Qualifying Exam

See Chapter IV, heading Doctor of Philosophy, subheading Qualifying exam

See Chapter IV, heading Doctor of Philosophy, subheading Program Regulations

Once the examination/defense has been setup by the Graduate Program Assistant, the Chair is responsible for following each program's specific process for the complete examination experience (e.g. questioning process from public attendees and examining committee, avoidance of asking own questions, following the time requirements, etc.). This process needs to be followed as precisely as possible to ensure fairness across all students within the program.

However, it is possible for the student and/or advisor to request a modification or accommodation to the process. All requests must be made to the Examination/Defense Chair who is responsible for ensuring that the process is fair to all students. Accommodations are possible as long as these are managed by the Defense/Examination Chair. If you have a defense/examination coming up and would like to discuss an issue related to the process, please discuss this with your Defense/Examination Chair with as much advance notice as possible to allow this person to discuss with relevant others if necessary (e.g. Department Chair, Grad Studies) and/or to arrange the modifications.

Look for "Area-specific qualifying exam" below CONTENTS for area-specific guidance if it exists.

Area-specific qualifying exam PHD CCAP

Components of the Qualifying Exam

The CCAP PhD Qualifying Examination will take place no later than the 6th semester following the MA degree (typically completed between May and June). Within the QE, students are assessed on their independent competence in two domains: clinical competency and research competency.

Competence Domains

Clinical Competency

Clinical Competency is assessed via two components: 1) A written examination, and, 2) A letter composed by the Clinic Director in consultation with the DCT providing a summary of the student’s clinical training to date.

Written Examination

Format: the written, closed-book exam is completed in a single 3-hour period around mid-May of PhD semester 6.

Content Overview: A single, clinically-focused question makes up the Written Examination. This question is based on readings and content of the courses taken to date and covers the areas of development,

assessment, diagnosis, case formulation, psychopathology, risk and resilience, intervention, ethics, and legislation. Specifically, students are given a case study and asked to respond to the following:

1. Diagnostic Formulation: Based on the information provided in the case study, provide a potential diagnosis consistent with the symptom presentation. Note that there may be more than one possible diagnosis for the symptom presentation. If more than one diagnosis appears appropriate, limit your answer to no more than three possible diagnoses. For each potential diagnosis, clearly indicate why the diagnosis is consistent with the individual's symptom presentation as well as any other further information you would need to confirm or rule out the diagnosis.
2. Case Formulation: Now imagine that you are meeting with your clinical supervisor. How would you explain the client's symptom cluster/presentation?
3. Other Issues: Clearly identify any ethical or legal concerns, or other issues needing further assessment.
4. Treatment Plan: Accounting for the three components above (your diagnosis, case formulation, and other issues), what would be your initial treatment plan? Should there be multiple diagnoses (up to three maximum) which are divergent, in the interests of time you may wish to focus on one or possibly two diagnoses for the treatment.

Feedback: Within 2 weeks of the written exam, the 3 members of the QEC who are competent to evaluate the written exam, complete the "Marker Report for the PhD Qualifying Examination Committee," and return the report to the QEC chair. The student's response is to be assigned either a "satisfactory" or a "some concerns" designation. Markers are to indicate in the report the nature of their concerns and/or any questions they have.

Within 2.5 weeks of the written exam, the chair of the QEC is to contact the student to inform them whether a "satisfactory" or "some concerns" was given for the written exam. The QEC chair does not share with the student any of the stated concerns or questions at that time. The students are allowed to review the exam in the QEC chair's office, but are not allowed to take away the exam.

If the majority of the markers (i.e., 2+ out of 3) indicated that the student satisfactorily passed the exam: No further consideration of the written exam takes place.

If the majority of the markers (i.e., 2+ out of 3) indicated that they had "some concerns" with the student's response: Follow up questioning by the 3 markers regarding the student's response and understanding of the case occurs at the oral exam meeting in mid-June (at which all QEC members are present). It is the student's choice regarding which component to complete first at the June meeting: oral research presentation and questioning, followed by further questioning on the written exam OR vice versa.

Committee members who indicated a "some concerns" on their marker report are asked to submit to the QEC chair a prepared line of Socratic questioning that would aid the student in demonstrating clinical competence. The QEC Chair appoints one of the QEC members who receive Committee members' questions and initiates the questioning. Questions are posed in the identified area(s) of concern to determine whether the student's performance has improved sufficiently to warrant an overall pass on the written portion of the qualifying exam.

Clinical Training Letter

Format: The Clinic Director, in consultation with the Director of Clinical Training, provides a written assessment of all the student's clinical work. The assessment of the candidate's clinical performance notes both areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed. At the beginning of the letter, the assessment includes a clear statement indicating whether the student has passed the standard of performance expected for the level of training to that point in the program.

This letter is submitted to the Chair of the QEC by early June of the 6th semester of the PhD. The letter is reviewed with the committee at the end of the oral exam in June (see overall evaluation below).

Research Competency

Research competency is assessed via three components: 1) the oral presentation and exam, 2) student submission of scholarly activity, and, 3) the supervisor's letter detailing the student's research track record.

When assessing research competency, students' active engagement in their field of study as well as their demonstration of independent thought, conceptual competence, and critical thinking are considered.

