Guidelines for Administering Graduate Student Qualifying Examinations

**Doctoral Qualifying Exam**

Graduate students pursuing a Doctoral Degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences will be administered a Qualifying Examination for Admission to Candidacy. The examination is intended to test the student’s ability to apply the scientific process to the study of a specific problem, and will evaluate the student’s overall knowledge, comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Failure to successfully complete the qualifying examination will be cause for dismissal from the program.

The Qualifying Examination shall consist of two parts, written and oral, as defined below. The Qualifying Exam will be administered once a year, beginning in the late spring, to students who have completed the Graduate Program in Pharmaceutical Sciences (GPPS) core curriculum, usually in the spring of their second year of study. The written and oral components must be completed within the timeline detailed below.

**Written Qualifying Exam**

1) Written examinations will be administered annually, in the late spring, following completion of the student's graduate core curriculum.

   a) The student will be required to write a grant proposal based on the student’s research interest. The topic of the proposal must be sufficiently different from the main work of the advisor so as to clearly identify it as the student’s own work. The student must include a brief statement from the advisor stating how the student’s proposed work differs from the advisor’s own work.

   b) A committee consisting of one member of the GPC plus the student’s advisory committee, hereafter called the Grading Committee, will grade the proposal. The GPC member, who may not be a member of the student’s Advisory Committee, will chair the committee. The student, in consultation with the Mentor, will choose the GPC member. A single GPC member cannot chair more than two committees. In case of significant overlap among GPC members and student’s advisory committee, the Graduate Program Advisor, in consultation with the student and mentor, will appoint one member, who is not a GPC member, to chair the student’s Grading Committee.

   c) The student must first submit a title and one-page abstract of the proposal to the Grading Committee for approval of the topic. The abstract should briefly address the background, hypothesis and experimental approach. Each student must have approval of the topic from his/her Grading Committee on or before the last Friday of May each year.

   d) The student will have one month to prepare the proposal: starting from the first Monday in June and must be submitted as a PDF file to the Graduate Program Office by the first Friday in July. In the event that the first Friday in July is a holiday, the proposal must be submitted by the Monday following the first Friday in July.

   e) Each member of the grading committee will prepare a summary statement, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of its significance, innovation, and approach, rate the proposal as “approve to advance to oral exam”, “contingent approval to advance”, or “disapprove to advance to oral exam” and submit the rating to the Graduate Program Office on or before the third Monday in August. To avoid biases, the committee members or mentor would be asked not to discuss his/her rating with the rest of the committee members before a committee meeting.

   f) Upon receipt of all ratings and comments, the Graduate Program Office will inform the committee and the student of overall results.

   g) In order to advance to the oral exams, there may be no more than two ratings of “disapprove”. If the student is approved to advance to the oral exam, the Chair of the grading committee will meet with the student to discuss the strengths/weakness of the proposal to assist the student in preparation for the oral exam.
h) All students with a contingent approval to advance must prepare a written response to the comments of the Grading Committee, with appropriate changes in the written proposal. This response and the amended proposal must be submitted to the Grading Committee no later than the fourth Monday in August.

i) If the student is not approved to advance to the oral exam (more than two “disapprove” ratings), the Grading Committee as a whole will meet with the student to discuss the strengths/weakness of the proposal. Within two weeks of that meeting, the student must revise the proposal, using the summary statements of the Grading Committee as a guide. If the revised proposal receives more than two “disapprove” ratings, the student will be dismissed from the program.

**Oral Qualifying Exam**

1) Upon satisfactory completion of the written proposal, the student will make an oral presentation of their proposal to all members of the Graduate Program in Pharmaceutical Sciences, both faculty and graduate students.

   a) The oral exams will begin on the second Wednesday in September, with a date and time to be set by the Graduate Office, and based solely on the availability of the Grading Committee.

   b) The first part of the oral examination will be a 30-minute public presentation of the proposal, wherein the student will specifically address the weaknesses of the proposal as defined by the grading committee in their summary statements. In this process, the student will have the opportunity to respectfully agree or disagree with the judgment of the committee, offering evidence to support his/her arguments.

