

## **BCN Qualifying Exam Guidelines**

A "Qualifying Exam" or "Quals" is an examination that must be passed in order to advance to PhD candidacy. The BCN area offers two options for the Qualifying Exam.

**OPTION 1: Review Paper.** This paper is typically a 20-25 page (double-spaced) paper that reviews the literature on a narrow topic related to the dissertation. A reminder that this paper is not able to be used for a Dissertation Proposal. An outline for the paper should be provided in the Program of Study along with a Reading List. Students often compose their outline with the references slotted into the outline, as in an annotated bibliography. Once the Program of Study and Reading List have been approved by the committee, the student has a maximum of 2 months to submit the qualifying exam paper.

**OPTION 2: Exam.** Answer 8-10 questions (~2 pages per question) off-line (no internet, no textbooks). Questions will be written by the Dissertation Committee and are guided by the Reading List and relevant completed coursework detailed in the Program of Study. The student will answer the questions during two back-to-back days.

After turning in the exam or paper to the Dissertation Committee, an oral exam will occur (usually 2-3 weeks later). During the oral exam, weaknesses in the paper/exam are usually probed further.

Step 1. Together with your advisor, choose Option 1 or 2.

Step 2. Draft your Program of Study and have it approved by your Dissertation Chair (your advisor). Include a Reading List and, if necessary, a Paper Outline. Reading Lists typically include 50-100 papers.

Step 3. Circulate the Program of Study to your committee, requesting edits to your Reading List/Outline. Once approved by all members of your committee, schedule your written exam or set a deadline for your paper. Once the Program of Study and Reading List have been approved by the committee, the exam or paper should be written without the help of anyone else, especially the advisor.

Step 4. Schedule your oral examination to be held 2-3 weeks after turning in your exam/paper.

It is recommended that the Qualifying Exam occur in the Fall semester of Year 3. Passing this exam allows the student to advance to candidacy and officially begin dissertation work to earn a PhD. It is hard to justify beginning dissertation work prior to advancing to candidacy.

The hard deadline for the Qualifying Exam completion is Summer of Year 3 or prior to earning 80 credits (this includes transfer credits), whichever is first. Failure to complete the exam prior to the start of Year 4 Fall semester will result in being placed on probation. The outcome of a probationary case will be recommended by BCN area faculty together with the dissertation committee. In some cases this may result in being administered Option 2 (written exam) on the timeline of your committee's choosing. In some cases, this may result in expulsion from the program. However, keep in mind that BCN faculty want to help all students succeed. Please reach out to your mentor and/or area director if you anticipate a problem in meeting this deadline.