

THE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

Each student has their own Qualifying Exam (QE) Committee. The Committee consists of a QE Chair, the student's adviser, and a third HDFS faculty member.

The Department Head appoints each student's QE Chair.

The student and adviser consult with the QE Chair to select a third committee member. This person should be a Graduate Faculty member in HDFS. Also, they should be selected because they have expertise relevant to what the student will be covering in their QE.

The overall aim of the QE is to ensure that doctoral students have learned to think critically and use their theoretical and methodological training to evaluate research. There are 3 specific goals for the critical analysis paper:

1. To demonstrate expert knowledge in a particular substantive area. It is anticipated that the topic chosen for this exam will also be pursued in the dissertation.
2. To demonstrate the ability to critically review (evaluate) and integrate (synthesize) this substantive literature from two distinct theoretical perspectives.
3. To demonstrate methodological competence by evaluating the quantitative and/or qualitative methods used to study a particular substantive literature.

The purpose of the QE is to determine whether the student has acquired the knowledge and skills that are essential for professional success in HDFS. Required coursework has been designed to give the student this exposure and help him or her develop his/her writing and critical thinking skills. Thus, only students who have completed their required theory, method/statistics, and at least two of their substantive courses are eligible to take the QE (as per their HDFS program checklist). Elective courses are not required before taking the QE.

Step 1: Form the Committee

Students notify the Director of Graduate Programs that they intend to take the QE exam in the next cycle. The Director of Graduate Programs asks the Department Head to appoint a QE Exam Chair. Students then consult with their adviser and the relevant QE Chair to identify an appropriate third committee member. This faculty member's willingness to serve should be documented in the student's department file (email is acceptable) before a student writes their proposal (step 2).

Step 2: Propose the Critical Analysis (CA) Paper

At least 10 or 15 weeks before the desired due date (the schedule at the end of this document for specifics regarding each QE cycle), the student must provide his or her QE committee with a 2-3 page proposal (plus references) for the CA paper. This proposal should identify the student's substantive area as well as the theoretical and methodological literatures they will use to critically analyze said substantive literature. The QE Committee will then meet with the student

to discuss the proposal and identify any needed changes. This meeting should occur at least 8 weeks prior to the due date, and must include the student as well as all 3 committee members. It is preferably held in-person, but a telephone conference is also acceptable.

The QE Committee should have a clear idea of, and approve, the scope and content of the paper before the student starts writing. Any input that committee members have about what the paper should cover should be resolved before writing starts. Thereafter, the student works independently, and the committee evaluates the student's independent work. To achieve this goal, the student and the committee will need to do more work at the proposal stage. This additional work at the beginning will make it possible for the student to work independently in the actual writing and for the committee to evaluate this independent work. It will also reduce the likelihood that the student does not meet the committee's expectation in the final paper.

It is possible that the QE Committee feels that a student is not ready to begin writing his or her CA. In this case, the committee should give the student clear feedback regarding what changes he or she needs to make in order for their CA proposal to be approved. The student should then wait until the next exam cycle and follow procedures accordingly.

Step 3: Write the CA

Students should write their CA as agreed upon by her or his QE Committee. Students should work independently. It is acceptable for students to talk about their exam with other students. They should not, however, receive any feedback from any faculty member including their QE Committee members. All communication should be between the student and the QE Chair, and should be limited to clarification questions. For example, "The committee agreed I would evaluate interview methodologies, does this include both standardized protocols and open-ended designs?"

Suggestion: Before writing, create a table of all empirical studies to be reviewed in the CA. Organize the table by theory, research question, methods, and findings. Then write CA from the table.

The CA must be 30-pages or less (1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced), plus up to 10 pages of references. Students should use either American Psychological Association (APA) or American Sociological Association (ASA) style, as appropriate to their content area. Both international and U.S. students are encouraged to consult with the UIUC Writing Lab for editing purposes. The student should submit a clean document; the Committee does not want to see spelling, grammatical, or style errors.

