

Revised October 2018

Qualifying Examination Procedure

The purpose of the PhD Qualifying Examination is twofold:

1. The Qualifying Examination (QE) ensures that doctoral students have the ability to think and write critically and work independently about an area of research or a social problem in order to enter into candidacy. The examination requires that students demonstrate integrative, evaluative, and critical appraisal of theory, empirical evidence, and research methodologies within a substantive area.
2. The products of the QE are a comprehensive paper and an oral presentation. The research, critical appraisal, and synthesis that students put into their examination should help them formulate research questions and develop material that can be used in their dissertation and potentially submitted for publication. Forming the QE Committee early in the second year of coursework and engaging the consultative process of developing the examination questions are intended to provide students with helpful mentoring and guidance from faculty.

Procedure of the examination

1. *Formation of QE Committee.* Each student will form a QE Committee comprised of three tenure-line faculty members appointed in the College of Social Work; exceptions must be approved by the PhD Program Committee. The student will invite one faculty member to chair his or her committee and will consult with the Chair regarding identification and selection of the additional two members. Normally, QE committee members may eventually serve on the student's dissertation committee. Thus, committee members should have substantive and/or methodological expertise to support the student's inquiry. The Ph.D. committee will review and approve each student's QE Committee.
2. *Timing of QE Committee formation.* Each student will develop his or her Committee as early as possible in the second year of doctoral course work, and no later than the second semester of that year. Students and faculty are encouraged to meet early and often to discuss compatibility based on interest, expertise, and availability. At the end of this document is a worksheet students need to complete and submit to their QE Committee for approval and signatures. Once approved, the QE Committee Chair will forward it to the PhD Director, who will then have the worksheet reviewed and approved by the PhD

Program Committee. The PhD Program Committee may also make suggestions for modifications, if needed, which will be directed to the QE Chair and the student to implement. The request will be reviewed by the Program Committee at the next scheduled meeting, provided it was received at least one week prior.

3. *Formulation of examination question(s).* Once the committee is approved by the PhD Program Committee, the student, in consultation with her or his QE Committee, will produce the objectives, goals and questions of the examination, accompanied by a bibliography.
4. *Proposing the examination question(s).* In a meeting with their Committee, students must finalize and receive the Committee's approval for their proposed examination question(s) no later than September 15th of the third year in the doctoral program, and no earlier than Spring Semester of their second year. The QE proposal shall include:
 - a. An introduction to the examination question(s), resulting in a clear statement of the issue to be examined and attending rationale, significance, and implications.
 - b. An overview of the research question or social problem to be examined including an emerging understanding of:
 - i. Theory or theories to be explored, integrated, critiqued, and/or identified gaps or controversies.
 - ii. A critical examination of the empirical research and the methods used to address the question/problem, including an analysis of strengths, limitations and controversies.
 - c. A bibliography that supports the objectives, goals and questions of the examination, addressing theory, research, and methods.
5. *Completing the examination.* Once the student's QE committee has approved the proposed examination, the student will have **3 months** to complete the examination. The examination is considered an independent project, during which the student may consult with their QE Committee for clarification of the questions. If necessary, the student may request an extension to complete the exam; this request must be submitted to the student's QE committee chair, who, in consultation with the QE Committee, will decide whether to grant the extension. It is strongly encouraged not to exceed an additional six weeks of extension. Failure to submit the completed written QE to the committee within the agreed upon timeframe will result in a failing grade for the exam and trigger a formal review. Students not completing and passing the QE within 6 months from the date of approval will receive a failing grade and will be formally reviewed.
6. The student will complete the examination by producing a scholarly paper (APA required, 50 pages maximum, exclusive of references) comprised of the following sections:

- a. Introduction to the examination.
 - b. Integrative critique of theory or theories of the research question or social problem.
 - c. Critical analysis of empirical research surrounding the research question or social problem.
 - d. Integrative summary of the introduction, theory, and critical appraisal of research including analysis of strengths, gaps, controversies, implications, and possible future directions for research.
 - e. Please articulate the rationale for the dissertation, including the research questions to be addressed, and the proposed methods.
7. *Grading.* In accordance with Graduate School requirements, students will orally present and defend their QE as a scholarly product. The QE Committee will grade students based on both the oral and written QE product. It is the responsibility of the QE Committee Chair to notify the student in writing of the exam results within three weeks of receipt of the completed QE document; a copy of the exam results must be sent to the Ph.D. Program Director and Program Coordinator. The oral defense of the written QE must be completed by January 31st of the student's third year. Exceptions must be reviewed and approved by the PhD Program Committee. Failure to complete the QE and move to candidacy by the end of the 3rd academic year may result in formal review and dismissal. **(100 points total)**

