

**SZÉCHENYI ISTVÁN UNIVERSITY**  
**SzEEDS<sup>M</sup> DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN MANAGEMENT**  
**DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF REGIONAL SCIENCES**  
**AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS**

In the SzEEDS<sup>M</sup> doctoral program (like in all doctoral programs in Hungary), there are two admission interviews to guard the virtual gates of the four-year program (two years of foundation plus two years of thesis preparation): one at the very beginning to gain acceptance to the program and one at the closure of the second year (the end of the fourth semester also means a closure to the training or foundation phase). The first admission interview, before the first semester, opens the door to the program; the second admission interview (at the end of the fourth semester; this is called Comprehensive Examination or “Complex Exam” in Hungarian) certifies that the student has the necessary foundation to start the research phase of writing his/her dissertation under supervision. Without the complex exam certification, no student can enter the second phase (that is the research phase of writing the thesis).

The “Complex Exam” (in Hungarian spelling "komplex vizsga") is roughly the equivalent of a comprehensive examination in the US system. Its outcome is a yes/no decision; exam takers either can continue or are denied admission to the research phase. Comprehensive exam applicants can come from inside (SzEEDS<sup>M</sup> students at the end of their second year in the program) or from the outside (non-SzEEDS<sup>M</sup> students). The qualifications, the materials required to be submitted before both admissions are the same (MSc Certificate, recommendation letters, motivation letter, research plan). Needless to say, the "komplex vizsga" applicants should show more mature research plans as they have only two years to finish.

To be admitted to Candidacy for the doctoral degree (the research phase of the program), each student must successfully complete a doctoral comprehensive examination. The doctoral comprehensive examination differs from semester-end examinations held for various courses taken by the students. While semester-end examinations for different courses test a specific student’s command over the material taught within the context of the respective courses, the doctoral comprehensive examination tests the student’s command over the totality of the discipline in which the student is earning the doctoral degree. The content of the doctoral comprehensive examination is not limited or constrained by the contents of the various courses taken by a student. Instead, it is determined by the total scope of the discipline of interest. The doctoral comprehensive examination is not a case of “If-Then” decisions: "if you perform like this, then you pass, else you do not." It is more a case of the mentors, professors, experts being satisfied that the student would be a good ambassador of the SzEEDS<sup>M</sup> and the academic fields the program represents. The main question is whether the student is ready to be a member of the community of scholars. The bar for such assessment is NOT black and white and cannot be expressed in percentage points. Different shades have their own strengths and weaknesses and it is the responsibility of the Examination Committee to decide.

Normally, a student will appear for a doctoral comprehensive examination *after* completing all required and prescribed coursework defining that student's program of study. The intent of this examination, as suggested above, is to establish the student's knowledge, understanding, and command of the chosen field of study as a whole. Additionally, the doctoral comprehensive examination shall establish the competency of the student to communicate the contents and considerations of the discipline in the English language. Furthermore, the doctoral comprehensive examination should not be confused with the evaluation of the doctoral dissertation proposal.

The doctoral comprehensive examination may vary significantly from discipline to discipline and from student to student, depending on the specific preparation, interest, and learning goals pursued by respective students in their specific program of study. For instance, it is possible that the doctoral comprehensive examination offered to a student who undergoes a program of study at Széchenyi University might differ from the examination offered to a student who has undergone a program of study elsewhere.

The comprehensive examination is a demanding and long exercise that tests the applicant's broad understanding of major issues and challenges them to provide an outline of a research contribution. Specifically, the written part of the comprehensive exam will take up to three hours in the morning and up to five hours in the afternoon. The focus of the morning session is to verify that the candidates have the necessary foundations in theories and research methods that will enable them to pursue research further on. The candidates will be given eight broad questions and are asked to answer four of them. Some illustrative examples are provided in the program's home page.

In the afternoon session, applicants will be given a topic (a topic that matches well with the applicant's specific research interest) and are asked to develop the framework of a paper for a given journal, typically a top-ranked "A" journal of the given field. Submission instructions, guide for authors are also provided for the given journal.

The admission interview takes place after the written tests, typically in the same week. The admission interviews are free-flowing conversations, lasting up to an hour per applicant, where the admission committee tries to get to know the person behind the many data and details we have on file. The admission interview is also a forum where the applicants can defend and clarify their views and convince committee members about the validity of their proposed research projects.

The committee attempts to assess the applicants' fit and judge their future success with the program. In its evaluation, the committee considers four broad categories: prior education/experience and recommendations, motivation letter (explaining why the applicant wants to enroll in this program and how, in the applicant's view, the program impacts their career), and the committee's assessment of the written portion of the comprehensive exam and the committee members' impressions during the interview. The SzEEDS<sup>M</sup> comprehensive examination is offered once a year; in case of failure, it can be repeated one more time, the next time the examination is offered again.