

# Qualifying Examination

All doctoral students are required to pass a qualifying examination (QE) **prior to** writing and defending their dissertation proposal, and being granted formal admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree.

## Process:

1. The student must have completed all required coursework in the semester previous to the one in which they begin the exam. Exceptions may be granted if there is only one course remaining and it is not a STEM Ed core course.
2. Under advisement of their faculty QE chair, the student decides on one of 3 formats options for their QE:
  - a) Small-scale empirical research study (using data the student collects or data to which they have access from a prior project, faculty mentor, national data, etc.) written in the general format of an article for an academic research journal;
  - b) Conceptual/theoretical paper written in the format of an article for an academic research journal;
  - c) Either a) or b) above, written in the format of a piece for a practitioner journal – the intended audience is educational practitioners.
3. The student, with approval from the QE chair and the other 2 committee members, decides on the semester to start the exam. The committee and student must agree on the start semester no later than the end of the second week of the semester. (Note: the committee is comprised of a total of 3 STEM Ed GSC members, but at least one STEM Ed program area faculty must be on the committee).
  - A. During each semester that a student is engaged in their QE, the student will send a draft of work in progress on the exam to their QE chair who advises them halfway through the semester; the QE chair will respond with either oral or written feedback.
  - B. Students are allowed and encouraged to get feedback from their peers throughout their QE process.

## Timeline:

1. The student has 2 consecutive semesters to complete the exam (either Fall/Spring, Spring/Summer, or Summer/Fall).
  - A. Although it is possible for the student to complete in one semester, 2 is the maximum (i.e., if student started in Fall, they must have passed the QE by the last day of the semester in the subsequent Spring semester). Therefore steps 2-4 below must all occur within 2 semesters.
2. The due date for the submission of the first full draft (submission 1) is determined by the committee in consultation with the student. After submission, the committee will read the draft, provide comments for revision to the mentor/chair, who then synthesizes comments (with approval and sign-off of all members) and shares this in written form with the student within 2 weeks of initial submission.
  - A. It is possible, but unlikely that the committee may decide that no revisions are needed and to accept submission 1; if so, the QE exam is done and the student has passed.
3. Assuming a revision is required, the deadline for "revision 1/submission 2" is determined by the committee in consultation with the student;
  - A. After receiving "revision 1/submission 2" (which should include a letter to the committee detailing the revisions that were made in response to the comments provided), the committee has 2 weeks to read the document; they will then confer as a group and vote to: *accept, or request another round of revisions*
  - B. To pass the exam, *at least 2 members must vote to accept*, one of which must be the QE chair.
4. If the committee votes to *request a second round of revisions*, the deadline for "revision 2/submission 3" is determined by the committee in consultation with the student (noting that the deadline, including the 2-week committee review period) must meet the requirement of occurring before the end of the second semester of the total allowed exam period).
  - A. After receiving "revision 2/submission 3", the committee has 2 weeks to read the document; they will confer as a group and vote to: *accept, or reject*.
  - B. To pass the exam, *at least 2 members must vote to accept*, one of which must be the QE chair.
  - C. If the committee votes to reject, the student's program will be terminated from the PhD program.

## Other Process Logistics:

Following the committee review of the draft, and the QE chair's written report to the student synthesizing/summarizing the committee's requested revisions, *the QE chair can choose to convene an in-person meeting with the student to discuss the requested revisions*; committee members are invited, but not required to attend the in-person meeting.

The student may have done preliminary work on their QE prior to the semester they begin their exam as part of prior coursework or work supervised by their QE chair; *however, it is understood that the majority of the writing of the paper should occur during the semester(s) of the exam.*

Students are *expected to disclose* if they are taking a paper written for a class and extending it/transforming it as their QE, so that their QE chair and committee are aware and give approval that the proposed extension meets this expectation.

In general, QE exams *cannot count later as dissertation chapters*; exceptions may be made if it has been greatly transformed such that it bears little resemblance to the QE paper; the QE chair who advises the student must make this determination in agreement with other members of the dissertation committee.

Exceptions to the limit of 2 consecutive semesters to complete the exam may be made in extenuating circumstances; exceptions can be requested by the QE chair who advises the student and must be voted on and approved by the STEM Ed GSC.

#### **Formatting Logistics:**

The QE document (not including the letter of response) should be in APA format and between 20-40 pages in length(excluding references and tables).

It is recommended that the student identify one or more journals that would be a good 'fit' for their study/lit review/conceptual paper and that would provide models of articles in terms of formatting and other conventions of the journals.

View the [STEM Doctoral Plan of Study](#) form