THE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION COMMITTEE CHAIR GUIDELINES

The Mission of the Qualifying Examination
Advancement to candidacy by passage of the Qualifying Examination reflects the judgment of the Graduate Division faculty that a student is adequately prepared to embark upon focused thesis research. That is, the student has demonstrated that s/he has the fundamental knowledge in a chosen discipline and the creativity, discipline, and dedication to complete the PhD degree in a timely manner. Conversely, failure of the examination indicates faculty concern regarding the student's likelihood of success at conducting PhD-level independent research.

Receipt of Written Proposal
Upon receipt of the written proposal, the chairperson will check that it is an acceptable document; two or three Specific Aims must be included in the proposal. Aims may be interdependent, but not entirely dependent upon each other. Only the specific departments listed below require the inclusion of the third, independent aim in the proposal:
- Anatomy & Structural Biology,
- Cell Biology, and
- Developmental & Molecular Biology.

The proposal is limited to 18 pages, excluding a title page and the Literature Cited:
- 6-page, double-spaced section on Scientific Background and Significance
- 2-page, double-spaced Specific Aims section
- 10-page, double-spaced section on Research Design and Methods (and Preliminary Data, if available)

Day of the Examination
Four Qualifying Exam Committee members must be present at the examination. If a member is absent, the committee chairperson will attempt to find a suitable replacement. However, if more than one member is absent, the examination must be rescheduled for the earliest possible date.

Conduct of the Examination
At the start of the exam, the student will be asked to leave the room and the Exam Committee members will discuss:
- The background of the student, including courses taken
- The written proposal—any issues that Committee members have found that should be addressed during the oral exam
- The process of the exam—i.e. the student presents the proposal without interruption for a maximum of 15 minutes, followed by oral questions.

The student then returns to the room to give the presentation and begin the oral exam.

Following the oral presentation, the committee can begin with questions based on the proposal, and then expand into more general knowledge questions. The student should be able to demonstrate sufficient basic knowledge outside his/her particular microdomain to ensure that the student can develop new ideas and design experiments with appropriate controls to test a hypothesis.

During the exam, the Qualifying Exam Committee chairperson should make notes.

Note: Audio and/or video recording of the oral examination are prohibited. Any recording will be viewed as a breach of responsible conduct of research and the matter referred to the Academic Affairs Committee.

At the end of the oral exam, the student leaves the room.
• A preliminary, nonbinding secret vote is taken
  o *Honors* (indicating an outstanding performance, i.e. in the top 10%)
  o *Pass*
  o *Postponed Decision* (requiring revision of the written document within one month)
  o *Fail*
• The vote is followed by open discussion to ensure that the various perspectives of the committee members are heard and understood.
• A final vote is taken

The chairperson should summarize the key points of the discussion/exam on the Chair’s Summary Evaluation.

A copy of this evaluation and the Examiner Scoring Sheets will be provided to the student, the mentor, and the Academic Affairs Committee.

Committee Decision:
• A majority vote of 3-1 is required for *Honors, Pass, Postponed Decision* and *Fail*;
• A 2-2 vote with two examiners voting *Honors* and two voting pass is a grade of *Pass*;
• A 2-2 vote with two examiners voting *Fail* and two voting *Honors, Pass or Postponed Decision* is a grade of *Fail*;
• A 2-2 vote with 2 examiners voting *Postponed Decision* is a *Postponed Decision*

The student is then brought back into the room and informed of the committee’s final decision.

![Please note: The grade Postponed Decision is to be used to obtain revision of the written proposal. The revised proposal must be distributed to all the members of the examination committee within one month of the oral exam date. After submission of a revised proposal, the committee has seven calendar days to submit a final grade (Pass or Fail) to the Graduate Division office via submission of Form 4a. If the oral examination is unsatisfactory, even if the written document is acceptable, the grade will be Fail. Qualifying Exam Form 4a will have been forwarded to the chairperson of the student’s Exam Committee once the Graduate Division office has received Form 4 and Examiner Scoring Sheets indicating a grade of Postponed Decision.]

**Appeal of Qualifying Committee’s Decision**

Students may appeal a decision by the *Qualifying Examination Committee* to the parent *Steering Committee*, by making this request in writing to the *Associate Dean for Graduate Programs*. The Associate Dean will review the request and may deny it or may refer to the *Steering Committee* for review. The *Steering Committee* may deny the appeal, in which case the original grade will stand, or may recommend that the student be allowed to repeat the examination with a new Exam Committee.

**Outcome of the Qualifying Examination**

A student who **passes** or receives **honors** following their oral examination will be awarded the Master of Science degree and will advance to candidacy for the PhD degree.

A student who **fails** the oral examination will be placed on academic probation by the *Academic Affairs Committee*. The *Academic Affairs Committee* will review the Qualifying Examination Committee reports, all grades received for graduate courses, and laboratory productivity as indicated by the mentor. (Eligibility to retake the exam is based upon review of the student’s entire academic record.) The AAC will either recommend a “retake” of the examination in the next Qualifying Exam period (i.e. within six months) or in some circumstances, recommend dismissal from the program. The examination “retake” is not a “rebuttal” of the failed examination but rather is a fresh independent opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge and insight required for advancement to candidacy. A student is allowed only one retake of the Qualifying Exam. A student who fails the retake will be dismissed from the program.

All information regarding the Qualifying Exam can be found on the Graduate Division website at [http://www.einstein.yu.edu/education/phd/current-students/qualifying-exam.aspx](http://www.einstein.yu.edu/education/phd/current-students/qualifying-exam.aspx)