

FACULTY OF FORESTRY
University of Toronto
FORMAT OF THE PH.D.
QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

Each Ph.D. student is required to pass a Faculty qualifying examination, which will ordinarily be taken between months 6 and 16 of the program. The examination is oral and normally will take two to three hours.

The purpose of the exam is to test the overall competence of the student in their area of specialization, their scientific foundation within their discipline, their ability to develop an acceptable Ph.D. proposal of appropriate depth and scope, and their ability to integrate knowledge acquired in different ways and from varied sources into a scientific whole. Students preparing for the examination should become familiar with all areas of science relevant to effective pursuit of the proposed research. The objectives of the exam are to demonstrate that the candidate possesses adequate critical thinking and problem solving abilities and has sufficient knowledge and background in their area of specialization.

The supervisor, in consultation with the student, selects the examination committee members and the date, time, and place of the exam, and provides this information to the Graduate Administrator for approval by the Graduate Coordinator. If the date and time of the exam has not been confirmed at the time when the exam committee names are submitted for approval, the supervisor should provide the Faculty with this information as soon as it is available, and not later than two weeks before the scheduled exam date. This will allow the Faculty sufficient time to arrange for an exam chair and to issue a formal notice. At least two weeks prior to the exam, the candidate must provide each examiner with a copy of the Ph.D. proposal. The proposal defines the research area and thus forms a basis for questioning and is itself part of the evidence upon which the final evaluation will be made. For these reasons, it should be written with care. Prior to the questioning, the student will undertake a 20-minute oral presentation of the proposal.

All supervisory committee members should attend the qualifying exam. The quorum for the exam is five: the supervisor, at least three supervisory committee members, plus at least one examiner from outside the student's supervisory committee.

In order to assess the candidate's qualifications and likelihood of Ph.D. completion, the onus of each examination committee member is to ask integrative questions concerning the Ph.D. proposal and the candidate's area of specialization. The Chair will remind the examiners of this objective at the start of the exam. The Chair must ensure that the examiner's questions are focused toward the objectives of the exam process.

At the time of the examination, the Chair will review the candidate's background with the committee members prior to introducing the candidate to the committee. The Chair will then oversee two rounds of questioning by committee members and will keep a brief record of the main topics covered and asked. Judging whether or not the answers offered by the candidate appear to adequately meet a questioner's expectations is the role of the

questioner and the examination committee as a whole. The supervisor goes last in the order of questioning.

Following the question period, the candidate will withdraw from the examination room and committee members will discuss the candidate's performance. The discussion on the student's performance will be started by someone other than the supervisor.

The exam has three possible outcomes: **pass**, **decision deferred pending supplementary undertakings (conditional pass)**, or **unsatisfactory**. A decision should be reached by a consensus of the committee whenever possible. In the event that no consensus is apparent, the Chair will call for a vote to be taken by a secret ballot. The Chair reserves the right to defer any decision if he/she believes that either fairness to the student or the standards of the Faculty are being compromised.

The candidate **passes** the exam if all members vote affirmatively.

The **decision is deferred pending supplementary undertakings (conditional pass)** if one negative vote is recorded, if there are extenuating circumstances, or for any other reason that the Committee finds compelling. Supplementary undertakings can take one of several forms at the discretion of the Examining Committee. For example, they may comprise a subsequent written or oral exam or the student may be asked to write an essay or review on a specified subject or to revise the thesis proposal. The exact nature of the supplementary undertakings, the procedures to be followed, and method of evaluation must be communicated in writing to the student as well as to all committee members. Supplementary undertakings should be completed within three months of the original qualifying exam.

If there is more than one negative vote, the outcome will be judged **unsatisfactory** and the examination will be adjourned and reconvened not earlier than six weeks following the adjournment. The examination can be reconvened only once. If unsuccessful in the second examination, the candidate is ineligible to continue in the Ph.D. program of the Faculty of Forestry.

Following the qualifying exam, the Exam Chair will verbally inform the candidate of the committee's decision and recommendation. The Chair also submits a written report on the proceedings, question topics, and outcome of the examination to the Graduate Coordinator.

The qualifying examination is considered to be a committee meeting; however, a committee meeting prior to the exam may prove useful. Prior to their examination, candidates are welcome to meet informally with members of the examination committee to discuss their proposal.

The meeting that transfers a student from an M.Sc.F. to a Ph.D. program can simultaneously be used to undertake a qualifying examination provided that the procedures outlined in this document are followed and that the supervisory committee is

aware of this dual purpose of the meeting at least two weeks prior to the exam. In this case, the committee's deliberations are a two-step process: 1) is transfer to a Ph.D. program advised and, if so, 2) what is the outcome of the qualifying exam? Prior to contemplating such a dual-purpose meeting, it is recommended that the student's supervisor discuss the possibility with the graduate coordinator.

Instructions for the Chair:

- 1) Please note the above paragraph.
- 2) Ask the candidate to leave the room.
- 3) Verify that all examination committee members have read the proposal and inform them that they are to ask integrative questions concerning the Ph.D. proposal and the candidate's area of specialization.
- 4) Review the candidate's background with the committee members. Ask the supervisor if they have any brief comments.
- 5) Establish the order of questioning (the supervisor is last). Inform the committee members that two rounds of questioning will occur, with approximately 10 minutes per committee member. Committee members can pass on a second set of questions if they so desire.
- 6) Invite the candidate back into the room, inform them of the order of questioning, and inform them that they have 20 minutes for an oral presentation of the proposal.
- 7) During the questioning, keep a record of the main topics covered.
- 8) At the end of the questioning period, ask the candidate to leave the room and then ask that one of the committee members (other than the supervisor) initiate a discussion on the candidate's performance.
- 9) Once a decision has been reached by the committee (see details above), ask the candidate back into the room and inform them of the committee's decision and recommendation. *If the outcome of the exam is "decision deferred pending supplementary undertakings (conditional pass)", the exact nature of the undertakings, the procedures to be followed, and method of evaluation must be communicated in writing to the student, all committee members, and the graduate coordinator.*
- 10) Submit a written report on the proceedings (question topics and exam outcome) to the Graduate Coordinator.