Step 4: Submit the CA to the QE Committee

The QE Committee will evaluate a CA in terms of how successfully it develops the paper as proposed. The evaluation decision should be made during a meeting of all three committee members. This meeting is preferably held in person, but a telephone conference is also acceptable. The student is not present for this meeting.

The Committee has one month from the due date to evaluate a CA. All communication will be by email between the Chair and the student. The decision and feedback must be documented on the "Critical Analysis Result (Written Exam) Form." There are three possible outcomes:

1. If the committee evaluates the CA as a “pass”, the student proceeds to Step 5. Passing means that the Committee agrees that the student has demonstrated their expertise as per the three specific goals (above) and the student’s agreed upon CA proposal.
2. If the committee evaluates the CA as “pass contingent upon satisfactory revisions”, the QE Chair will inform the student via email of the decision and required revisions. This “conditional pass” will be given when the Committee agrees that the student’s overall work demonstrates expertise as per “pass” criteria, but there are a few issues that require effective rethinking and then rewriting before a “pass” will be granted. The student will have 10 calendar days to make the appropriate changes and submit their revision to the QE Chair. Along with the revised CA, the student must submit a revisions memo detailing how they responded to the Committee concerns, and where in their paper these changes were made. To ensure that the student understands what this memo entails, the QE Chair will provide an example memo. If the Committee agrees that the revisions are satisfactory, the student will receive a “pass” and proceed to step 5. If the Committee agrees that the revisions are unsatisfactory, the student will receive a “fail.” Failing the revised-CA will result in termination from the HDFS doctoral program.
3. If the committee evaluates the originally-submitted CA as a “fail,” the student will have only one opportunity to resubmit their exam. The QE Chair will inform the student via email of the decision and required revisions. A “fail” will be given when the Committee agrees that the student’s overall work fails to demonstrate expertise as per “pass” criteria. The student will have 30 calendar days to make the appropriate changes and submit their revision to the QE Chair. Along with the revised CA, the student must submit a revisions memo detailing how they responded to the Committee concerns, and where in their paper these changes were made. To ensure that the student understands what this memo entails, the QE Chair will provide an example memo. The evaluation of the submitted revision will be evaluated as either “pass,” or “fail”. If pass, the student proceeds to step 5. If fail, the student will be terminated from the HDFS doctoral program. The committee may not issue a “conditional pass” to an exam that failed its first submission.

Step 5: The Oral Examination

After passing the CA paper, the Comprehensive Oral Examination may be scheduled. The oral examination is expected to occur within two weeks of receipt of the CA decision. The duration of the oral examination must be at least one hour but not more than two hours total. Oral examinations are closed to anyone other than committee members. The purpose of the oral examination is to have students demonstrate their ability to analyze their substantive area from other critical perspectives, to apply their knowledge to support or extend their critical analysis, and to have them ‘think on their feet’ and address a problem from a new angle.

The oral defense will be evaluated as “pass” or “fail.” Passing means that the Committee agrees the student adequately answered all of the questions posed during the oral examination. Failure means that the Committee agrees that the student did not adequately answer the questions posed during the oral examination. If the student fails the oral examination the committee may make one of two decisions: (a) the committee may allow the student to retake the oral examination one time after a specified period of preparation, or (b) the committee may elect for no repeat examination and terminate the student from the program. If a repeated oral examination is permitted but evaluated as a “fail”, the student will be terminated from the program. The result of the comprehensive oral examination must be made by the committee chair **on the examination result form** no longer than 24 hours after the conclusion of the examination.

The below calendar assumes a “pass” at every step. Dates will be modified as appropriate if the student receives a conditional pass, or a failure, on their CA.

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Form the Committee	Committee meets with student to finalize student’s CA proposal	Student submits CA paper to Committee. The Committee has 30 days from this date to evaluate and notify the student	Committee gives student CA Feedback	Oral Exam
Before April 15	Before May 15	September 1	October 1	October 16
Before October 15	Before November 1	January 15	February 15	March 1
Before January 15	Before February 1	April 1	May 1	May 16