

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
AT  
CHAPEL HILL  
27514

THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
DEPARTMENT OF EPIDEMIOLOGY

MEMO

TO: All Faculty Members, Department of Epidemiology  
FROM: John Cassel  
DATE: April 5, 1972  
RE: Doctoral oral and written examinations: For discussion Monday,  
April 10 at Faculty Meeting

As you will recall, at the faculty meeting on March 27 we were requested by the students to clarify some issues concerning the doctoral oral and written examinations. This topic has risen before, and while the concerns have been expressed in various ways, central to them all is the indication that the students would find it helpful if the faculty could make their expectations for these examinations clearer. This memo is intended to provide a point of view, which is open for modification or alternatives and which I would like to discuss at the faculty meeting on Monday, April 10.

My experience with the doctoral orals over the past year or so is that the committees are tending to use the dissertation proposal as the vehicle to test the candidates' "depth and breadth of the field." The usual procedure has been to have the candidate summarize the proposal, and then using the ideas in the proposal focus the questions of research design and substantive issues that arise from this proposal. In my judgment this procedure has worked reasonably well and I am wondering whether we should formalize this and so inform the students?

As far as the written exams are concerned, we have had no explicit policy in the past. Perhaps it is time to develop one. Two suggestions have been made, and I think we might consider incorporating both of them.

The first is that the written should focus on those areas in which the candidate's answers during the oral exam have been less than satisfactory. The second is that this might be the opportunity to assess the candidate's ability to think critically. This could be accomplished by a critical review of journal articles or research applications in areas that are of interest to the candidate.

I would be interested then in your thoughts on these suggestions and any other approaches you might wish to recommend.

JC:jf