Graduate Program PhD Qualifying Exam Procedure for EEOB Students

General philosophy: The exam will be completed in a timely manner, and requirements will be enforced uniformly among candidates.

Supervisory Committee

The Qualifying Exam Committee will consist of the Supervisory Committee with the exception of the thesis supervisor. One member of the Qualifying Exam Committee will serve as chairperson to ensure that the rules for qualifying exam are followed. The thesis advisor may attend the oral portion of the exam as a silent observer. They must leave the room along with the student for the Committee's discussion following the exam and cannot vote on the outcome of the written or oral portion of the exam. A pass or fail decision will be by majority vote of the Exam Committee (at least 3 votes in favor).

Written and Oral Exam Components for the Qualifying Exam (PhD)

The exam will consist of a written document that will be defended in a single oral defense. If failed, a student can retake each part of the exam once as per university statutes.

The written portion of the exam will consist of a synthetic review of an area related to the student's research. The document will include (1) a 300 word summary or abstract, (2) the review not to exceed 15 pages (1.5 space; Arial 11 or Times 12 fonts with one inch margins as per NSF/NIH formats) including figures and tables, and (3) a literature cited section. The review topic will be chosen by the Exam Committee from a list of 3 mini-reviews (one paragraph abstracts) to be provided by the student. A student must complete the written component within 7 weeks from the time an abstract is chosen by the committee. The committee will have two weeks to evaluate the written document. If revisions are requested by the committee, the student will have two weeks to complete them and resubmit the written component of the exam. In addition to the revised review, the student must submit a “Response to Reviewers” document that explicitly addresses the written comments and recommendations of the student's exam committee, itemizing changes made to the review and justifying any recommendations not followed in the revision. The committee will then have one week to reevaluate the written component of the exam.

The oral component of the Qualifying Exam cannot be scheduled until the student has passed the written component and must take place within 30 days from the time the student passed the written component of the exam. In the oral defense, the student may give a formal presentation of the review to the Qualifying Exam Committee, but it may not exceed 10 slides. The oral component of the exam may cover any material deemed appropriate by the committee and should not exceed two hours in length.

Exam Schedule

The qualifying exam may be undertaken as early as the second semester of entering the graduate program in Biology but no later than the fourth semester. If the exam is failed, it may be retaken once by the end of the following semester. Students are strongly encouraged to undertake the exam during their second or third semester of entering the graduate program in Biology. Students who have not attempted their qualifying exams by the end of their fourth semester and have not passed the exam by the end of their fifth semester will be judged as not making satisfactory progress toward their degree. These students will be ineligible for departmental and university support.
First Thesis Committee Meeting

Students must have a formal thesis committee meeting within one semester of successfully completing their qualifying exam. For this meeting, the student must furnish a research proposal that outlines the student’s thesis work. The proposal should be in the form of a NSF or NIH grant proposal and include (1) a one-page project summary, (2) a project description not to exceed 10 pages (1.5 space; Arial 11 or Times 12 fonts with one inch margins as per NSF/NIH formats) including figures and tables, and (3) a literature cited section. A budget section is optional. This proposal will be formally evaluated by the student’s committee and judged as acceptable or unacceptable. If the proposal is unacceptable, the student will have one month to revise it and resubmit it to the committee. If the student fails to produce an acceptable research proposal by the end of their sixth semester of entering the graduate program in Biology, they will be deemed as making inadequate progress toward their degree and departmental and university funding will be revoked.

Exceptions or modifications to these rules must be approved in advanced by the Graduate Program Committee.

*Note: The first formal thesis committee meeting will be a PROGRAM requirement. It will not be part of the qualifying exam per se, as it will be in an area on which the thesis advisor and student are expected (and encouraged) to work together closely [and is thus inappropriate for inclusion as part of the formal (intellectually independent) qualifying exam].