   c) Following the oral presentation, there will be a 15-minute public question and answer period, where any member of the faculty or any other graduate student can ask questions, faculty having precedence.

   d) At the end of the public questioning, there will be a closed question and answer period involving only the student and his/her Grading Committee. While the proposal will serve as a starting point, questions may cover any topic that the grading committee deems appropriate. There will be no formal time limit for the closed questioning session.

   e) At the end of the questioning period, the student will be dismissed from the room and the grading committee will evaluate the student's performance, rating it as “approve to advance to candidacy” or “disapprove to advance to candidacy”. The student is deemed to have passed the exam if there are no more than two ratings of “disapprove”. The findings of the Grading Committee will be immediately communicated to the student.

   f) The oral exam will be counted toward one of the four seminars that are required for completion of the core curriculum.

2) Should a student receive three or more “disapprove to advance to candidacy” ratings, he/she will discuss the deficiencies with the grading committee.

   a) Then the student will schedule a re-examination with the full grading committee to take place no less than two weeks and no more than four weeks from the date of the initial oral examination. At that time, a revised presentation will be followed by an open-ended question and answer period.

   b) The re-examination will take place in private. The Graduate Program Advisor, upon consultation with the Grading Committee Chair, will appoint an observer, in the rank of associate professor or above, during re-examination. Should a student receive three or more “disapprove to advance to candidacy” ratings on the re-examination, he/she will either be dismissed from the program or given the option to petition to the Graduate Program Committee for entrance into the Masters Degree Program in Pharmaceutical Sciences.
Admission to Candidacy

1. Upon successfully completing the Oral Qualifying Examination, the Graduate Program Coordinator will submit a request for Admission to Candidacy form to the Dean of the GSBS in Lubbock.

2. All records will become part of the student’s permanent file in the Graduate Program Office.

Appendix 1. Format for the Written Qualifying Examination

1) Each year, the Graduate Program Advisor will present information on how to write a grant proposal before the qualifying exam begins.

2) Students must use the following format to prepare their proposal
   a) The proposal shall be no more than seven pages, single-spaced, 11 point Arial fonts, ½ inch margins all around
   b) Hypothesis and 2 or 3 Specific Aims: This section should contain a brief statement of the hypothesis and a description of the general approach to test the hypothesis (1 page)
   c) Approach: This section should have a short statement of why and how the student arrived at this hypothesis, a statement of how the specific aims address that hypothesis and include a short review of the relevant literature and a statement of scientific premise, preliminary data, if any (2-3 pages).
   d) Experimental Section: The student should design an appropriate number of experiments to address each specific aim. While the description of methodology need not be exhaustive, it must contain enough detail so that the committee is able to evaluate the student’s level of facility in experimental design. Each experiment must be accompanied by a description of the reason (rationale) for the experiment, a statement of how the data will be analyzed, a statement of anticipated results and a statement of why those results are anticipated (3-4 pages).
   e) Not included in the maximum 7-page limit:
      i) A list of all literature referenced in the proposal, hyperlinked to the paper.
      ii) Justification of human subjects (1 page; this section must not be used to circumvent the page limits of the proposal) addressing the following points:
         (1) Protection of human subjects
         (2) Inclusion of women and minorities
         (3) Targeted/planned enrollment
         (4) Inclusion of children
      iii) Justification of vertebrate animals (1 page; this section must not be used to circumvent the page limits of the proposal) addressing the following points:
         (1) Detailed description of the proposed use of animals, identifying the species, strains, ages, sex and numbers of animals to be used
         (2) Justify the choice of species and numbers to be used.
         (3) Information as to the veterinary care of the animals
         (4) Description of procedures that ensure that discomfort, distress, pain and injury will be limited to that which is unavoidable; include a list of any and all drugs and restraining devices to be used
         (5) Describe the method of euthanasia and the reason for its selection
Master's Qualifying Exam

Graduate students pursuing a Master’s Degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences will not be administered a Qualifying Examination. They will be admitted to candidacy upon the completion of the core curriculum for the master’s program.