

## **Guide to The Qualifying Exam for Graduate Students in Cultural Studies**

The qualifying exam is designed to assess the student's preparation to begin working on their dissertation. As such it consists of three components: a written exam that seeks to evaluate the student's knowledge of the fields they and their committee members have deemed suitable and relevant for their project; a dissertation prospectus that outlines the rationale for their project and provides an outline of its major parts; and an oral component that measures the student's ability to engage in informed conversation about these fields and their specific applications to their dissertation project.

A successful essay is one that demonstrates the student's ability to enter into productive dialogue with the conversations and debates occurring in their fields by responding to the examiners' questions in a manner that makes evident their familiarity with the central debates and texts of the fields, as determined by their reading list, and their ability to put this scholarship into dialogue with their own project. A successful oral exam is one in which the student is able to respond productively to questions, concerns, and suggestions their examiners may have about both the written portion of the exam and the dissertation prospectus. Even though the exam consists of three parts--the written exam, the dissertation prospectus, and the oral examination--the overall result is based on holistic evaluation of all of these elements, although in the case of a provisional pass, a student may be asked to take some part of the exam over again.

### **Timing**

The qualifying exam occurs after all course work, including course work for the DE, has been completed, and the Foreign Language requirement has been fulfilled. Before sitting for the qualifying exam, the student will also need to submit a bibliography, produced in consultation with the proposed examiners, and a dissertation prospectus that is approved by all members of the committee.

### **The Bibliography**

The bibliography is a collection of articles and books, including both primary and secondary texts, produced in consultation with all members of your committee. These texts will form the basis for both the written and oral portions of the exam. The core of this bibliography will emerge from the guided readings completed during the 270s, but should also include other materials that you have found useful, or that faculty have since added to your list. The bibliography should be divided into three distinct areas of examination under headings that you determine to be relevant to your proposed area of study. These headings can, but do not have to, correspond to the three areas of your 270s. You should circulate your bibliography to your committee early on, so that you have time to read additional materials they may recommend. A final copy of your bibliography should be circulated at least one month prior to the exam. There is no required number of texts; the bibliography should neither be a list of everything you have read to date, nor a list of the texts you have cited in your prospectus. A bibliography consisting of 100 items (articles, books, and primary texts) is a rough average. The emphasis is rather on texts that are central to the fields of study in which you are engaged intellectually, as well as those that are germane to your specific project. You should know the central arguments of each of these texts sufficiently well to be examined on them.

### The Dissertation Prospectus

Typically, a dissertation prospectus is about 20-25 double spaced pages in length and includes a bibliography of works cited (separate from the QE bibliography). The prospectus:

- Elucidates the candidate's research project: What questions will you pose and what materials will you be using to answer your questions?
- Gives an overview of the extant literature, indicating why the study to be undertaken moves beyond what has been written to date.
- Delineates and justifies the methodologies, theories and critical approaches you will be using to complete your project. Why is an interdisciplinary cultural studies approach appropriate for the topic under consideration.
- Justifies the project: Why this topic, Why now? Who is the audience?

### The Qualifying Exam

The qualifying exam may be taken as early as the spring quarter of the third year. Most students sit for this exam in either spring of their third year or fall of their fourth year. Students must complete their qualifying exam by the end of the fourth year. After passing this exam, students are said to be ABD (All But Dissertation), which means they need only finish the dissertation in order to complete the Ph.D. degree.

The qualifying exam committee consists of **five** examiners (one in each of the 3 areas plus a member of the graduate group and a chair). At least **three** members of the qualifying exam committee should be selected from affiliated cultural studies graduate group faculty. The qualifying exam committee chair does *not* have to be a member of the graduate group. If you are participating in a designated emphasis program, you will be required to have committee members who are affiliated with that program as well (check with the D.E. program for specifics). The entire qualifying exam committee must be approved by the CST graduate advisor.

