

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION FOR TRANSFERRING TO A PH.D PROGRAM

**DBS Graduate Studies Committee
(11 December 2017)**

Under the university policy, all graduate students who wish to transfer to the Ph.D. program are required to take two examinations: a written qualifying examination followed by an oral examination. The written examination will test students' ability to read, understand, analyze, and criticize scientific literature papers, while the oral examination will test specific knowledge about their research project and the broader research field within which the project is contained.

Written Qualifying Examination (QE)

Schedule of written examination

The department will conduct the written examination at the beginning of every semester, i.e. January and August. Details of date and venue will be announced about two months in advance.

Students are required to read BL5198 before attempting to sit for the QE written test.

Procedure

- Students who wish to transfer to the Ph.D. program need to pass the written QE. It is recommended that students take their QE at the end of their second semester in graduate school, and no later than by the beginning of their fourth semester. Students need to get their supervisors' approval before applying for the written QE.

Format of the written examination

Students will be given a choice of several research articles two weeks before they take the oral examination. They should pick one of these articles to read and study carefully, but they can read and prepare material for more than one article, if they wish. In addition, students should read additional research/review articles around the same topic, or in the same field, to become familiar with aims and goals of the larger field of research represented by the specific article, the techniques used in that field, and advances achieved since the article was published. The exam questions will be specific to each of the proposed articles and students can choose which questions they want to answer at the beginning of the examination. Questions around the article may be broad or quite specific, and are left to the discretion of different faculty members. The examination may test a student's ability to read and understand the specific research article, the student's ability to provide a critical assessment of the articles' strengths and weaknesses or its methodology, ability to discuss a controversial topic raised in the article, the ability of the student to devise additional hypotheses and experiments that can advance the field forward, etc. The exam will last up to four hours and be in the open-book format, but no internet access will be permitted.

Marking standards

- The exam can be either handwritten or typewritten. The handwriting must be clear and legible.
- Students will be examined on
 - their knowledge in the field,
 - the quality of their reasoning,
 - the quality of their arguments,
 - and the quality of their writing style.

Preparation for the examination

- Students are required to read BL5198 for preparation of the written QE.
- Students will be given two weeks to read and prepare for the written test.
- Students should read a broad range of research articles to prepare for the QE.

Results of the examination

There will be “Pass” or “Fail” grades. A “Pass” grade will be awarded if the student attains a score equivalent to or above a B grade.

Students with a “Pass” grade will then proceed on to the oral examination.

Students with a “Fail” grade are allowed to apply for the second examination, by the beginning of their fourth semester at the latest. This will be their final chance to remain in the graduate program.

Oral Qualifying Examination

After passing the written examination, the student can proceed on to the oral examination, which should be conducted before the 21th month of beginning of the candidature (end of Apr for Aug intake; end of Sep for Jan intake), at the latest. Students can take the oral QE as soon as they are ready, anytime from 12-18 months of the candidature. A warning letter will be issued by the Head of Department if the oral QE is delayed beyond the 21 months limit.

Requirements

Before taking the oral QE, the student should meet the following conditions:

- A. Have taken three graded level 5000 graduate modules with an average grade of B (CAP of 3.5 and above).
- B. Preferably fulfilled a minimum of 104 hours of part-time teaching if the student has been awarded a NUS scholarship.

The oral examination will focus on the following:

- A. Research progress.
- B. Research proposal.
- C. Knowledge in the specific research area.

Procedure

- A student has to pass the PhD Written Qualifying Examination before s(he) can take the oral qualifying examination.
- The student has to form his/her examination committee consisting of two voting members and the supervisor as a non-voting member. One of the voting members will act as the Chairperson.
- The student will need to submit a written proposal for his/her research thesis of about 10-15 (maximum) pages, covering question/ hypothesis/ specific aims/ methods/ expected outcomes, and progress, **at least two weeks before the oral examination.**
- The student needs to present his/her thesis proposal in an open seminar, followed by a closed session with the examination committee.
- It is up to the discretion of the Chairperson whether the supervisor(s) has to leave the examination venue during the close-door discussion by the examiners.
- A decision will be made by the Committee in the absence of the student and the supervisor(s).

Results

The Committee will decide if the student

- passes the oral examination and can transfer to the Ph.D. program directly.
- be given a conditional “Pass”, with conditions stipulated by the Committee. A re-examination may be called for if necessary.
- fails the examination and should not be transferred to the Ph.D. program.

Thesis Committee or Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC)

A TAC should be formed immediately after confirmation of the supervisor by the student and, if the faculty wishes, can be used to panel the oral QE. TAC members will be recommended by the supervisor and approved by the DBS Graduate Committee. A TAC will consist of a supervisor(s) and two non-supervisory members. One of the non-supervisory members will act as the chairperson.

One TAC meeting must be conducted within the student’s first year of study after admission to help the student prepare for their QE. The meeting format of the TAC is flexible. It is the responsibility of each student to call regular meetings of the TAC at least once a year after QE. Meetings can be held anytime during the semester to avoid scheduling conflicts.

The final TAC meeting makes a recommendation for thesis submission. For more information on TAC, please refer to this [link](#).