Area-specific Qualifying Exam: Written Component NACS PHD

For this exam, candidates will be required to do Notice of Intent (NOI) and a full application (Form 101, including free form sections) for an NSERC Discovery grant. The NACS area has created templates for the NOI and Form 101 (links below).†You will also need to provide the four free-form sections listed below.

a) NACS template for Notice of Intent

b) NACS Exam Form

- Budget Justification

- Highly Qualified Personnel Training Plan

- Research Proposal

- Reference List

NSERC has very strict and detailed instructions for the creation of the proposal and notice of intent, including specific formatting instructions for free-form sections. These instructions are detailed on the NSERC website. In addition to reading these instructions carefully, it is important to learn how to write a good application, and to identify the merit indicators that NSERC uses to evaluate applications:

PhD Qualifying Exam: Timeline

1. The qualifying exam committee must first be formed. The names and signatures of the committee members must be documented on a form made available by the graduate secretary

2. Next there is a preliminary meeting (Meeting #1) at which the committee and the candidate discuss the overall plan, the scope of the proposal, and possible directions for the program of research.

3. Based on the discussion at Meeting #1, the candidate will compose a Notice of Intent for the NSERC Discovery Grant (NOI), which summarizes the research to be proposed. Students will have 2 weeks to complete their NOI and send it to the qualifying exam committee.

4. The committee will be given 1 week to read the NOI, and then a meeting will be scheduled (Meeting #2). At this meeting, the committee will give the candidate feedback about the notice of intent. It is important to note that Meeting #2 is the last time that the student will be able to get feedback and guidance from the committee on their proposal and plan of research; it is permissible, though, for candidates to ask subsequent questions of the Chair if they are unclear about procedure.

5. After Meeting #2, candidates work independently to create a full Discovery grant application (Form 101, including free-form sections). Students will have 4 weeks to complete their Form 101 and send it to the qualifying exam committee. For guidance, students are encouraged to read past successful NSERC applications provided by faculty.

6. The oral examination will occur within 2 weeks from submission of Form 101. Within these two weeks,

the committee will send their feedback to the committee chair. Most importantly, each committee member will provide a judgment of whether the written component was completed satisfactorily, as well as a basis for this judgment. The committee chair will then collate the judgments to make a decision about whether the written component was completed successfully or not. On the day of the oral exam, the chair announces the decision to the student and the committee, and provides the detailed comments of committee members. There are several possible outcomes:

- If the entire committee (or all but one member) judges the written component to be satisfactory, then the oral examination will proceed.

- If two or more members judge that the written component was not completed satisfactorily, then the student fails and the oral examination will not proceed. However, students will be given a second attempt to pass the written exam. The date for the second attempt will be negotiated with the student, but it should normally begin within 6 months of the first attempt. The second attempt begins at stage 2 of the procedure listed above, although the research program to be proposed will most likely be an improved version of the failed program rather than a completely different program.

- If the student is on their second attempt to pass the exam, and the revised written component is deemed unsatisfactory, then the exam is a failure. At this time, the student will be asked to leave the program.

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