Proposal for New Ph.D. Qualifying Examination Format

The primary goal of the PhD program in HESP is the development of skills related to the creation and dissemination of knowledge. This, in turn, requires being able to take in the existing knowledge in the field, distill it into its main points, identify pieces that are missing, and use that to identify logical next steps and subsequent questions. These skills are developed through hands-on practice; the PhD qualifying exam is one means of learning these various skills. That is, the intent of the qualifying exam is to itself be a learning process, not a pure assessment.

As such, the Ph.D. qualifying exam is designed to lead to the following learning outcomes:

1. Improving students’ critical thinking in approaching a research question.
2. Improving students’ understanding of the broader context of their own research.
3. Improving students’ ability to defend their ideas to a critical audience.
4. Improving students’ ability to express their ideas in writing and to provide a coherent, critical message.
5. Establishing a springboard toward completing the dissertation.

The qualifying exam will consist of one of the following two options:

1) A broad literature review: A critical review of (primarily) peer-reviewed journal articles in which the student presents an original synthesis of ideas. It is intended to be broad in scope. Students could use this literature review toward their dissertation. The length is expected to be approximately 20-30 double-spaced pages, 12-point font, 1” margins, not including references or figures. The paper should follow APA style, as should all written documents for the HESP Department.

2) A grant proposal with an extended literature review. This will include a 1-page Specific Aims, a Background and Significance section expanded to 3 pages, and a Research Strategy section limited to 5 pages. Formatting is expected to follow current NIH requirements for F31/F32 grant applications (available online; students should consult with their mentor to confirm current requirements). In other words, 11-point font size (Arial only) or larger for other fonts (such as Times New Roman). This form of the QE is single-spaced with margins as narrow as 0.5” page. The paper should follow APA editorial style (currently, the 7th Edition).

It is important to note that regardless of the option chosen, the document is expected to broadly connect different literatures, and thus will NOT mirror typical manuscripts or
grant proposals in the field (which often have length restrictions that preclude such breath). An otherwise strong document that is not sufficiently broad will not receive a passing evaluation.

Moreover, the scientific content of the grant proposal, or the topic of the literature review can be discussed with the advisor, but the advisor does not edit the document (more details about the roles of the student, mentor, and committee are described below).

Both options entail a written document to be followed by an oral examination. Every student will have an oral examination to demonstrate that they can defend their ideas to a knowledgeable audience.

Details of the Qualifying Exam Administration

Roles and Responsibilities:

1. Student’s responsibilities:
   a. Together with the faculty mentor, the student decides the membership of the qualifying examination committee. The members of this committee can be the same as the PPC, but may be different faculty members. The committee must consist of at least three members of the UMD Graduate Faculty, with at least two from HESP (including the advisor).
   b. The student contacts these faculty members to ask if they are willing to serve on the comps committee.
   c. The student is essentially responsible for the content of the qualifying exam through their identification of the topic matter for the review or grant proposal. In addition, the student develops an initial reading list and outline to provide a sense of the proposed scope of their topic.
   d. The student schedules a meeting with the committee to discuss the topic, providing them with the reading list and outline at least one week (and preferably two weeks) before the scheduled meeting.
   e. The student records the committee’s comments and recommendations, and any decisions made at the committee meeting, and shares this written document with the committee by e-mail for approval. The approved document is placed in the student’s file.
   f. The student informs the committee members at least two weeks in advance of when the student will submit the written document.
   g. The student then writes, and subsequently submits the written document. The student may speak to the advisor and committee members about any
questions that arise as the writing progresses, but the document will not be edited by others in any way. The document is expected to be wholly the work of the individual student.

h. The student schedules the oral examination after approval to schedule is received from faculty mentor. This should be scheduled to occur 6 weeks after submission of the written document.

i. The student schedules individual meetings with committee members to receive feedback in preparation for the oral exam.

j. The student schedules the oral exam itself (finding the meeting time, booking a room), and brings the departmental LOA rubric to the oral exam.

k. The student prepares paperwork to advance to doctoral candidacy when comps process is complete.

2. Faculty mentor’s responsibilities:
   a. Discusses with the student the time-line for scheduling comps and completing comps;
   b. Meets with the student to discuss the nature and content of the written and oral qualifying examination;
   c. Reviews expectations for written comps with student before initial meeting.
   d. Reviews the reading list and outline with the student prior to the committee meeting and suggests revisions (without editing) as appropriate;
   e. Serves as the chair of the qualifying examination committee by running the planning meeting with the comps committee and student to review reading list and outline;
   f. Completes the grading rubric for the written examination and gathers grades and rubrics from all committee members;
   g. Informs the student of the grade for the written exam (pass/fail);
   h. If student has difficulty with scheduling, facilitates student appointments with committee for feedback on written document.
   i. Chairs the oral exam meeting and leads the discussion of the final grade with committee members.
   j. Informs the student of the grade for the written and oral exam.

3. Qualifying Examination Committee Members:
   a. Respond promptly to student request to schedule initial meeting;
   b. Provide feedback at initial meeting on reading list and outline;
   c. Complete the grading rubric for the written qualifying exam within two weeks of receiving the written exam. Supplement the rubric with comments. Send written feedback to advisor;
d. Meets with the student individually to discuss areas that might be queried more in-depth during the oral examination. Each committee member has the responsibility to meet with the student.

e. Attend oral comp and provide input to group rubric.

**Timeline:**

1. The qualifying examination is generally administered in the third year of study, beginning in the fall with completion in the spring. Thus, these exams are typically administered after completion of the candidacy research and required courses. However, there is no requirement that the exam wait until coursework or candidacy research are completed. The date by which the exam process must be initiated is January 30 of year 3, with completion by May 15 of year 3.
   a. *Note:* If the student opts to write a grant proposal as their exam requirement, and the student seeks to submit this written comp as an F31 or F32 application to the NIH, then the student may complete this type of comp sooner than in the third year in the Ph.D. program.

2. Step 1 - Early in year 3: Initial planning meeting between faculty mentor and student begins the qualifying exam process, followed by a planning meeting (with reading list and outline) with the faculty committee.

3. Step 2 - Student submits the written comp, no later than March 31 of Year 3

4. Step 3 – Members of comps committee grade the written comps within 2 weeks of receipt.

5. Step 4 – Oral exam is scheduled 4 weeks after passing grade of written comp is determined, and no later than May 15 of Year 3.

**Nature of the Oral Qualifying Examination:**

The oral qualifying examination is an opportunity for committee members to ask the student for clarification of points from the written examination. The committee may ask questions about how the student synthesized the literature and how he or she reached conclusions explained in the written document. The committee may also ask questions about aspects of the reading list that were not addressed in the final document, or about fundamental ideas underpinning the written document that were not addressed. At the beginning of the oral exam, the student will be given the chance to retract or add anything in the written document. This part of the oral comps should last about 5-10 min. There is no other formal presentation by the student during the oral comp. The entire oral qualifying examination will be limited to one hour.

**Grading, Criteria for Pass/Fail, and Subsequent Actions:**

A standard rubric will be used for grading the written qualifying examination. The rubric should be supplemented by individual faculty member’s comments for the written examination. Each faculty member will complete their own rubric to come to a determination on whether or not the student has passed the written exam. The faculty
committee will complete a single group rubric following the oral qualifying exam. The final outcome of the student’s performance on the written + oral comps is either Pass or Fail. A pass constitutes adequate performance in both written and oral areas.

A fail constitutes unsatisfactory performance on either the written or oral portions of the exam, or both. If the student fails the qualifying exam, he or she will re-take the comps in the same or a different research area with the same or different products (qualifying literature review, grant proposal). The committee can ask the student to re-write any aspect of the exam that they deem inadequate. The student will re-take the exam in the next fall semester. The initial planning meeting should be held by Sept. 30 in Year 4, and the written and oral comps must be completed by the end of the fall semester in year 4 (Dec 31).

Regardless of qualifying exam outcome, the committee should complete a learning outcomes rubric based on the exams.

**Dual-degree students:**
MA/PhD students will follow the qualifying examination format outlined above for HESP Ph.D. students.

AuD/PhD students may take this qualifying exam format, or may take a 1-day take-home written qualifying examination in the student’s research area (plus the completion of the AuD comps). Regardless of the written comp option selected, these students will also complete an oral comp.
### Written qualifying exam scoring rubric

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<th>Does not meet expectations</th>
<th>Meets expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds expectations</th>
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<tr>
<td>The document demonstrates critical thinking about the existing literature</td>
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<td>The document makes connections with the broader research context</td>
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<td>The document has sufficient breadth to meet the spirit of the exam requirements</td>
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<td>The document demonstrates the student’s ability to synthesize across the literature</td>
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<td>The document demonstrates the student’s ability to identify existing gaps in the literature</td>
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<td>The document demonstrates the student’s understanding of the broader impacts of the research topic</td>
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<td>The document demonstrates the student’s ability to express his or her own ideas and a coherent message</td>
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<td>The document demonstrates clarity of arguing and writing</td>
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### For a grant proposal:

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<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Does not meet expectations</th>
<th>Meets expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds expectations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Does the project address an important problem?</td>
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<td>Is there a strong scientific premise for the project?</td>
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<td>Does (or could) the proposed study address the questions raised?</td>
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<td>Would conducting this research lead to new scientific knowledge?</td>
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<td>Are the ideas within the grant proposal innovative or novel?</td>
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<td>Is the methodological approach well-reasoned and appropriate for addressing the specific aims?</td>
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<td>Are potential problems addressed? Are the proposed analyses described and appropriate?</td>
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For a literature review:

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<tr>
<td>Does the paper do justice to the existing literature?</td>
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<td>Is there a main argument underlying the literature review?</td>
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<td>Does the literature review lead to a new/original synthesis or conclusion that adds to our existing knowledge?</td>
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