

AHN Qualifying Examination (QE) Process

According to the University of Guelph [Graduate Calendar](#), “As a qualifying examination, consideration is to be given not only (1) to the student’s knowledge of the subject matter and ability to integrate the material derived from his or her studies, but also (2) to the student’s ability and promise in research. The examining committee, therefore, will receive from the advisory committee a written evaluation of the quality of the student’s **research performance** to date and of the **student’s potential as a researcher**. The examining committee will determine the relative important to be given to these two major components of the qualifying examination.”

The Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition has developed the following qualifying examination process in keeping with this regulation.

This examination provides an explicit point early in the student’s work for determination of the appropriateness of a given student officially entering the doctoral program. The purpose of the qualifying examination is to ensure that the student has attained sufficient breadth and depth of the knowledge. Upon successful completion of the exam, the doctoral student officially becomes a ‘doctoral candidate’.

Examination Committee

The student’s advisor, in collaboration with the student, suggests the composition of the qualifying examination committee and submits the [Qualifying Examination Committee Appointment Form](#) to the Graduate Program Assistant. **This form is due a minimum of 8 weeks prior to the anticipated exam date for AHN students.**

The Examination Committee consists of 5 members:

- 1) Two members of the student’s advisory committee
- 2) Two additional members of the graduate faculty who are not members of the advisory committee
- 3) The Chair of the examination committee. This individual is determined by the Chair of the Department in consultation with the Graduate Coordinator and normally alternates between the Department Chair or their designate and the Graduate Coordinator, except when the student’s advisor is the Chair or Graduate Coordinator.

NOTE: At least **one** member of the qualifying examination committee must be from outside the department; this requirement is most readily met by naming the external advisory committee member to the examination committee.

Schedule

If not accomplished during semester 4, the qualifying examination is completed in semester 5. ***Whether the student has completed the written component or not, the qualifying examination must be held by the end of semester 5.*** A decision of FAIL will be the normal outcome if the written component is not submitted in time for the qualifying exam, and a second exam will normally be scheduled, within 6 months, at the discretion of the examination committee.

In accordance with the University of Guelph guidelines, students are required to complete a qualifying examination **no later than the end of the 5th semester**. This is the same deadline by which all PhD students must have presented their thesis proposals to the large group in Research Seminar (see [PhD Schedules of Dates and Deadlines](#)).



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NOTE: Students do not register for UNIV*7000 Doctoral Qualifying Examination. Rather, the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies adds the course to the student’s transcript once the QE result has been reported to them by the department.

Components of the Qualifying Examination (QE)

1) Written

The written component will consist of a paper of no more than 50 pages, excluding references, using a 12 Times New Roman font, 2.0 line spacing, 1” margins, and the **most recent** referencing style.

In AHN, the student is given four questions, one written by each member of the QE committee and finalized by the committee as a whole (under the direction of the student’s advisor) prior to release to the student. The purpose of the written component is to demonstrate the student’s ability to integrate knowledge with the critical appraisal of original literature, on selected topics in AHN. The topics will reflect the student’s: 1) coursework; 2) area of research; and 3) stated interests. The student will be given **four weeks** to prepare the responses to these questions, with full access to all library facilities. The student should feel free to consult with members of the qualifying examination committee during the course of writing the paper for clarification of the examination question(s), access to reference materials, etc. The written material may not be shared by students (or reviewed by examiners) until the QE has been completed and submitted for evaluation. Once completed, the written component is submitted in hard copy by the student to the QE committee for evaluation.

2) Oral Component

The qualifying examination is completed **within two weeks** of submission of the written component to the examination committee. The oral component of the QE involves a defence of the written component. This is a **closed** session, only including the student and members of the QE committee. This defence typically occurs for 1.5-2 hours. See note below re: scheduling of the oral component.

The defence of the written component involves the examination committee asking questions of the student (e.g., average of 15-25 minutes per examiner). Questions focus on the theory or substantive area covered by the written component. The committee may ask questions of the student outside of this document to obtain further information on research potential (e.g., questions about additional research projects the student has been involved with, etc.)

After the questioning period, the student leaves the room and there is a closed discussion among members of the examination committee, considering all components of the Qualifying Exam.

