

International Agricultural Development Graduate Group
MS Plan II – Capstone Project/Comprehensive Examination Guidelines
Approved November 20, 2015

The following provides an overview of the requirements for completing an MS Plan II degree in the IAD program. Below we describe guidelines for the capstone project required of all plan II students in IAD. Also described are the steps involved in preparing for and an overview of the comprehensive exam.

Capstone project

Capstone projects are focused on development practice and demonstrate your ability to take an idea from conception to final presentation. A successful capstone project will combine academic knowledge, research, and professional skills into a coherent final product. Ideally, you will define a capstone project in consort with stakeholders or a community with whom you are working and demonstrate competency in project design and management skills, written and oral presentation of complex ideas, and analytical and empathetic thinking.

A capstone project differs from an MS I thesis project in not requiring original research, but demonstrating the ability to apply what was learned during the IAD program (including specific IAD courses, as relevant) to a problem in international agricultural development. It is expected that the final capstone report will be approximately 15-20 pages, not including references, tables, and figures. The paper must include an executive summary (limited to 300 words) and references.

The precise content of the final capstone report and the types of analysis included will depend on the nature of the issue and, if relevant, the needs of the stakeholders engaged. In most cases the final report will include the following topics:

- Background, context, and description of the problem, including analysis of broader development context into which the issue falls, identification of target audience(s)
- Method(s) of analysis
- Analysis of alternatives to the solution or amelioration of the problem
- Recommendations for action
- Discussion of methods for monitoring and evaluation of the outcome
- Optional additional products—e.g., lesson plan for course or extension activity, podcast, video, website, monitoring and evaluation report, implementation plan developed for an organization, curriculum for participatory extension

At the end of the capstone experience you will have produced the following deliverables.

1. A written paper with final recommendations
2. A final briefing via oral presentation to your examination committee
3. Potential additional product (see list of report topics)

Students writing a Master's thesis in another graduate program may incorporate material from this thesis into their Capstone project, but the project must also include work carried out independently of the thesis.

Preparing for the exam (students)

1. Establish an academic specialization in winter or spring of the first year (e.g. soil science, agricultural economics). Develop a course plan based on discussion with your academic advisor.
2. Narrow down the topic of your capstone project in winter or spring of your first year. Discuss your options with your academic advisor and other relevant faculty and staff.
3. Choose a capstone mentor to provide guidance for your project before you begin the project or the start of fall quarter of the second year, whichever is earlier. The mentor may also be the chair or a member of your examination committee.
4. Submit your capstone proposal to your mentor. Format to be determined by the student and their mentor; can be in grant proposal format if student has submitted request for funding (Blum, RIFA, Jastro, Trellis, etc.).
5. Carry out the capstone project and begin writing the final report and creating any other products or outputs.
6. Advance to candidacy no later than the end of winter quarter of the second year. (Link to candidacy form is at the end of this document.)
7. Identify examination committee members and have the committee approved. This is the responsibility of the student and the academic advisor. Contact the graduate program coordinator for help determining the eligibility of prospective committee members. (Link to committee approval form is at the end of this document.)
8. Arrange the exam time, day, and location. Provide this information to the graduate program coordinator no later than two weeks before the exam.
9. One week prior to the exam, the student will submit the final written report to the committee.

Preparing for the exam (academic advisors)

1. Beginning in the student's first year, help student narrow their area of specialization, create a course plan, consider project topics, and help identify possible capstone mentors.
2. Meet with student to complete and sign the advancement to candidacy form.
3. Meet with student to discuss and approve exam committee members.

Preparing for the exam (exam committee chair)

1. Meet with student to review and sign the exam committee approval form.
2. Work with student and other committee members to identify a day and time for the exam.
3. Review student's final capstone report before the exam. You will be given at least one week for review.
4. Bring necessary documentation (provided by the graduate program coordinator) to the exam.
5. Prepare questions for your portion of the exam (20 minutes).
6. Attend the exam.

- a. Lead the structure of the exam, as discussed in this document.
- b. In the event of an unanticipated absence of any committee member, the chair must develop “a specific plan for completion of the examination within 72 hours.”
- c. Debrief the student after the committee has decided if the student has passed, not passed, or failed the exam.
- d. Ensure that all committee members and the student complete all necessary portions of the examination documents.

Preparing for the exam (committee members)

1. Work with student and other committee members to identify a day and time for the exam.
2. Review student’s final capstone report before the exam. You will be given at least one week for review.
3. Prepare questions for your portion of the exam (20 minutes).
4. Attend the exam. Format described in this document.

During the exam

The standard procedure for the Master’s comprehensive exam in IAD is as follows. The exam is an oral exam and ordinarily lasts two hours. The student begins the exam with a presentation of the capstone project lasting no more than 30 minutes (not counting questioning during the exam). Following the presentation, each committee member questions the student for a period of about 20 minutes. Questions may cover subject material as discussed between student and members of the examination committee prior to the exam. Student will also be responsible for material covered in their curriculum and should be able to explicitly show in their presentation how what they learned from those courses was incorporated into the project. The committee chair will ensure that all members have equal opportunity to question the student. After the first round of questioning, the remaining period of the exam may be used for any further questions by any committee member and/or further elucidation by the candidate if needed.

The committee will decide if the student has passed the exam and then complete the Master’s Report Form and Comprehensive Examination Form. The committee chair will provide debriefing to the student on their performance and the exam committee’s final decision. If the student has passed the exam the student will be asked to complete the Exit Information Form. One of the committee members will return all documents to the Graduate Program Coordinator in person or in the mail. If a student does not pass the exam, the committee may recommend that the student be reexamined one time. The examination may not be repeated more than once. A student who does not pass on the second attempt is subject to disqualification from further graduate work in the program by the dean of Graduate Studies.

Forms/Policies

Plan II candidacy form:

<http://iad.ucdavis.edu/iad-program/forms-and-guides/>

Policy on Service on Advanced Degree Committees (contact Graduate Program Coordinator with questions regarding eligibility for committee membership):

<https://gradstudies.ucdavis.edu/sites/default/files/upload/files/grad-council/gc1998-01-uc-davis-graduate-council-policy-rev-06-final.pdf>

Exam committee approval form:

<http://iad.ucdavis.edu/iad-program/forms-and-guides/>