

Ph.D. QUALIFYING EXAMINATION (revised June 2015)

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A. POLICY

Successful completion of a Ph.D. Qualifying Examination is a requirement for the Ph.D. degree in the Department of Nutritional Sciences. The previous Comprehensive Examination is no longer required. The requirement for a Ph.D. Qualifying Examination is waived for students who have successfully passed the Ph.D. Reclassification Examination in the Department of Nutritional Sciences.

B. PURPOSE

The Ph.D. Qualifying Examination serves 3 main purposes: 1) to encourage early communication between supervisor and student regarding the overarching Ph.D. work and thereby assisting students to complete their degree in a timely fashion (i.e., within 4 years). The Examination will ensure that all Ph.D. students have, during the first year of their program, completed half of their course requirements in a satisfactory manner and developed and defended a research proposal which is both adequate and feasible to complete in a timely fashion, normally defined as being within the next 3 years. 2) The defense of the proposal will test the student's ability to conceptualize and integrate knowledge and his or her understanding of research design, as well as breadth of knowledge tangential to the thesis. 3) The Examination will allow weak students to be identified earlier in their program than was possible with the previous Comprehensive Examination.

C. PROCEDURES

1. The Ph.D. Qualifying Examination Committee

The Department shall establish a committee of at least 4 persons, each with a two-year renewable term (initially staggered), plus the Graduate Chair or his/her representative (usually the Graduate Coordinator) – 5 persons in all. This Committee shall be charged with responsibility to:

- a) Review and revise from year to year, as appropriate in the light of experience, the actual examination procedures. Major changes shall be referred to the Graduate Affairs Committee for approval. Any changes to procedures will be announced before the time of Fall registration and will hold for at least the whole of that academic session (September - September).
- b) Establish the dates when Ph.D. Qualifying Examinations will be conducted each year.
- c) Participate in the examinations scheduled each year, it being a major responsibility of the examiners to ensure continuity and consistency across examinations and to monitor the procedures.

2. Written Proposal

The student will provide the Examination Committee with a written proposal for his or her PhD program at least 2 weeks before the date of the examination. The proposal should include a background/literature review, rationale, objectives and/or hypothesis, methods and discussion of the anticipated findings and/or their interpretation. The proposal should be a maximum of 20 sides of double-spaced text with 1 inch margins all around, font size no smaller than Times New Roman 12, or Arial 11. An unlimited number of references, tables and figures may be included as an appendix.

Each student's proposal will be assigned to three members of the Examination Committee for review, with two identified as in-depth reviewers and one identified as a reader. These assignments will be developed by the Graduate Coordinator in advance of the date that the student proposals are submitted. In assigning proposals to individual faculty members, the Graduate Coordinator will take into account the expertise of examination committee members, while at the same time endeavouring to balance the workload across the entire committee. If the student's supervisor is a member of the Ph.D. Qualifying Examination Committee or is the Graduate Coordinator, then he/she will be excluded from the proposal evaluation and oral examination of that particular student.

The in-depth reviewers will be required to provide written comments on the student's proposal (to be shared with the student after the oral examination) and to lead the questioning of the student at the examination. The reader will not be required to provide any written assessment of the proposal, but will participate in the questioning of the student during the examination.

3. The Oral Examination

Two examination dates shall be declared for each year by the Ph.D. Qualifying Examination Committee, one date during the first half of the Fall term (for students entering the Ph.D. program the previous January), and the other during the second half of the Spring term (for students entering the Ph.D. program the previous September). All examinations will occur on these dates, except for re-examination of students who do not pass on their first attempt. It is expected that all PhD students who are sitting for Qualifying Examinations during the day will be present for the entire day. It is also expected that each student's supervisor will be present, at minimum, for that student's examination.

The Chair of all Qualifying Examinations will be the Graduate Chair or a representative.

On the day of the examination, the student will provide the Examination Committee with his or her PhD Program Milestones Form which has been filled out, including at least 2 courses completed.

The examination of each student will last approximately 1hr; the student will make a 15-20 min oral presentation of his or her thesis proposal followed by questions from the Examination Committee. The questioning will be led by the two in-depth reviewers, followed by the assigned reader, followed by an opportunity for all other faculty present (except the student's supervisor) to ask questions if they so choose. In their questioning, the examiners will probe the student's ability to discuss and defend the thesis proposal. This will include examination of i) how well the student is able to situate his/her research in the field more broadly; ii) the logic underlying

the specific research objectives and hypotheses proposed (e.g., why choose this particular focus?); iii) the reasoning behind the proposed study methods (including sample size, study design, analytic methods, etc); iv) the student's ability to contrast the proposed methods to alternative approaches and defend his/her decisions; and v) the perceived significance of the proposed research.

In evaluating the student's performance, the examiners will consider his/her ability to conceptualize and integrate knowledge, understand research design, as well as breadth of knowledge tangential to the thesis. A student will be deemed to have passed the examination if at least 3 members of the Examination Committee vote that the student has passed. If the student passes, the PhD Program Milestones Form will be approved by the Graduate Coordinator.

Students who do not pass the examination on the first attempt, may, if the Examination Committee so recommends, chose to be re-examined before the end of their first year of their Ph.D. program. Since successful completion of the Ph.D. Qualifying Examination is a requirement of the Ph.D., if the examination is not cleared on the second attempt, the student will be asked to leave the Ph.D. program immediately and the Department will refuse further registration in the Ph.D. Degree program.

All students will receive written feedback on their proposal and performance at the examination. This feedback will include the written reviews of the student's proposal prepared by the two in-depth reviewers, as well as a brief assessment of the student's performance at the examination, prepared by the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Coordinator's assessment should include comments on the student's strengths and weaknesses as indicated during the examination and identify any needs for remedial work. The in-depth reviewers may elect to provide their comments by inserting text directly electronically on the proposal document. The Graduate Administrator will be responsible for forwarding the in-depth reviews and Graduate Coordinator's summary report to the student after the examination.

4. Scheduling of Examination in Relation to the Student's program

The Ph.D. Qualifying Examination must be cleared before the start of the student's second academic year. Normally students whose Ph.D. program starts in September will have their Qualifying Examination the following Spring term, while those whose Ph.D. program starts in January will have their Qualifying Examination the following Fall term.