

IRHR Qualifying Exam Policy and Procedures

1. Objective: The Graduate School's policy states that "The purpose of the qualifying examination is to determine whether a student has acquired sufficient mastery of the field of concentration to warrant admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree."

2. Content: The exam tests for mastery in the following areas:

General background content: The exam tests for the student's knowledge of the IRHR literature that is considered to be the broad foundation upon which the student's career and future research are based. Included here should be research from relevant disciplines as well as the broad areas of IR or HR or some other clearly specified general area (e.g., a topic defined by the intersection of HR and IR, or a topic defined by the intersection of IR or HR and another discipline). Students work with their advisory committees to craft a statement that defines their general background content area

Specific focal content: The exam will also test the student's knowledge of two or more specific areas within the broader domain. These specific topics should reflect the student's focal research specialty. Again, students work with their committees to define areas of appropriate scope.

Research methods and data analysis: The exam also tests for the student's knowledge and understanding of research methods and data analysis techniques used within both the general and specific content domains. The exam questions are tailored to test knowledge that is particularly relevant to the student's declared areas of general and specific expertise.

3. Qualifying Exam Advisory Committee. In preparation for the exam, the student works with a three-person committee. The committee chair must be a full member of the IRHR Graduate Faculty. Other committee members may be associate or full members of the Graduate Faculty. The committee works with the student to specify the topics to be covered by the exam and prepare reading lists to be used to study for the exam. The committee, in consultation with the Graduate Director, also prepare the questions that appear in the exam.

4. Grading Procedures. The exam is graded by a committee of four members. Usually, these four people include the three members of the advisory committee and the Graduate Director. If the Graduate Director is a member of the student's advisory committee, then the Graduate Director will select a fourth person to be involved in the grading of the exam. For all students, other faculty who are not members of the committee but who are considered to have relevant expertise may be involved in the development and grading of questions, as deemed appropriate by the Graduate Director.

5. Who may sit for the exam? A completed master's thesis must be filed with the IRHR Graduate Director before a student can sit for the qualifying exam. In addition, the GS - NB policy states that this exam "should be taken as soon as a student has completed the major portion of the course requirements." The Ph.D. policy committee interprets this to mean that, under most circumstances, a student will have satisfactorily completed 42 of the required 48 predissertation credits. Students who are admitted with transferred credits are expected to take the exam when they have completed a total of approximately 42 credits.

6. Timing: The exam will begin on a date agreed to by the student and his or her committee. The expectation is that students will sit for the exam in the middle of their third year (or the equivalent). If a student is not ready to take the exam at this point, s/he must take it at the end of their third year (or the equivalent). Failure to take the qualifying exam on schedule will result in a failing grade on the exam.

7. Format: The exam is an open-book, take-home exam lasting 48 hours. Students do not receive the questions in advance. Two questions address the general content area and four questions address the specific content areas. Within the general and specific domains, at least one question tests for knowledge of research methods and statistical techniques (i.e., a total of at least two questions in the exam test for knowledge of research methods and statistical techniques).

8. Consequences of success/failure: Students who pass the exam are admitted to candidacy for the doctoral degree. Students who do not successfully complete and pass the exam by the middle of their third year (January) will not be eligible for financial support in the following summer and will not become reeligible for support unless they pass the exam when it is readministered in May of that same year. Students who have not successfully completed the exam by the end of their third year will be terminated from the program. (Note that it is possible for a student to subsequently be readmitted to the program, if we choose.)

Grading Guidelines for Qualifying Exam

Instructions to Faculty Graders

Each exam question will be read and graded by at least two faculty, using the scale shown below. The graduate director assigns the questions to the faculty graders and compiles the grades for all the questions. The graduate director then consults with each student's committee member before assigning an overall grade of Pass or Fail to the exam. In general, it is expected that qualified students will receive grades of good or excellent for the majority of their answers. A failing grade on one question is sufficient to result in failure on the entire exam. The faculty may also decide to fail a student who receives all or mostly grades of "borderline."

Excellent. A thorough/insightful answer, which shows a very good grasp of key issues and the literature. Definitely a Pass.

Good. The answer is adequate to show that the student is well-informed on the topic. Although more could have been said, the student nevertheless has shown a sufficient level of competence in this area. Pass.

Borderline. The answer shows some understanding but also has some gaps and/or reflects some misunderstanding and confusion. Not a clear Pass, but also not a clear Fail. (It's not clear that this answer is sufficiently weak to result in the student failing the entire exam. On the other hand, the student probably should be Failed if other answers were of this borderline quality.)

Fail. The answer does not show an adequate understanding of the issues and relevant literature for a student claiming this as an area of expertise. Substantially more studying is required by the student. This is a clear Fail. (Note: If a student fails a question, they fail the exam and must retake the entire exam.)