

Guideline for Ph.D. Qualifying Examination in the Department of Pharmacology (Revised 11/21/2023)

The Department of Pharmacology follows the guidelines established by the Graduate School for the qualifying examination. Sections D and E contain additional policies established specifically by the Department of Pharmacology.

A. Prerequisites

1. Each doctoral program shall define required courses and other pre-requisites, which must be satisfactorily completed prior to the qualifying examination.
2. In addition to these minimal requirements, the student's advisor may establish other prerequisites appropriate to the course of study undertaken by the individual student.

B. Scheduling

The graduate program in which the student is enrolled shall schedule the examination for the end of the student's second year (or soon thereafter); exceptions require approval by the Dean.

C. Committee Composition and Conduct of the Examination

The examining committee shall consist of at least five members, including the student's advisor. The committee will be approved and a chair appointed by the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies on recommendation of the student's advisor and Program Director. No more than three members of the committee shall have their primary appointment in the same primary Department as the student. The chairperson of the examining committee shall not be a member of the student's Primary Department or Program, but must be a member of the Graduate Faculty Organization. The student's primary advisor will participate in all aspects of the exam but will not have voting privileges. In extenuating circumstances, the exam may proceed with a minimum of four committee members, but only if a suitably qualified chairperson is present.

The advisor and student, in consultation with all the other committee members, will determine dates and times at which they can all participate in the exam. These dates and times must be communicated by the dissertation advisor, in writing, to each committee member who, in turn, must confirm in writing his/her continued commitment to participate. If a committee member cannot devote the required hours on the dates and times specified, either that committee member must be replaced with another faculty member approved by the Dean or other dates and/or times must be selected which allows all the committee members to fully attend. If a committee member later finds he/she cannot fully participate in the entire exam and it is not feasible to find a replacement, the oral exam can go forth with a few as four committee members, one of which must be the dissertation advisor, provided the remaining committee members and the student agree to do so.

D. Nature of Program-Specific Qualifying Examination

There are two written parts and an oral part in the qualifying examination.

Written examination: This part of the examination includes (1) an essay that critically answers a question that is defined by the Qualifying Examination Committee and (2) a grant proposal. All documents should be single spaced, 0.5” margin, and Arial size 11 (except figure legends font size 8).

(1) The written answer should be no more than 10 pages (single spaced) excluding references. You may include figures (with appropriate citation) if they add significantly to your answer.

(2) The grant proposal should be in the NIH style. The document should include 1 page for Specific Aims and 8 pages for the research strategy/proposal (single spaced). References are excluded from the page limit. In addition, an abstract (not more than one page) on the grant proposal should be submitted.

The grant should clearly outline the significance, innovation, hypothesis, approach with expected results, timeline, limitations and alternative directions, and the long-term impact of the study. The proposal should contain a critical review of the background information relevant to the proposed studies as well as research design and methods (approach) to accomplish the proposed specific aims. Inclusion of the related preliminary data generated by the student is encouraged but not required. A student may use a grant document previously generated from a grant-writing course or for a pre-doctoral fellowship application. However, the examination proposal must include at least one new specific aim that is developed independently by the student without assistance from his/her mentor.

(3) In the oral examination, a student will be examined on all materials included in the written documents.

Oral Examination

The committee shall meet at the call of the chairperson within two (2) weeks after the completion of the written section at which time the student shall be examined orally. If the committee decides the written section(s) will not warrant a pass prior to the oral examination of the written section, a delay should not be given and the examination should continue. At the end of the oral examination, the student shall be evaluated on the basis of his/her performance on both the oral and written sections, and the committee shall take action as outlined below.

E. Voting Procedures

1. For a committee member's vote to be counted, he/she must have participated in the entire exam and his/her vote must be cast in person. The student’s advisor will not be a voting member of the committee.

2. To reach a decision on any of the motions listed below, more than one-half of the committee members present must approve the motion. The vote shall be by ballot or roll call at the discretion of the chairperson.

Motions:

a) Approve

b) Approved pending completion of recommendation(s)

c) Delay final action for no more than thirty (30) days for further examination or in order

to take other action deemed appropriate by the examining committee. Further examination may be either written, oral, or both. Should the committee delay decision for reexamination or other appropriate action, final decision to approve or disapprove under this section rests with the examining committee.

e) Failure

Student must receive four passing votes to successfully complete the exam.

F. Additional Policies

1. Although the student's program or department may administer a departmental oral or written examination prior to the official graduate school qualifying examination, the results of the departmental examination shall not be considered a part of the graduate school examination.
2. If the committee delays action following an examination for the purpose of reexamining or other appropriate action, these actions shall not be considered as representing a failure.
3. If a student is failed by the committee, he/she may be reexamined by a new committee after a minimum of thirty (30) days but no more than ninety (90) days.
4. Failure on two (2) qualifying examinations shall result in automatic dismissal from the doctoral program at the end of the current semester. However, the department may petition to the Dean for permission to allow the student to continue toward the Master of Science degree.