

**Qualifying Paper Examination Requirement
Gerontology Ph.D. Program
University of Massachusetts Boston**

Purpose

The qualifying paper exam provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to lay the foundation for a substantial, independent research project. Students will critically review the appropriate scholarly literature and develop a sound conceptual or theoretical framework that reflects the literature. While the qualifying paper need not have any relationship to the student's dissertation, students are strongly encouraged to select a topic that will lead to a dissertation. The paper will not be an empirical examination of the topic. Rather, the paper will review, summarize, and integrate relevant social and behavioral science literature in order to provide a synopsis of the "state-of-the-science" regarding a specific topic relevant to the field of gerontology and aging studies. Students will address this substantive topic from multiple points of view. This may mean a multi-disciplinary approach to the topic or it may mean evaluating the topic from a variety of frameworks within a single field. The paper serves as evidence of the student's readiness to begin a dissertation project and may serve as a pathway into the broader literature surrounding her/his dissertation topic. Thus it is reasonable to think of this paper as a preliminary step toward a more comprehensive review of the literature associated with the dissertation topic. The paper will take a broad view of the topic, given the challenge of representing and integrating multiple frameworks required by the exam.

Structure and Procedures

To be eligible to write the qualifying exam paper, students should have completed all required course work. Exceptions may be granted by the Graduate Program Director (GPD) under compelling circumstances.

The process begins with the student submitting a qualifying paper exam prospectus to the GPD. (A list of steps in the process is provided below.) The prospectus is a double-spaced, one-page statement identifying the topic and providing a discussion of the importance of the topic to the field. Upon approval of the prospectus by the GPD, the student will identify a Gerontology faculty member to serve as Chair of the Qualifying Paper Exam Committee (QPEC). Students should seek input from the GPD regarding the selection of the Chair. By agreeing to serve as the QPEC Chair, the faculty member is not necessarily making a commitment to serve as the Chair of the student's dissertation committee. Conversely, the student is not necessarily making a commitment to have the Chair of the qualifying paper exam also serve as Chair of his/her dissertation committee. However, this will be a reasonable outcome in most cases. The GPD will then assign two other graduate gerontology faculty members to serve as members of the QPEC. Committee membership will be determined in part so as to distribute the workload evenly among the faculty. After the identification of the members of the student's QPEC, a meeting between the student and the committee will

be arranged by the student at a time and day mutually convenient to all persons. Students should present a draft statement of the topic, questions and themes to be addressed, and an initial list of major references to the committee prior to the meeting. The committee will help the student to refine his/her thesis statement, questions and themes, and may suggest additional references. A follow-up meeting may be arranged if the Chair of the committee and the student agree that such a meeting is necessary.

Following the meeting, the student will prepare a final written thesis statement that includes a set of organizing questions or themes to guide the review. This statement should be no longer than two double-spaced, typewritten pages. Students should prepare a bibliography consisting of approximately 20 scholarly works (articles, books) central to the emerging dissertation topic using APA style guidelines. (Additional references may be included while preparing the final exam paper.) As noted above, the initial reference list will be compiled with input from the Chair and other members of the QPEC. The scholarly reference material should be selected to reflect multiple perspectives and/or multiple disciplinary approaches to the topic. The thesis statement must be approved by the QPEC. Prior to beginning the exam, the thesis statement and the bibliography must be submitted to the GPD for approval.

After the thesis statement and bibliography are approved, the qualifying paper will be completed by the student without input from the QPEC or other persons. The final paper exam should be no more than 35 double-spaced pages. During the exam period, students may ask only clarifying questions of the QPEC Chair.

There are two qualifying paper exam periods each year; one in the winter, and one in the summer. The completed paper will be reviewed by the QPEC during the month following the exam period. The qualifying paper will be assigned one of three grades; Pass, Pass with revisions, or Fail. Students who are given a "Pass with revisions" will be given comments from the committee describing why revisions are deemed necessary and will be given 2 weeks from the time they receive the comments to submit revisions. The committee will then assign a Pass or a Fail. With input from the other members of the QPEC, the Chair will provide the student with written comments supporting the **final** grade assigned to the qualifying paper.

Upon successful completion of the qualifying paper, the Chair of the QPEC will notify the GPD and the student. The student will provide one copy of his/her paper to be placed in her/his Program file. These copies should be free of typographical and grammatical errors.

Successful completion of the qualifying paper is required for admission to Ph.D. candidacy.

Schedule for Preparation and Completion of Exam

Activity	Spring Session	Summer Session
1. Prepare one-page prospectus/submit to GPD for approval	November 1 - January 15	March 1-May 15
2. