

Best Practices for Virtual Qualifying Exams | Spring 2020

In response to COVID-19 emergency status banning in-person meetings at UT, the BME GSC will allow for virtual meetings for student qualifying exams. The following guidelines and rules for the virtual exams are effective immediately and expire when the ban on in-person meetings is lifted.

Guidance for Students

1. You are required to use Zoom as your virtual platform for the qualifying exam (<https://utexas.zoom.us>).
2. Familiarize yourself with Zoom meeting features such as share screen, whiteboard, mute/unmute, and stop video function. You are required to use the virtual whiteboard function such that you can write an equation or draw a figure for your committee to see. A touchscreen device with a stylus is ideal. Be sure to practice these features with your lab mates or friends.
3. It is your responsibility to schedule the exam (date/time) and set up your virtual exam. Be sure that the Graduate Coordinator (Lacy White) and all your committee members are well informed of the schedule and the format in advance.
4. The virtual exam will be hosted by your committee chair. It is your responsibility to get your committee chair's Zoom link and ensure it is sent to the Graduate Coordinator. As host, the committee chair will have control of breakout rooms in Zoom such that the committee can meet privately for discussion after the exam.
5. If the video or audio transmission is not reliable due to an internet or device issue, and you cannot remedy the issue immediately, your committee chair will call off the exam. Be sure to test the video and audio streaming quality multiple times before the exam.
6. Utilize the support website for Zoom (<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>).

Guidance for PIs

1. Please help your students select a platform and provide them with guidance for effectively using it. A rehearsal is highly recommended.
2. Please ensure your students have a contingency plan if (1) the Zoom platform fails, (2) a committee member suddenly loses internet connectivity (yes, the member may dial in by phone), (3) the internet connection becomes unstable, and other issues.

Guidance for Committee Chairs

1. As the committee chair, you will host the meeting using your Zoom meeting link. As the host, you will have control of breakout rooms in Zoom such that the committee can meet privately for discussion after the exam. Please ensure the breakout room feature is turned on in your meeting settings. Learn more about breakout rooms here: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476093-Getting-Started-with-Breakout-Rooms>.
2. If one committee member does not show up for the virtual exam and the student has waited 20 minutes, the exam may continue with only two voting members (our current rule; PIs do not participate in the vote for their own students).
3. During the virtual exam, all committee members must stay connected at all times. If the connection for a member is lost due to technical difficulties, the exam should be paused until the connection is reestablished.
4. If one committee member is completely cut off from the connection and a reconnection cannot be established before the vote is completed, it is at the discretion of the committee chair whether the exam should be rescheduled. If two members lose connection, the qualifying exam must be rescheduled.
5. If the video or audio transmission is not reliable due to a connectivity or device issue such that evaluation of the exam is significantly affected, the committee chair should call off the exam.
6. All forms required for the exam will be provided by the Graduate Coordinator before the exam and can be signed electronically via Adobe, DocuSign or other means:

- a. Intent to Qualify
 - b. Qualifying Exam Outcome Form
 - c. Learning Outcomes Forms
7. During the virtual exam, the student will be asked to temporarily leave the virtual meeting room during the committee's discussion. Please use Zoom's breakout room feature for this purpose. Have a secondary form of communication planned (e.g., phone or email), if needed, to contact the student when it is time for them to rejoin the meeting.

Guidance for Committee Members (non-chair)

1. Please ensure the platform the student chooses is what you are familiar with. Feel free to test the connection with the student before the exam.
2. Please mute your microphone when not speaking to reduce background noise for the student.

Grace Period

In the event that some committee members still cannot participate in qualifying exams after the ban on in-person meetings is lifted, the GSC EC will review individual student requests for extensions. The student and PI will need to co-sign a petition letter to the GSC EC explaining the circumstances. Extensions are rare and should be avoided, however, the GSC EC will evaluate requests on a case-by-case basis in light of COVID-19 disruptions.