7. THE PHD QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

The PhD Qualifying Examination (QE) serves as one of the key filters in allowing a student to pass from Special (simple admission to the program) to Regular doctoral student status. As such, the QE is designed in accordance with the following principles:

• The examination promotes breadth in the preparation for doctoral studies. The examination also accommodates those students wishing to pursue nontraditional paths of scholarship, since much of the most exciting new work can occur “between” traditional curricular areas.
• The examination establishes that the student is prepared for further advanced studies at the doctoral level.

To pass from Special to Regular status, the doctoral student must have a GPA of at least 3.5 and also obtain a commitment from a faculty advisor on his or her PhD Plan of Study. Thus the QE is not the sole determinant for acceptance as a Regular doctoral student. Students who have demonstrated significant research activity and an excellent academic record while at OSU may be able to waive the qualifier. A typical record that would be considered for waiver has the following:

1. Support letter from Ph.D. advisor attesting to the student’s outstanding research ability
2. Evidence of research accomplishment including journal and conference papers.
3. Graduate GPA of approximately 3.8 or higher

Only students who have been at OSU for at least 3 quarters (including time in both M.S. and Ph.D.) will be considered for this waiver. The graduate studies committee will evaluate each waiver request case-by-case and decide if the student’s qualifying exam can be waived. The student should submit a CV with the advisor’s letter and a copy of all journal and conference papers (preprint if not published) to the grad studies chair. Students who are not waived must take the qualifying exam.

The Ph.D. qualifying exam is an oral exam given by a committee of 3 faculty members, consisting of the student’s advisor and 2 other members. The members of the committee will be jointly decided by the student with the advisor. The committee members must be faculty with P status within the department and also hold a departmental appointment (excluding 0% appointments). The student may petition the graduate studies committee to allow at most one committee member who does not meet the above criteria. The timing of the exam depends on where the student received the MS degree, as outlined in the two cases below. The student is notified about the result within a week after the exam. Two attempts are allowed in each case.

CASE 1: Ph.D. qualifier combined with MS exam (advisor for Ph.D. is the same):
• The student must have 3 committee members for the MS exam. After the MS exam, the student is asked to leave the room, and the committee decides whether the student has passed or failed.

• The student is then called back into the room and informed of the decision. If the student passes the MS exam, he/she is allowed to continue to the Qualifying Exam. The Qualifying Exam is a one hour oral exam taken immediately following the MS exam. Each member will have approximately 20 minutes to ask questions. It is expected that the student will pick committee members who have had the student in a class to facilitate the formulation of the questions. After the hour, the student leaves the room, and the advisor may make a statement to the remaining committee members about the student’s capabilities as a Ph.D. student. Then the advisor should leave the room for the 2 remaining committee members to discuss the student’s performance on the exam without grading the student.

• All 3 committee members will then submit a grade for the student directly to the grad studies chair. If the advisor is the grad studies chair, the grades will be sent to the Dept. chair.

CASE 2: All other cases

In principle, the exam is similar. The differences are outlined below:

• The first attempt of the qualifying exam must be taken by at least the end of the 3rd quarter after admission to the Ph.D. program if the student obtained the MS at OSU or by at least the end of the 5th quarter if the student obtained the MS elsewhere.

• The Qualifying exam consists of a written component and an oral exam. For the written exam, the student will be asked to respond to an open-ended research question (or set of questions) and write a report. All committee members should participate in defining the research project. This project would ordinarily be assigned at least one month prior to the oral exam. The oral exam will be for 90 minutes of which the first 20 minutes will be for presentation associated with the research project. The format is similar to a conference where the questions are reserved for the end. After the presentation, 10 minutes will be allocated for questions associated with a research topic. The remaining hour will be reserved for questions by the committee members. Each member will have approximately 20 minutes to ask questions. It is expected that the student will pick committee members who have had the student in a class to facilitate the formulation of the questions. After the 90 minutes, the student leaves the room, and the advisor may make a statement to the remaining committee members about the student’s capabilities as a Ph.D. student. Then the advisor should leave the room for the 2 remaining committee members to discuss the student’s performance on the exam without grading the student. All 3 committee members will then submit a grade for the student directly to the grad studies chair. If the advisor is the grad studies chair, the grades will be sent to the Dept. chair.
Students in non-traditional areas who do not have their MS degrees in ECE may petition if they need more time to prepare for the exam.

**Grading of Qualifying Exam**

The grading for the exam will be either a 2 (pass), 1(marginal), or 0(fail). In order to pass the qualifier, the student must score at least 4 out of 6. The committee members should send their score for the exam by e-mail to the grad studies chair. The student and advisor will be informed by the grad studies chair as to whether the student passed or failed. If it is the student’s first try, the student will have one more opportunity to pass the exam. The second try must be taken the next quarter after the failed exam. In addition, the committee for the second try must remain the same. If the student wishes to change the committee, he/she must petition the grad studies committee with a reason for the change.

**Documents required and deadlines:**

Two weeks before the start of the qualifying exam, the student should turn in the request for the Qualifying Exam. This form is on the web.

**One week before the exam:**

The student should give the following documents to the exam committee members one week before the exam:

1. List of graduate courses taken (with brief descriptions if courses are not OSU courses).
2. A resume with list of publications.
4. Written report for the research project for Case 2.