Student research record

Format: The student is to submit their current CV which should list publication, oral presentation, and poster presentation activity to date. The student may also submit copies of published papers and/or papers under review or in press as desired. These materials should be submitted to the QE Chair by early June of PhD semester 6.

Student oral presentation and exam

Note: The purpose of this oral presentation and exam is to demonstrate the student's conceptual competence in their area of research. Thus, the student should not be consulting with their supervisor in preparing for the oral presentation and exam (e.g., content of presentation, types of questions). Rather, this document is intended to provide all of the information necessary for students to prepare. If needed, consultation with the chair of the QE can be sought.

Format: Each exam and presentation takes take place around mid-June over a designated 1-2 day period.

a. Presentation: The student gives a 15 minute oral presentation (maximum) to the QEC regarding their general research area of study. The student can choose to use Powerpoint/other slide show program or use hard copy handouts. The purpose is not to defend the dissertation proposal (which should have been completed), nor to get into methodological details. Rather, this presentation should contain the following components related to their own work at a general level:

1. The state of the science (e.g., what are the 5 high-level take home messages that people should know about this area?)
2. Important theoretical gaps and their implications (e.g., what don't we know? why is that information important?)
3. Translation of this work into the real world (e.g., clinical practice, education, policy, advocacy, ethical implications).

Students are expected to address each of the 3 areas above, but the amount of time spent talking about each component is up to the student. Please note that the presentations are only allowed to last 15 minutes – students who try to go beyond this time are cut off by the QE chair.

b. Examination: The QEC then engages in 30 minutes of structured questioning of the student on the broad theoretical context, assumptions, connections with extant literature, and general implications of

this work. This questioning is not to include very specific methodological queries more suitable to discussions with the PhD Advisory committee.

Deliberation: Following the student presentation (15 minutes) and committee questioning (30 minutes), the student withdraws from the room and the QEC meets in camera to deliberate regarding the student's performance. See further details in Overall Evaluation.

Thesis supervisor's written letter

Format: The student's PhD supervisor is asked to write a letter summarizing the student's research competence, by outlining the research accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses of the student. Should the student have completed their Master's under a different supervisor, the current supervisor is also expected to gather feedback/information from the Master's supervisor. This letter is to be submitted to the QE Chair by early June in the 6th semester of the PhD.

Overall Evaluation

At the oral presentation and examination meeting (in mid-June of PhD semester 6), the QEC deliberates on the following items:

1. Research presentation and oral exam.
2. Supervisor letter regarding research performance to date.
3. Performance on the written exam (i.e., whether it was passed or not).
   Note: if the written exam was not passed at the original marking stage, the student's performance in fielding the following up questions at the oral exam is assessed.
4. Letter from the Director of the Centre for Psychological Services (in consultation with the DCT) summarizing practicum performance to date.

The QEC makes the final determination as to whether the student has successfully passed the qualifying examination. To be granted PhD candidacy, the student must have passed all components of the QE as outlined above and had their PhD proposal approved.

If the Committee decides, following the voting procedures of Graduate Studies, that the student has not passed one or more of the components of the qualifying examination, the examination is considered to be failed and a report of unsatisfactory is forwarded to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Following the in camera deliberations at the end of the oral exam and meeting aroundmid-June, the student is brought back into the room and informed of the outcome of their qualifying exam. In addition, within one week of the meeting, the QE chair provides the student with a letter similarly indicating the outcome of the exam.

Composition of each student's Qualifying Examination Committee

The QEC for each student consists of five members:

1) Chair (CCAP QE Portfolio Chair unless they are the supervisor or on the advisory committee of the student)

2) Advisor

3) One of the other Advisory Committee members

4) An additional member

5) An additional member

One member of the QEC must be external to the Department (this can be a member of the Advisory Committee), and at least three members must be able to mark the clinical question on the written exam.

The Chair of the QEC is the Chair of the CCAP QE Portfolio and thus is the same across all QE for that year (except in the case of being the supervisor, co-supervisor, or on the advisory committee of the student).

Roles and Responsibilities

Faculty Advisors

The Faculty Advisor of the student is responsible for meeting with the student in the fall semester of PhD 2 (PhD semester 4) to determine which members of the Advisory Committee move forward to the QEC (usually advisor + one other).

If one of the Advisory Committee members is external to the department, there are advantages for that person moving forward to the QEC but this is the decision of the student and Advisor. If a person external to the department is still needed after determining who is moving forward from the Advisory Committee, the Advisor in consultation with the student, is responsible for identifying and reaching out to that person to see if they are willing to serve in that role. This document can be used to explain the process and identify the time frames when availability is needed.

Given that a student's QEC is to be in place by the end of the PhD semester 4, the aforementioned tasks should be completed before the winter break.

Students

Students should speak with their Advisor starting in the fall semester of the second year of the PhD (PhD semester 4).

If students have any concerns about their ability to complete the QE successfully or are on an individualized plan of study, they should seek guidance from the DCT, the GPC, and QE Chair as soon as possible in the fall semester.

Students should begin to think about who could move forward from their Advisory Committee and who might be a good person to approach who is external to their committee.

Students should review the timeline in the main policy document and be proactive about ensuring various components are scheduled, materials are prepared, and schedules are booked.

Source URL:https://www.uoguelph.ca/psychology/book/page/qualifying-exam-phd-ccap