

# Rehabilitation Science PhD Program

## Guidelines for Qualifying Exam

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Program Director: Dr. Andrew Judge ([arjudge@php.ufl.edu](mailto:arjudge@php.ufl.edu))

Program Coordinator: Laura Quintana ([lauraq@php.ufl.edu](mailto:lauraq@php.ufl.edu))

Successful completion of a written and oral qualifying examination is required of all doctoral students as they near the completion of their course work. This document provides details regarding the structure, timing, and format of the exam.

The qualifying exam should be completed by the end of the student's second academic year in the program. However, it must be completed no later than the end of the first semester of the student's third year. It may be taken no sooner than the third semester of graduate study. The student should have completed the majority of their didactic coursework prior to taking the exam. There must be at least two terms between the oral portion of the qualifying examination and date of the degree. The term the qualifying examination is passed is counted as one of the semesters if the examination occurs before the published midpoint of the term, and the graduating term is counted as the second semester. Thus, the oral qualifying exam and date of the degree can be consecutive semesters, but only if the oral examination occurs before the published midpoint of the term. All work for the doctorate must be completed within 5 calendar years after the qualifying examination, or this examination must be repeated.

Prior to scheduling the qualifying exam, the student must have a full committee meeting (in person or via video) during which the committee agrees that the student is ready to take the exam.

It is highly recommended that the student has individual meetings with each committee member to review their expectations for the exam. Students should inquire if there are specific readings or content area that the committee members expect the student to review prior to the exam.

The qualifying exam consists of a written portion, which must be taken first and passed, followed by an oral examination. Together, the written and oral exam will assess the student's: **1.** Understanding of the application of their work to rehabilitation science; **2.** Mastery of course work; and **3.** Readiness to successfully complete a dissertation. The student's supervisory committee will develop challenging questions that broadly cover these three areas. The student will be expected to display "foundational knowledge" in their discipline as well as in relation to their specialized course work, including research methodology. In this context, foundational knowledge refers to the principles, theories and terminology that are essential to proceed with advanced study in a particular discipline. **The student must first pass both the written portion and then also pass the oral portion of the qualifying exam to complete the milestone.**

***Required content:*** The written qualifying exam must include a question designed to test the student's foundational knowledge of public health and rehabilitation as covered in *RSD6110: Rehabilitation Science Theory and Application 1*. This question can be tailored to the student's particular area of interest. If the primary mentor has questions about this, they are encouraged to communicate with the Program Director.

### ***Format of the written exam:***

The student will be given three questions prepared by their primary advisor and supervisory committee. The student will write a comprehensive answer in response to each question. Prior to starting the exam, the student should agree with their mentor on a three week "time block" during which the student can focus primarily on the writing of the exam. The mentor and supervisory committee should set requirements for all aspects of the written document so that there is no ambiguity for the student. Details such as due date, font, page limits, margins etc. should be specified before the exam commences. As a general guideline, an answer will typically require 8-10 pages of written text (single spaced, 12-pt font, 1-inch page margins; may include figures or diagrams, as appropriate).

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### **Option A:**

The student is given one week (5 working days plus 1 weekend) per question to develop a written document. The questions should be designed to test the student's mastery of the required Rehabilitation Science coursework as well as the scientific basis and foundational knowledge of their concentration. The questions should be of sufficient depth such that the committee feels it will take 1 week of work for the student to prepare an adequate answer. The exam is "open book" format, and the student is permitted to consult the scientific literature or textbooks, etc. during the exam. However, using the honor system the student is not permitted to seek help from any other individuals including students, faculty or other colleagues. The student is bound to the rules and regulations of the UF Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>

Written answers should be "scholarly" in all regards. It is appropriate to choose a citation style consistent with journals in the student's area of research.

Most commonly, the student receives 1 question per week. Upon submitting the answer to question 1, the student will be provided question 2. Upon submitting the answer to question 2, the student will be provided question 3. At the end of the third week, the student will submit the response to question 3. The student works on one question at a time and is not permitted to move between questions.

### **Option B:**

Alternatively, the mentor and committee may decide for the student to receive all 3 questions simultaneously. In this situation, the student has the three-week period to work on all of the questions and may move between questions as they feel is appropriate. All three questions are submitted at the end of the exam period.

If the student has a graduate minor, they will have one additional week (7 days) and one additional question for a total of four questions. The fourth question is specific to the subject area of the graduate minor and should be developed with the committee member representing the student's minor.

Note: The content of the qualifying exam will necessarily differ between students. We have a diverse program and accordingly the areas of emphasis for the exam will vary between different mentors and research areas. It is the job of the primary mentor and supervisory committee to design the exam within the guidelines set forth in this document.

### **Option C:**

A mentor and student may petition the Rehabilitation Science Steering Committee to request a "one day" format for the qualifying examination. In this format, the student takes a "closed book" exam over a 1 day (8 hours) with no outside resources consulted. The required content on public health (discussed above) must still be included. The questions should be designed to test the student's mastery of the required Rehabilitation Science coursework as well as the scientific basis of their emphasis area/concentration. The mentor must present the questions in advance to the Program Director for approval.

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**Review of written exam:** The student will turn in each paper to the primary mentor at the end of the week (date and time should be specified in advance, at the time the assignment is given). The mentor will then distribute the paper to the supervisory committee. The student will be graded based on the totality of the answers to questions 1-3. No interim feedback is to be provided to the student during the three-week writing period.

Questions 1-3 will be reviewed by the supervisory committee and judged to be satisfactory or unsatisfactory. If aspects of the work are unsatisfactory, the committee must decide if: **1)** this is considered a failed exam, or **2)** if the student will be given an opportunity to rewrite aspects of the exam.

If an answer is deemed by the committee to be lacking depth or scholarship in certain aspects, but the committee feels that the overall answer will be satisfactory upon revision, then the student should be given the opportunity to rewrite the given question(s). If the committee agrees that revisions are needed, the student will be given written guidelines regarding how to improve the paper. These guidelines will include specific areas for the student to address prior to committee re-review as well as a hard deadline for completing the revisions. No more than 1 week per is permitted for all revisions. Failure to meet the deadline will result in a failed qualifying exam.

If the written answers lack evidence of scholarship throughout and the expected foundational knowledge is absent, this is considered grounds for failure and the exam will not proceed to the oral portion. This is then considered a failed qualifying exam (see “Exam failure” at the end of this document).

### ***Format of the oral examination***

If the three written papers are judged satisfactory the student can proceed to the oral examination. The oral exam ideally should commence within 1 week of completing the written exam, but no later than 1 month. At the opening of the meeting, the committee should ask the student to leave and spend approximately 10 minutes reviewing the procedure and any other relevant information. The guidelines for the oral exam are as follows:

- The primary mentor should appoint a committee member to serve as the Chair of the meeting.
- The Chair of the meeting is tasked with ensuring that each committee member has the opportunity to ask questions, and that the primary mentor does not insert any bias into the proceedings.
- The External member of the committee should pay particular attention to ensuring the process is conducted in accordance with graduate school guidelines, and that the student is treated fairly.
- The committee will ask questions in turn until each committee member is satisfied that they can determine a grade of pass or fail.
- Content of the questions should pertain to the content of the three written papers as well as any other content deemed necessary to decide whether the student is qualified to continue work toward a PhD degree.
- A “whiteboard” or similar technology should be available for use, if needed.
- Typically, oral exams take 2-3 hours.
- All members of the supervisory committee must attend the oral portion of the qualifying exam. The student and chair or co-chair must be in the same physical location. With approval of the entire committee, other committee members may attend remotely using modern technology.

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### **Review of oral exam:**

Once committee members are satisfied that they have enough information to reach a decision, the student should be excused from the room. The Chair of the committee should then ask each committee member, in turn, to provide a vote of “pass” or “fail” and to provide the reasons for their vote. A vote of pass indicates that the student has mastered the required content at a level required for a PhD student. A vote of fail indicates that the student did not display sufficient mastery of the content. The committee should allow sufficient discussion so that a majority vote can be agreed upon. The committee must choose either pass or fail, there is no option for a “pass with conditions”.

### **Exam failure (written and/or oral):**

To pass the qualifying exam, the student must first pass the written portion and then also pass the oral portion. If the student fails the written portion they will not proceed to the oral portion and it is considered a failed exam. If the student passes the written portion but then fails the oral portion, it is considered a failed exam. The Program Director should be notified of failed exams, in writing, by the primary mentor. A re-examination may be requested, but it must be recommended by the supervisory committee. At least one semester of additional preparation is required before a re-examination can occur. If the student fails the second attempt, they are dismissed from the program.

#### *Failure of written exam:*

If the student fails the written portion, the exam does not proceed to the oral portion. If this is the first attempt at the qualifying exam, the student is permitted to retake written exam with approval from the primary mentor and advisory committee. However, at least one semester of additional preparation is required before a re-examination can occur. If the student does not pass both the written and oral portions of the exam on the next attempt, they are dismissed from the program.

#### *Failure of the oral portion of the exam:*

If the student has passed the written exam, but fails the oral portion of the exam, they are permitted to retake the oral exam with approval from the primary mentor and advisory committee. However, at least one semester of additional preparation is required before a re-examination can occur. They do not need to retake the written portion of the exam as long as the oral portion is successfully completed by the next semester.

**Paperwork required to document milestone:** It is the student’s responsibility to notify the Program Coordinator when a qualifying exam is scheduled. Students should contact the Program Coordinator two weeks prior to the oral portion of the qualifying exam for the necessary paperwork. The *Rehabilitation Science Committee Meeting and Milestone Evaluation Form* will be completed by the committee chair and signed by all committee members to document the milestone. The Program Coordinator will provide the form to the supervisory committee via DocuSign. The milestone is not considered complete until the signed form is returned.