

## The Qualifying Exam

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 is designed to give the student this exposure and help them develop their writing and critical thinking skills. Thus, only students who have completed required theory, method/statistics, and at least two substantive courses are eligible to take the QE (as per the HDFS program checklist). Elective courses are not required before taking the QE.

### The overall aims of the QE are to:

- Demonstrate expert knowledge in a particular substantive area in which they intend to conduct their dissertation research.
- Demonstrate the ability to critically review (evaluate) and integrate (synthesize) this substantive literature using theory.
- Demonstrate methodological competence by evaluating the methods used to study a particular substantive literature.

### The QE paper may take one of two forms:

1. An *Integrative Critical Analysis Paper*, which consists of the following:
  - a. An integrative literature review
    - i. Integrative reviews critique and synthesize a representative selection of literature on a topic in order to build new frameworks and perspectives on the topic
  - b. An evaluation and **integration** of **multiple** theoretical perspectives
  - c. A discussion of how the integration of theoretical perspectives advances the chosen field of study

### OR

2. A *Scoping Critical Analysis Paper*, which consists of the following:
  - a. A scoping review of the relevant literature
    - i. Scoping reviews involve mapping key literature on a given topic or research area and identifying/defining key concepts, gaps in the knowledge, and areas of future growth.
  - b. An evaluation and **critique** of **prominent** theoretical perspectives on the chosen topic
  - c. A discussion of the steps needed to address the major theoretical and/or methodological gaps in the chosen field of study

### In addition, all QE papers regardless of form must include:

- a. An introduction with a rationale for the chosen topic
- b. An analysis and critique of the methodological approaches used to study the chosen topic

## **The QE Process**

### **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 (who is the second member of the committee) and the relevant QE Chair to identify an appropriate third committee member. This faculty member's willingness to serve should be communicated to the Director of Graduate Programs before a student writes their proposal (step 2).

### **Step 2: Propose the Qualifying Exam Paper**

Prior to starting the exam, the student must provide their QE committee with a 2-3 page proposal (plus references) for the paper (see schedule at the end of this document for specific due dates for each QE cycle). This proposal should identify the format of the paper, the student's substantive area, and the theoretical and methodological literatures they will use to critically analyze that substantive literature. The QE Committee will then meet with the student to discuss the proposal and identify any needed changes. This meeting should must include the student as well as all three committee members. This meeting may be held in-person or virtually.

The QE Committee should have a clear idea of, and approve, the format, scope, and content of the paper before the student starts writing. Any input from committee members about what the paper should cover must be resolved before writing starts. After approval, the student works independently, and the committee evaluates the student's independent work.

It is possible that the QE Committee may feel that a student is not ready to begin writing their paper. In this case, the committee should give the student clear feedback regarding what changes they need to make in order for their proposal to be approved. The student should then wait until the next exam cycle and follow procedures accordingly.

### **Step 3: Write the Paper**

Before writing, it is suggested that students create a table of all empirical studies to be reviewed in the paper, organize the table by theory, research question, methods, and findings, and then write the paper from the table. Students should then write their paper as agreed upon by their 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. Any communication should be between the student and the QE Chair, and should be limited to clarifying questions only. For example, "The committee agreed I would evaluate interview methodologies, does this include both standardized protocols and open-ended designs?"

The paper is limited to 30 pages (1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced), plus up to 10 pages of references. Students should use American Psychological Association (APA) or American Sociological Association (ASA) style, as appropriate to their content area.

**Step 4: Submit the Paper to the QE Committee**

Students should submit a final document that has been carefully and thoroughly proofread to ensure there are no spelling, grammatical, or style errors. Students may consult with the UIUC Writing Lab for editing purposes, if desired. The QE Committee will evaluate the paper in terms of how successfully it meets the aims of the QE process described above. The evaluation decision should be made during a meeting of all three committee members. This meeting may be held in-person or virtually. The student should not be present for this meeting.

The Committee has one month from the due date to evaluate the paper. All communication will be by email between the Chair and the student. The decision and feedback must be documented on the “Qualifying Exam (Written) Form,” which can be found [here](#). There are three possible outcomes:

1. If the committee evaluates the paper 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 specific goals stated in this document and the student’s agreed upon proposal.
2. The committee will evaluate the paper as “pass with minor revision” 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 rewriting before a “pass” can 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 paper, the student must submit a 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” decision and proceed to step 5. If the Committee agrees that the revisions are unsatisfactory, the student will receive a “fail” decision. Failing the revised exam will result in termination from the HDFS doctoral program.
3. If the committee evaluates the originally submitted paper as a “major revision,” the student will have only one opportunity to resubmit their exam. A “major revision” 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 paper, the student must submit a 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” or require a revision to an exam that was already revised.

**Step 5: The Oral Examination**

After passing the written portion of the exam, the Oral portion of the Qualifying Examination may be scheduled. 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 examination is expected to occur within two weeks of receipt of the decision on the written portion of the exam. 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 the student and committee members.

The oral defense will be evaluated as “pass” or “fail.” “Pass” means that the Committee agrees the student adequately answered all of the questions posed during the oral examination. “Fail” 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) allow the student to retake the oral examination one time after a specified period of preparation, or (b) 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 oral portion of the qualifying examination must be made by the committee chair on the oral examination result form found [here](#) no longer than 24 hours after the conclusion of the examination.

The calendar below assumes a “pass” at every step. Dates will be modified as appropriate if the student receives a pass with minor revision, or a major revision, on either part of their QE.

<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Step 5</b>
Form the Committee	Committee with finalize QE proposal	Student submits paper to Committee	Committee student QE Feedback on the appropriate form	Oral
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

Students who encounter extenuating circumstances during the qualifying exam period should contact the director of graduate programs to discuss available accommodations.