

Ph.D. Candidacy Examination and Proposal Defense

Approved by the Geosciences faculty 4/21/2010.

All students in the Ph.D. program are required to pass a written and an oral candidacy examination during the academic term immediately following the completion of their coursework. For full-time students this should be within the first five regular semesters of admission to the program. Part-time students should complete the exams within the first seven regular semesters of admission to the program. The deadline for exam completion may be extended with unanimous consent from the student's Ph.D. committee and approval from the Department Chair. The oral exam must be taken within one month after satisfactory completion of the written examination. Satisfactory completion of both exams is determined by the student's Ph.D. committee. The student's doctoral committee chair will report the results to the student and Department Chair in writing within 2 weeks after completion of each exam component.

The candidacy examination evaluates the student's background preparation and problem-solving abilities. The goal is to determine that the candidate has a sufficient level of geosciences knowledge, and the theoretical, and methodological approaches in the chosen area of study. The dates of the examinations will be selected by the student in consultation with the student's doctoral committee, but must be announced during the first two weeks of the semester in which the exam will be given. The student will make the request in writing to the Department Chair to have the examination dates reserved.

For the written component of the examination, the student will work with his/her doctoral committee to identify the subject areas chosen no later than two months before the date of the written examination. The student must demonstrate satisfactory performance in all areas of the written exam. The exam will cover at a minimum two subject areas or subfields relevant to the focus of the student's dissertation research. The content of the written examination is usually comprised of material from graduate courses in the designated subject areas, although the questions are not necessarily restricted to topics covered in any specific course. Questions may also come from pertinent reading lists provided to the student by any member of the student's doctoral committee. Such reading lists must be given to the student no later than two months prior to the examination date. The student's advisor will solicit questions for the written exams from the student's doctoral committee. The written examination will take place within a one week period. The exact number of examination sessions during the week will be determined by the student's doctoral committee chair based on the number of questions received by the committee members. The exam may or may not be 'open book' at the discretion of the doctoral committee. Students will not be allowed to take the oral exam unless they have passed the written exam.

The oral examination is based on the student's written examination as well as any supplementary readings provided to the student by the doctoral committee members. The supplementary readings should be focused on areas of deficiency identified by the student's performance on the written examination. The oral examination normally occurs within one month after the written examination. The entire oral examination should normally last approximately two hours. Announcements of oral candidacy exams will be publicly posted. The oral examination is attended by the candidate and doctoral committee only.

The examining committee will deliberate to make a judgment of either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory for the Ph.D. Candidacy Examinations (no more than one dissenting vote is allowed). A Satisfactory judgment on both the written and oral parts of the examination as well as a successful proposal defense must be achieved by the student in order to be a Ph.D. candidate. The Ph.D. committee may request the student to remedy deficiencies identified during the candidacy exams, which may include additional coursework. Students are limited to two chances to pass the candidacy exams. If the student fails the first attempt, the second attempt must occur within one year of the first attempt. Students who fail to pass the candidacy exam in two attempts will be dismissed from the program and possibly redirected into one of the Department's Master's programs.

The student's dissertation proposal normally should not exceed 25 pages including tables, figures and references. The proposal must be presented in digital format (email is acceptable) to the student's Ph.D. committee at least one week prior to the oral defense of the proposal. Normally, the proposal defense occurs after the completion of the written and oral examination; however, the doctoral committee has the flexibility to allow the student to give the presentation and defense of the proposal in a different order. Students must clearly demonstrate their understanding and competency in their proposed research question, relevant literature and proposed methodology. Announcements of the proposal defense will be publicly posted as well as emailed to faculty in the doctoral program in geosciences. All university community members are welcomed to attend the proposal defense.

The student must petition for admission to candidacy following successful completion of the written and oral components of the qualifying examination and a successful proposal defense. This petition requires filing the appropriate forms with the Graduate School. The student will provide the Department Chair with copies of the forms submitted to the Graduate School.