3) Supplementary Information Evaluated by the QE Committee

Skill/Activity	Description	Evidence Required	Responsibility and Timeline
Written Communication	Demonstrates critical thinking and integration of material	1. Written responses to exam questions <i>Optional: Advisory committee and course instructors’ evaluations of written communication</i>	Student – 2 weeks prior to QE oral defence Advisor Solicited by the Chair of QE
Oral Communication	Performance in course presentations, research presentations	1. Presentation of thesis proposal in large group seminar before QE 2. Defence of written component of QE	Student

		<i>Optional: Advisory committee and course instructors' evaluations of oral communication</i>	Advisor Solicited by the Chair of QE
Student's Assessment of Research Potential	Provides examples of expected competencies being met, highlights academic accomplishments, outlines future plans	1. Cover letter 2. Student's CV 3. Unofficial transcripts 4. PhD student evaluation reports	Student – submitted with written components of exam two weeks prior to QE
Demonstrated research potential	Concrete examples of independence in research	One of the following must be complete by QE: thesis proposal, funding proposal, published manuscript	Student
Advisory committee assessment of research potential	Provides context, description of student's research activity from their perspective	1. Letter addressed to QE chair signed by all members of the advisory committee; evaluates the student's capacity to complete independent research based on the activities and evidence accumulated to date, comments on the GRA/GSA and other areas of skill development 2. Copies of semester evaluation reports	Advisor – provided 2 weeks prior to QE Chair of QE

Outcome of Qualifying Examination

The task of the qualifying examination committee is to arrive at a recommendation to the Office of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies and the candidate. The recommendation may take the form of: a) approval for admission (pass), or b) disapproval (fail). If the student fails the QE, they **may** be given the opportunity by the examining committee to be re-examined within **six months**. Failure of the second attempt at the QE results in a recommendation to the Board of Graduate Studies that the student be required to withdraw.

The student has passed the qualifying examination if there is no more than one “unsatisfactory” vote among the examiners. An abstention is regarded as a negative vote. The Chair of the qualifying examination committee communicates the results (pass or fail) to the Dean of Graduate Studies by completing the **Report on Qualifying Examination Form** and provides detailed written feedback to the student.

Roles and Responsibilities

Faculty Advisor: The role of the advisor will vary depending on the stage of the qualifying examination process. Particularly important are the advisor's responsibilities to explain and plan for the qualifying examination at the beginning of the doctoral student's program, determine and solicit QE members (except the Chair), and to schedule regular meetings and monitor the student's progress.

The advisor, in conjunction with the student are also responsible for scheduling and booking the examination room and equipment with the Graduate Program Assistant and accumulating and providing access to all documents as required to the QE committee (see chart above for requirements).

Advisory Committee Member: The advisory committee member who is not part of the QE examination provides input to the written evaluation of the student's research potential which takes the form of a letter written by the advisory committee to the chair of the qualifying examination committee. Contact to assist the student with conceptualizing or completing the written component of the exam is **not permitted**.

Qualifying Examination Committee Members: the examination committee members external to the advisory committee do not meet regularly with the student. Their role in an AHN examination is to write a question for completion by the student, and liaise with the examination committee to ensure minimal overlap and sufficient breadth in the four questions written for the exam. As necessary they may meet with the student to clarify the question or provide access to resources unavailable at the library.

Chair of the Qualifying Examination: The role of the chair is to ensure proper procedures are carried out. Specific roles include:

- 1) Chairing the qualifying examination before the end of the fifth semester, in accordance with the university regulations.
- 2) Providing written feedback to the student following the examination.
- 3) Communicating the decision of the committee to the Office of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies by ensuring signatures of QE members are provided on the Report on Qualifying Examination Form and submitting to the Graduate Program Assistant.

Note: Scheduling of the Oral Component

The date of the oral component is negotiated between the student and the advisory committee. Students are encouraged to anticipate scheduling issues and may find it helpful to connect with the committee as they near completion of the written component and in advance of the anticipated completion date. From an administrative perspective, the room booking of the oral defence is coordinated through the Graduate Program Assistant, typically informed by the advisor.

Tips for Students to Consider During the Qualifying Examination Process

- Remember that passing the qualifying examination should be your first priority during the first four semesters of your doctoral program. The qualifying examination determines whether you will be allowed to continue in the program.
- Be sure that you and your advisor meet regularly during this period to help you keep on track.
- Make time for research and writing, especially in semester 4. It is advisable to arrange your time accordingly during this time. For example, you may plan to reduce your course load during this time and avoid taking on responsibilities such as teaching a course.