

Anatomy and Structural Biology Program

Ph.D. Qualifying Exam

All the students pursuing the Ph.D. degree are required to pass the qualifying exam to continue their Ph.D. work.

The objective of the qualifying exam

To examine the student's foundation in Anatomy and Structural Biology that will enable him or her to carry out research in a chosen field of study.

A student is expected to have an adequate breadth and depth of knowledge in the wider areas of Anatomy and Structural Biology to merit advancement to candidacy for a Doctorate in Philosophy.

Format of the Exam

The qualifying exam consists of a critical literature review at the state of the art in the assigned topic with critical analysis of the literature and directions for future research in the area, written examination related to the paper submitted, and an oral defense of the paper.

The paper must be prepared and written by the candidate himself/herself. The writing of a paper must be at least 30 single-spaced pages in length, excluding abstract, figures, and references. For written examination and oral defense, the exam committee members will ask questions about the examination theme and other topics related to the student's basic knowledge in the coursework.

Request for Qualifying Exam

To register for the Ph.D. qualifying exam, a student must submit a completed application form to the program officer. The application form includes the name of the student's advisor, degrees received, current thesis topic, classes taken to date and grades (transcript), and a one-page abstract of the thesis research.

The student must present, to the exam committee, 3 topics of interest that may be related to the thesis research but not directly relevant to the thesis proposal. One paragraph abstract of each topic must also be provided.

Qualifying Exam Committee

The program chair appoints the student to draw four faculty program members as the qualifying exam committee. One of whom will be selected as a chair of the committee. The student's research advisor must not be included in the committee.

Selection of the Topic

A student must present 3 topics of interest to the qualifying exam committee and the officer. The proper topic will be chosen by the qualifying exam committee.

Arrangement of the examination

It is the student's responsibility to arrange for the written and oral examination dates with the committee and to arrange for the room with the officer. The student must complete the literature review paper within 4 weeks from the time the topic is chosen by the committee. A compact disc (CD) containing the work in word format (.doc or .docx) must also be given to each of the members of the committee for plagiarism checking. The committee will have a week to evaluate the written document and provide questions related to the written document as a written exam. The student will have two weeks prior to the oral defense of the proposal to the qualifying exam committee after written exam. Oral defense should not exceed an hour of the presentation. In the case of a re-exam, the second topic must be different from the first one.

Exam Schedule

Student must attempt the exam before the end of the fifth semester of the graduate study. If the exam result is failed, the exam may be re-taken once (on a different topic) by the end of the sixth semester.

A student who has not passed the qualifying exam by the end of the sixth semester, the graduate school will judge as "not making satisfactory progress" toward the Ph.D. degree.

Evaluation of the Exam

The qualifying exam committee decide whether the student has passed or failed according to the qualifying exam evaluation rubrics. The decision will take place after the oral defense in the absence of the student. The committee will sign an evaluation form (with comments/recommendations, if any) and return it to the Program chair right after the oral defense.

In the case of a re-exam, if the student does not pass, he/she will not be permitted to continue in the Ph.D. program. Such a student can be allowed to continue to study for an M.S. degree if he/she has not already earned a master's degree.

An evaluation will be based on the major areas: knowledge of concepts, creativity & critical thinking skills, and oral (communication) skills. The committee will evaluate each student and write their comments on an evaluation form according to the rubrics set by the faculty program member. The discussion among the committee will be done after the oral defense. The student will be given the result and feedback (recommendations) summary after the exam by the chair of the committee.

Possible Results

On the basis of the written document, written examination, and the student's performance in the oral examination, the committee will decide upon one of the following four outcomes:

- a) Pass without condition;
- b) Pass with conditions;

In this case, the committee will outline the weakness and how the conditions the student could (or must) fulfill before reconsideration. The student will be assigned some candidacy paperwork and have 2 weeks to fulfill with the conditions. After the conditions have been fulfilled, the committee will reconsider the result from “pass with conditions” to “pass”.

c) Fail with re-examination. (Be appropriate when the committee believe that the student's performance will be improved if the student is aware of his/her weak points and tries the best in the re-examination).

d) Fail without re-examination. (Be appropriate when the committee make decision that the student's overall performance in the examination indicates that he/she does not have strong prospects of successfully completing the Ph.D.). A second examination must be scheduled.

First Thesis Committee Meeting*

Following successful completion of the qualifying exam, student must have a thesis committee meeting within 6 months. For this meeting, the student must prepare a 5-page document with background and specific aims of the thesis proposal.