Guidelines for grading the QE. Committee members will consider the following guidelines in grading the written product:

1. The student develops and presents a critical, integrative analysis of theory and research, and produces an integrative summary rather than a summary overview. Students should strive to identify, conceptualize, evaluate and synthesize critical issues, gaps, and/or controversies as appropriate to the literature being explored. The work contributes clearly to and justifies the proposed dissertation research project. **(50 points)**
2. The content of the exam is relevant to social work while integrating interdisciplinary scholarship and critique. **(15 points)**
3. The exam is coherent and well-written as evidenced by a logical sequence of ideas, bridging transitions, and adherence to APA Guidelines. **(15 points)**
4. The oral presentation and defense is well organized, thoughtful and clear. **(20 points)**

Grading criteria for the oral and written examination: Students will receive feedback on both the written product and oral presentation in each of the four areas: theory, research, integrative summary and proposed dissertation project. On the complete product, three initial evaluations are possible: pass, conditional pass, and fail. The evaluation of “pass” indicates no revisions are required. Students who receive a “conditional pass” will be required to resubmit either all or a portion of the exam material as instructed by the QE committee. The evaluation of “fail” indicates the student’s work earned less than 70 points and the student will have to petition the Ph.D. Program Committee to retake the exam. Timelines and future steps for each of the three options are described in greater detail below.

1. **Pass.** Students who receive a “pass” evaluation will meet with their committee within two weeks of receiving feedback to discuss future steps and receive consultation on the dissertation process. At this point, students also move into Candidacy (see PhD handbook). A grade of 85% is needed for a clear “Pass” with no revision.
2. **Conditional pass.** Students who receive a “conditional pass” evaluation must revise and resubmit some or all of their work as directed by their Committee. A conditional pass suggests that revisions are needed in order for the student to receive a passing grade and move on to candidacy. The Committee will determine the timeline by which revised materials must be resubmitted; in general, it is expected that up to four weeks will be a sufficient time frame. Revised work will be evaluated using the same criteria for originally submitted material. If the resubmitted material does not earn a grade of “Pass,” then the student will be considered to have failed the Qualifying Examination, and must follow the procedures listed below in #3. A grade of 70-84% is required for a “Conditional Pass” with revisions required.
3. **Fail.** Students who fail the QE will need to petition the PhD Program Committee if they wish to retake the examination; by policy of the U of U Graduate School, students will only be permitted to take the QE twice (i.e. one retake only). The PhD Program Committee will review a student’s request to retake the QE, which must include an appropriate plan of study approved by their QE Committee, and completed prior to the QE retake. Once the student completes the additional plan of study, the student will submit documentation of the work completed to the PhD Program Committee, who will review the request and approve the student to move forward with their QE Committee to re-develop the proposal and retake the QE. The second QE will need to be completed within three months of the PhD Program Committee’s approval of a new QE request. The QE retake will be evaluated using the same guidelines as for the original submission. If the student does not earn a “Pass” or “Conditional Pass” with completed revisions (see #2 above) on the QE retake, she or he will be dismissed from the program in accordance with PhD Program policy. A grade of less than 70% results in “Fail.”

Instructions: Request to Form Qualifying Examination Committee

To help you form a Qualifying Examination Committee, please complete the following worksheet and return it to your proposed QE Committee members and the PhD Director (Christina.Gringeri@sockw.utah.edu), with a copy to the PhD Program Coordinator (Mirela.Rankovic@socwk.utah.edu). Each proposed QE Committee worksheet will be reviewed by the PhD Program Committee at its next scheduled meeting, providing it has been submitted at least one week prior.

In completing this form, we expect you will consult with the proposed members of your Committee to seek feedback, approval and guidance. Each proposed member will need to sign off on this worksheet. As needed, please feel free to consult with the PhD Director or CSW faculty prior to completing this form.

Worksheet: Please answer the following three questions that will help the PhD Committee review your request.

1. Concisely describe the research questions or social problems you desire to pursue in your Qualifying Examination. Consider providing sufficient context to position your research or social problem in the literature in general and specifically within social work.
2. Briefly discuss what motivates you to study this area?
3. Please list your proposed QE committee members, noting what each individual can contribute to your work in terms of substantive or methodological expertise. Finally, please ask each proposed Committee member to verify that they have reviewed your ideas with you and agree to be on your committee by signing the form.