

FRHD 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 by the end of the 2nd semester for FRHD 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 specialization paper and qualifying examination are completed in semester 5. ***Whether the student has completed the paper 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 SP 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 Schedule of Dates and Deadlines](#)).

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.

For FRHD students, a specialization paper (SP) is written. Please see the detailed instructions below to produce a cohesive and sound document. Activities are suggested by semester to ensure progress and timely completion.

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.

In the closed sessions, FRHD students will give an oral presentation based on the content of the specialization paper. This 15-20 minute presentation provides an opportunity for the student to present further thoughts or reflections on the specialization paper.

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. Specialization Paper <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 SP in closed QE 2. Defence of written component of QE <i>Optional: Advisory committee and course instructors’</i>	Student Advisor Solicited by the Chair of QE

		<i>evaluations of oral communication</i>	
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 5. Approved PhD Specialization Paper Proposal form signed by all qualifying examination committee members	Student – submitted with written components of exam two weeks prior to QE
Demonstrated research potential	Concrete examples of independence in research	<i>Optional:</i> Conference presentations, publications, scholarships, proposals	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 with **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. In the case of the FRHD specialization paper, the advisor typically writes the first draft of the advisory committee letter evaluating the student's research potential and submits this to the chair of the QE after additions have been made by advisory committee members and the letter has been signed by all advisory committee members.

In FRHD, the advisor also chairs the meeting as which the SP proposal is presented and submits the approved time line and [Approval of PhD Specialization Proposal](#) form to the Graduate Program Assistant **by the mid-**

point of the 4th semester. The student's progress on the SP should be reported on the student's evaluation report at the end of each semester. At the end of the fourth semester, poor progress should result in an evaluation of "some concerns". When the student is nearing completion of the SP, the advisor will identify potential dates for the QE in consultation with the Graduate Program Assistant.

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 a FRHD examination is to approve the scope of the SP during one or more initial meetings or when major changes in scope are proposed by the student and advisor. They also read and evaluate the SP and participate in the qualifying examination.

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 completing the specialization paper and 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 the specialization paper, 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.

PhD FRHD: Overview of the Specialization Paper (SP)

Expected Competencies to be Achieved:

- Ability to use, describe and evaluate theory;
- Specialization in an area of research literature that will serve as a broad basis for the doctoral thesis proposal. (However, the "specialization" should not be so close to the thesis proposal that it either results in the thesis research questions or reproduces their literature review);
- Ability to demonstrate independent writing;
- Ability to construct a logical argument, and to see flaws in other arguments;

- Ability to articulate and consult, to develop a question for the specialization paper in conjunction with the advisory committee; and
- Ability to construct a well-written paper, using the most recent APA style of referencing.

Description and Content

The specialization paper involves the identification and application of a set of theoretical ideas to a substantive area of research related to the student's general dissertation interests. The theoretical ideas should be related to the proposed dissertation topic but have a broader theoretical orientation than the thesis. The primary purpose of the paper is for the student to develop competency in using theory. This involves demonstrating an understanding of underlying theoretical premises and key concepts, an ability to apply theoretical concepts to the chosen substantive area, and an ability to articulate possibilities for its future development. Students will be evaluated according to their ability to organize and conceptualize a problem, engage in a critical theorizing process, and communicate the results in writing and in an oral presentation and defence. The goal is not to integrate different theories, although integration may be possible to some extent.

Components of the Specialization Paper (SP):

- 1) A statement of the general problem to be analyzed;
- 2) An introduction and overview of the theoretical conceptualizations, including key assumptions, epistemological considerations, and key concepts underlying the literature being reviewed;
- 3) Consideration of the role of theoretical conceptualizations in the formation of research questions;
- 4) Critical reflection on the strengths and limitations of the selected theoretical ideas in relation to the chosen topic; and
- 5) A consideration of future directions for the theory that would move the research forward.

Detailed Timelines for the Specialization Paper (SP)

Semester 1

- Planning for the SP and the qualifying examination should begin early in the first semester of the doctoral program. Early discussions between the student and advisor should focus on clarifying the nature of the qualifying examination and SP procedure, expectations for student and advisor responsibilities and meetings, and outlining a timetable for completing the SP and QE.
- By the end of the first semester, the student should identify a broad research area and a set of theoretical ideas that will be the topic of the SP. Progress should be noted on the doctoral student's evaluation for semester one.

Semester 2

- During the second semester the student should read broadly in the research literature relevant to their future thesis proposal. Such readings generally incorporate suggestions by the student and the advisor. Regular meetings between the advisor and student must be scheduled to discuss the readings and shape the SP proposal. In addition, the advisory committee members are selected.
- The student-advisor relationship during this phase is collaborative and the student may also seek input from advisory committee members.
- Towards the end of the second semester, the advisor, in collaboration with the student completes the [Qualifying Examination Committee Appointment Form](#) (except the chair) and submits it to the Graduate Program Assistant for review by the Graduate Coordinator.

Semester 3

- The student submits to the qualifying examination committee a three-page proposal for the SP outlining the scope of the paper, including major sources and a representative by not exhaustive reading list. The qualifying examination committee should subsequently meet with the student to ensure general agreement on the scope of the paper. The committee may approve the plan or provide constructive feedback to come to a speedy approval. **Semester 4**

- During the fourth semester, the student will carry out the major portion of the reading for the SP. The student meets regularly with the advisor to discuss progress. However, **the advisor may not read or comment on written portions or drafts of the SP**. The student should also take the opportunity to discuss program with other student who are also in the writing stag of their SP.
- The expectation regarding the advisor-student relationship during this period, is for greater independence in the student's performance. That is, collaboration and mentorship are expected to continue in discussions of readings and oral plans for organizing the paper.
- The [Approval of PhD Specialization Paper Proposal](#) form is completed and signed. **Failure to complete this by the end of the fourth semester will result in a "some concerns" on the student's semester evaluation.**
- The paper must be written within **6 months** of the approval of the proposal. Only medical or compassionate grounds will be considered if the deadline is not met. Students may submit their paper earlier.

Semester 5

- The student's advisor identifies the near completion of the SP to the Graduate Program Assistant. The oral examination is set within 2 weeks of anticipated submission of the written component.
- If not accomplished during semester 4, the SP and QE are completed in semester 5. ***Whether the student has completed the paper or not, the QE must be held by the end of semester 5. A decision of fail will be the outcome if the SP is not submitted in time for the qualifying examination, and a second exam will normally be scheduled within 6 months, at the discretion of the examining committee.***