent), and are close to completing their dissertation. The Department Chair, in consultation with members of the Graduate Committee, will select the successful Ph.D. students for GTFs using a transparent, documented process.

During the course of the GTF, successful Ph.D. students are encouraged to contact a member of the Department's Executive Committee (comprised of the Department Chair, Graduate Chair, and Undergraduate Chair) for guidance and mentorship, and if they are interested in obtaining an evaluation of their teaching.

## **XVI. 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](#).

## **XVII. Office Facilities**

Graduate student offices are located in Kenneth Taylor Hall (KTH) on the 2nd floor. All offices are shared between multiple occupants. Each office has 5-6 workstations and is equipped with one desktop computer plus a printer. **For PhD students:** Designated PhD offices are KTH 201, 202, 203, and 204. Offices will be assigned during the Orientation Session in September. Office keys may be obtained at the Orientation Session or afterwards in the Department of Health, Aging & Society office (KTH 226). A deposit of \$15.00 for keys is required (money will be refunded when key is returned).

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

Mailboxes for graduate students are located on the 2nd floor of Kenneth Taylor Hall (KTH), in the Department lounge, Room 215. The access code to the lounge will be given to all graduate students in September.

## **XVIII. Departmental Contacts**

Graduate Committee:

- Dr. Tara Marshall
- Dr. Meridith Griffin
- Dr. Rachel Zhou

Academic Department Manager:

- Kristine Espiritu

Main administrative contact for all graduate programs:

- Colleen Brown  
Graduate Administrative Assistant  
Kenneth Taylor Hall Room 226  
Telephone: 905-525-9140 ext. 27961  
E-mail: [brownc88@mcmaster.ca](mailto:brownc88@mcmaster.ca)

[Department of Health, Aging & Society](#)

## **Appendix A: Suggested Program Timeline**

### **Ph.D. in Social Gerontology – Model Timetable**

4-year Schedule: September Admission (Full Time)

<b>Schedule</b>	<b>Fall Term (September - December)</b>	<b>Winter Term (January - April)</b>	<b>Spring/Summer Term (May - August)</b>
<b>Year I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2 courses</li> <li>▪ SGS 101 &amp; SGS 201</li> <li>▪ Non-credit Research &amp; Professional Development Seminar (Program Milestone)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3 courses</li> <li>▪ Non-credit Research &amp; Professional Development Seminar (Program Milestone)</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>

#### **Ph.D. in Social Gerontology - 5 one-term courses required:**

- HLTH AGE 714
- HLTH AGE 716
- HLTH AGE 713
- Two elective courses from HLTH AGE OR another department/academic unit (*obtaining permission for courses in another department/academic unit is the student's responsibility*)\*

*\*Course selections MUST be discussed with the student's supervisor*



Schedule	Fall Term (September - December)	Winter Term (January - April)	Spring/Summer Term (May - August)
<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>▪ Non-credit Research &amp; Professional Development Seminar (Program Milestone)</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>

**Year II: Comprehensive Exam and Research Proposal: Completed by the end of Winter Term**

1. Grad Committee appoints Comprehensive Exam Committee – 4 members:
  - Chair (faculty member in the Department)
  - Supervisor
  - Two (2) members of the supervisory committee
2. Student prepares Reading List AND 1st Draft of Research Proposal in consultation with Supervisory Committee.
3. Student submits proposed Reading List and 1st Draft of Research Proposal to Grad Administrative Assistant **ONE WEEK BEFORE Pre-Examination Meeting** for distribution to Comprehensive Exam Committee.
4. **PRE-EXAMINATION MEETING:**
  - **Must take place 3 TO 2 ½ MONTHS BEFORE the Written Comprehensive Exam**
  - Comprehensive Exam Committee meets with the student to review proposed Reading List and to schedule various components of the examination
5. **ONE (1) WEEK AFTER Pre-Examination Meeting:**
  - Submit Final Reading List to Grad Administrative Assistant for the approval of Comprehensive Exam Committee
6. **TWO (2) WEEKS BEFORE Written Comprehensive Exam:**
  - Submit 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of Research Proposal to Grad Administrative Assistant for circulation to Comprehensive Exam Committee

**7. WRITTEN COMPREHENSIVE EXAM**

- Open book, take-home examination
- Duration: two weeks
- 6 questions: Student answers 3

**8. ORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAM**

- **Occurs ONE WEEK AFTER the Written Comprehensive Exam**
- Student presents Research Proposal in an open forum
- Comprehensive Exam Committee will ask the student questions related to both the written examination questions (all 6 questions) and the research proposal in the closed session of the oral examination

**9. Final Research Proposal**

- Student incorporates feedback/comments given by Comprehensive Exam Committee
- **Must be submitted to the Grad Administrative Assistant ONE WEEK AFTER the Oral Comprehensive Exam**

<b>Schedule</b>	<b>Fall Term (September - December)</b>	<b>Winter Term (January - April)</b>	<b>Spring/Summer Term (May - August)</b>
<b>Year III</b>	<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>

Schedule	Fall Term (September - December)	Winter Term (January - April)	Spring/Summer Term (May - August)
<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 Ph.D. 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: Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam and Research Proposal Planner**

**PLEASE SUBMIT TO GRADUATE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT WHEN COMPLETE**

McMaster University

Department of Health, Aging & Society

### **Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam and Research Proposal Planner**

<b>Student Name:</b>		<b>Program:</b>	
<b>Comps Exam Chair:</b> <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 <i>(1 week BEFORE Pre-Examination Meeting)</i>	
Pre-Examination Meeting <i>(3 to 2 ½ months BEFORE Written Comprehensive Exam)</i>	
Final Reading List Submitted to Grad Admin Assistant <i>(1 week AFTER Pre-Examination Meeting)</i>	
Second Draft of Research Proposal Submitted to Grad Admin Assistant <i>(2 weeks BEFORE Written Comprehensive Exam)</i>	
Comprehensive Exam Planning Meeting <i>(Committee <b>WITHOUT</b> student)</i> - Set comprehensive exam questions	
Written Comprehensive Exam Begins - Take-home examination <i>(Duration: 2 weeks)</i>	
Written Comprehensive Exam Due - Submit to Comprehensive Exam Committee and Grad Admin Assistant	
Oral Comprehensive Exam <i>(1 week AFTER Written Comprehensive Exam)</i>	
Final Research Proposal Submitted to Grad Admin Assistant <i>(1 week AFTER Oral Comprehensive Exam)</i>	