There are two parts to the qualifying exam; the **written** and the **oral** exams

1. The **written** qualifying exam takes place on three days of your choosing during a single week (Monday – Friday). Typically, the CST 270 professors write the exam questions based on the reading lists and discussions for the 270 series (occasionally, a professor different from the 270 instructor will serve this role). Each day, the student will be given four questions and will be asked to address two of them. Eight hours of writing time will be allowed each day. At the end of each day, you will send your response electronically via email to the Chair of the exam, the Program Coordinator and cc: yourself.
2. Seven to ten days following the written exam, you will meet with your committee for the **oral** exam. During a three-hour period, the faculty will have the opportunity to question you further about your written exams as well as discuss the dissertation prospectus. **Pleased be advised: the oral**

**exam must be scheduled by the CST program coordinator.** Please work closely with the coordinator so that we all know when your exam is taking place, where, and with whom. Space and time are precious commodities at a university so the more time ahead you plan, the better.

A successful oral exam demonstrates the students ability to engage in productive conversation with faculty members about both th

There are three possible outcomes of the qualifying exam:

- pass: you advance to candidacy
- not pass: you may retake the exam, or a portion of it, once.
- fail: you do not advance to candidacy (if this occurs you have the option of leaving the program with an M.A. degree in Cultural Studies.

### **Calendar for the Qualifying Exam:**

1. In the first quarter of your third year, you need to identify five faculty members to serve as your qualifying exam committee. Typically, your CST 270 professors form the core of this committee. You will need to download the form titled “Application for Qualifying Examination” from the “Forms” page at <http://www.gradstudies.ucdavis.edu>, have the graduate advisor sign it, and turn it in to Graduate Studies. We recommend that you turn in this form at least **two months** prior to your exam. In addition, if you are participating in a designated emphasis program, remember that the director of that program will need to sign your application to take the qualifying examination as well.

**Please note: Your prospective dissertation advisor should be on this committee but cannot serve as chair. This is a university rule.**

2. If you are taking the qualifying exam in spring quarter: during winter quarter you need to set the dates on which you will take your written and oral qualifying exams. In addition, you need to work with the program coordinator to locate a room in which to take your oral exam. (You may take your written exam from home.)

3. **One month** before your exam, you need to present the five members of your committee with the final version of your reading list—those books and articles on which you may be tested during the exam.

4. **One month** before the exam, you need to turn in your dissertation prospectus to the members of your qualifying examination committee, a document that explains the proposed topic of your dissertation and justifies it as a cultural studies project. At this time you must also file a copy of the dissertation prospectus with the program coordinator. At least half of the oral portion of the exam consists of a discussion and defense of your dissertation prospectus, therefore you should try to get feedback from your committee as soon as possible, in case revisions are required.

5. **One week** before the exam, all of your committee members need to have forwarded their questions to the exam chair. It is your responsibility to contact the chair and determine that the exam questions have been received and that all is in order. While the chair cannot reveal the questions to you, you need to confirm that all faculty have sent their questions and that the exam will proceed according to schedule.

### **Appointment of the Dissertation Thesis Committee**

When you pass your qualifying examination, you must file the paperwork with Graduate Studies for “Advancement to Candidacy.” Therefore, be sure to bring the form titled “Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy – Plan B” which may be found on the “Forms” page at <http://gradstudies.ucdavis.edu> to your oral examination. This document is signed by you and the chair of the qualifying examination committee. Then you must bring the form to the graduate advisor to be signed as well. Please note: this document requires that you have your three member PhD Thesis Committee in place (at least two members of the dissertation committee must be selected from the affiliated faculty of the Cultural Studies Graduate Group at UC Davis and, if you are participating in a designated emphasis program, one member of the committee must be an affiliated faculty members on the committee as well)). This committee must be approved by the graduate advisor (signified by the advisor’s signature). You should file this document immediately with Graduate Studies after successfully passing both sections of the qualifying exam.