

Departmental Guidelines for Qualifying Examination (QE) (for PhD Students)

1. Timing and administration of the QE

PhD students are required to take the qualifying examination by the 18th or 30th month of study for full-time and part-time students, respectively. Students are required to submit a “Request to Schedule a PhD Qualifying Examination” form to the Department Office at least one month prior to the proposed examination date.

A student who has failed the QE may re-take the examination within three to six months after the first attempt (i.e. between 19th and 24th month of study for full-time PhD, and between 31st and 36th month of study for part-time PhD).

The QE can be retaken only once. A student failing to obtain a pass in the second attempt may apply for transfer to a relevant taught Masters programme or MPhil programme offered by the Faculty, or be dismissed. The transfer application should be recommended by the Department and approved by the Faculty Research Postgraduate Studies Subcommittee on a case-by-case basis.

2. QE Committee

A QE Committee, which normally consists of three faculty members, including the student’s principal supervisor, the Department Head (or designate), and an academic staff member from the Department, will be formed to administer the examination. The QE Committee will review and approve the examination questions prepared by the principal supervisor. The Committee will also review the student’s answers and a majority vote is required for the student to pass the examination. The student’s performance in QE will be graded “Pass” or “Fail”.

3. Format

The QE is a six-hour open-book examination, which takes place in a designated on-campus venue. The six hours of examination will be divided into two three-hour sessions, with at least a one-hour break in between. The first three-hour session will ask questions on the application of social theories in a particular field of research. The second three-hour session will ask questions on both social theories and research methodologies.

The student will be required to answer a total of TWO questions, specifically, ONE question EACH in the two three-hour sessions. The answers have to be

presented in the essay format and typewritten. There will be no page limits to the answers, i.e., no maximum and no minimum. By the end of each three-hour session, the student is required to submit one printed version and one electronic version of the essay to the Department Office.

To help the student to prepare for the qualifying examination, a reading list will be provided by the principal supervisor in consultation with the student taking the qualifying examination. However, this does not mean that the student's answers have to be confined by the reading list.

During the QE, the student is not allowed to use the Internet and has to work on a computer provided by the Department. He/she is also not allowed to bring any electronic storage devices to the venue. Only print materials are allowed in the examination venue.

If the student needs to leave the venue during the examination period, she or he should notify the supporting staff in the General Office.

If the QE cannot take place on campus at the designated date and time due to unforeseeable circumstances, e.g., virus outbreak, the QE Committee may, in consultation with the student, make alternative arrangements for the examination. It might involve postponing the QE or arranging for the QE to be taken online.

(1 Sept 2020)