



POLICY: QUALIFYING EXAMINATION POLICY

Rationale and purpose

The qualifying examination is designed to determine whether a student can utilize the knowledge base gained during course work and from reading scientific literature to formulate well-reasoned answers to questions regarding major current concepts and paradigms in the discipline of study. Passing a qualifying examination provides evidence that the Ph.D. student can advance towards Ph.D. candidacy.

Basic format and timing

1. IPP students should take the qualifying exam at the end of their second year, upon completion of core coursework. Students pursuing a degree in pharmacology, and students in cell biology or physiology who are specializing in neuroscience should complete the qualifying exam by the end of the Fall semester (December) of their third year. This delay is justified because these students will be taking one of their major core courses (PHRM 1020 or BMSM 1410) in the Spring term of their second year of study. The scheduling of the exam will be determined by the Academic Advisory Committee.
2. Students in the M.D./Ph.D. program should take the qualifying examination at the end of the first year, and students in Ph.D. program with Advanced Standing should take the qualifying examination at the end of the first or by the end of the Fall semester of second year (e.g., Advanced Standing Ph.D. students specializing in neuroscience), as determined by their Academic Advisory Committee.
3. The qualifying examination may be delayed for individual students who have not yet completed the core curriculum and the essential disciplinary requirements at the normal time intended for the exam. All such deferments must be recommended by the student's Program Director and approved by the Academic Advisory Committee in consultation with the Dean.
4. Each program (department) will create the exam for the students who have entered that program. The format should consist of two components: a written component and an oral component. The weight of each component and the content of the exam will be program-specific as long as the overall scope and difficulty of the exams are comparable across different programs.
5. Students should be given a set of study objectives and topic areas, including reading requirements, two to four months before the examination. Students should also use the scientific literature in these areas during preparation. Study areas should be chosen so that they are narrow enough for a student to be able to master them in a brief period of intensive study yet of broad enough scope to be representative of the general discipline of the degree.
6. The student shall receive individualized guidance from the faculty to prepare for the qualifying examination and is expected to meet with faculty members frequently as he/she prepares for the exam.
7. Exams will be graded by the faculty in each department for the students in that program. When appropriate faculty expertise is available, at least two different faculty members can grade the exam. Programs are also encouraged to invite a member of the graduate faculty from a different department to grade at least part of the exam and to participate in the final assessment of the student's performance.

8. If the department or program uses a committee structure for the qualifying exam, the Qualifying Examination committee can be formed. It can include members of the student's Academic Advisory Committee.
9. Grades and the written part of the qualifying exam should be stored in the academic department. The completed Qualifying Exam Approval form, signed by the Qualifying Examination committee, should be submitted to the Graduate School of Basic Medical Sciences Dean's office for record keeping.
10. If the student's performance on the qualifying examination is unsatisfactory, they may be given the chance to retake the examination with the approval of student's Program Director and the Academic Advisory Committee in consultation with the Academic Standards Committee and the Dean based on their overall assessment of the student's potential to complete the program successfully. No more than two opportunities to pass the qualifying examination shall be provided. The scheduling of the reexamination should occur within a year of the first attempt and will be determined by the Program Director and the Academic Advisory Committee.

Other considerations

11. A student who seeks a transfer from one Ph.D. program to another *after* having passed the qualifying examination in the first program must follow the normal procedures for requesting a transfer and may be required to pass a qualifying examination in the second program. The faculty in the second program may waive this second examination if, in their judgment, the student has demonstrated sufficient knowledge of the new discipline.
12. A student who wishes to transfer from one Ph.D. program to another after having *failed* the qualifying examination in the first program must follow the normal procedures for requesting a transfer, which requires acceptance by the second program and approval of the transfer by the Dean. If the student is admitted to the second program, a second attempt at the new qualifying examination may be granted under conditions described in Section 10. Such student, however, is also subject to the possibility of dismissal for failure to make timely progress towards a degree.
13. A student who wishes to transfer from one laboratory to another in a different department without switching the program, can work towards their degree in the discipline of choice with permission of the Program Director, new Dissertation Advisor, Department Chair and the Dean.

HISTORY:

Updates Proposed to SCIPP:

Approved by Graduate Faculty Council: