

The Social Work PhD Qualifying Examination

The Qualifying Examination is an integral part of the program of doctoral study. It offers a process for you (a doctoral student) to consolidate your knowledge, and provides a bridge between your course work and your dissertation. The purpose of the qualifying examination is to provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate that you have achieved both a breadth of knowledge in social work and a depth of knowledge in the chosen area of specialization within which it is expected that your dissertation will be located. It is designed for you to demonstrate (1) a command of the broad field of inquiry, (2) the connections between the intended dissertation and the discipline of social work, and (3) develop your own critical perspective on the field.

An example may help to illuminate. A student wishes to complete their dissertation on the connections between mental health and homelessness. For the purposes of the qualifying examination, the area of specialization is mental health and homelessness but the broad field of inquiry could be either mental health or housing. In some cases, the student may want to take on both areas. So, the qualifying examination is intended to permit the candidate to demonstrate the connections between social work and the dissertation topic (area of specialization), and their knowledge of either of mental health or homelessness or both.

At the end of the qualifying examination process you will have had the opportunity to demonstrate that you have the knowledge and skills necessary to complete the independent research which is required in the preparation of the dissertation. The comprehensive exam provides you an opportunity to develop areas of specialization.

The social work qualifying examination takes place immediately following the completion of all course work. The following are the steps in the process leading up to the completion of the qualifying examination.

Step 1 Committee Members

The members of the committee will **in normal circumstances** be your dissertation supervisor, one additional social work faculty member, and one additional faculty member who could also be from social work or from other units at Carleton University. The list of members of the committee must be submitted to the Graduate Supervisor for approval.

Step 2 The Reading List

The reading list has two components; a description of your inquiry and a bibliography. The description will outline your interests in the broad field (s) of inquiry and the area of specialization and the connections of the field and the area of specialization to social work (1 or 2 pages). This is followed by a bibliography that guides the critical review of the social work literature in the your broad field of inquiry and area of specialization. This reading list will include a minimum of 25 key scholarly readings that are representative of the broad field of inquiry, the area of specialization and the connections to social work (to include books, journal articles, chapters, reports). At least half of the readings chosen must be scholarly books. This list

will form the basis of your preparation for the qualifying examination. You will first distribute this preliminary reading list to your committee. Each member of the committee will have the opportunity to contribute further suggested readings and/or revisions to the proposed list. From this discussion, you will prepare a final version of the reading list to be circulated to all committee members for approval. This approved list of readings will then be submitted to the Graduate Supervisor for departmental approval.

Step 3 Format of the Examination

You can choose to undertake the qualifying examination in one of two possible formats. The options are:

- a. A take home paper, with questions assigned by the committee members who will arrive at the list of questions in a collaborative manner, facilitated by your doctoral studies supervisor. The paper will require you select and provide answers to either 2 of 4 questions or 3 of 6 questions. The paper will normally be 25 single-spaced pages or 10,000 words (excluding references) drafted over seven days (a week).
- b. A critical review essay with an agreed length (normally 25 single-spaced pages or 10,000 words) and deadline date. The essay should be framed by the line of inquiry which preceded the bibliography approved by the committee in Step 2.

Both the take home paper and the review essay serve to strengthen your ability to think critically about issues in your broad field of inquiry, your area of specialization, and your relationship to social work however that is interpreted. In either version of the exam, the goal is for students to put the authors and content in conversation with each other.

While the Qualifying examination constitutes an independent piece of work, you are encouraged to discuss the plan for the paper with your supervisor.

The paper is first submitted to the supervisor for approval. The supervisor examines the merits of the submission and either approves it to go to the committee or they may ask you to rethink/revise some aspects of their work. While the supervisor provides this written feedback they do not provide any substantive or editorial comments on the body of the paper. Since this is an examination, the supervisor is limited to one review of the paper and one set of written comments before it is reviewed by the committee.

After the supervisor sends the paper to the committee, committee members have one week to determine whether the paper is ready for defence. The committee may determine that you complete further revisions before moving to the oral defence stage. In this situation, the committee will provide you with a timeframe to complete the revisions (usually 1- 2 weeks) and will review the paper when completed. The committee can request one set of revisions before the oral exam.

Once determined to be ready for defence, committee members are expected to provide a written assessment of the examination to you at least three days before the date of the oral examination.

This includes a general statement or set of comments about the paper. It does not require drafting specific questions. The date for the oral examination will be organized by the comprehensive exam Supervisor.

Students have a maximum of five terms from the initial registration in the PhD program to complete the qualifying examination. (See the attached table of significant dates.)

Step 4 The Oral Defence

Upon completion of the written examination, you will be required to defend your work in an oral examination. Whether or not you are ready for oral defence is the decision of the majority members (2 of 3) of your committee who have read the written exam. The oral defence is closed to you and your examining committee and the chair. During the defence, questions may arise related to your written work as well as any of the 25 works cited on your reading list.

The defence date shall be set as soon as possible following agreement by the committee that the qualifying exam is ready for examination. An oral defence is normally arranged within two to three weeks following submission of the qualifying examination paper. The thesis supervisor will assist you in preparing for the defence process. The oral defence is normally up to 2 hours in duration. The chair of the Examining Committee for the oral defense is the Graduate Supervisor or someone designated by **that individual**.

At the beginning of the oral examination the chair will ask you to make a presentation of approximately 15 to 20 minutes in duration outlining the contents of the written qualifying exam. Once this presentation has been completed, the chair will ask each member of the qualifying exam to ask you questions. The order will be determined by the chair. In the first round, questions and responses are a dialogue between you and the questioner. Each member will have approximately 15-20 minutes to ask questions at the discretion of the chair. In the second round, members of the committee have the opportunity to ask follow up questions and to intervene in a broader discussion based on your reading list.

At the end of the oral examination the chair will ask you to leave while the committee members have the opportunity to discuss the written examination submission and your oral defence. The committee may award you one of the following grades: pass with distinction, pass, or fail. You will then return and will be notified of the result.

Successful completion of the qualifying examination will appear on your annual academic audit. The chair of the committee will submit a report to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs stating the results. Copies of the qualifying examination and the written paper, as well as the results of the oral examination are placed in your file after the completion of the oral examination. In the event that you are unsuccessful in the oral defence, you will have one additional opportunity to repeat the qualifying examination. This additional examination will

require you again choose one of the options under Step 3 and go through the process above for establishing a new examination.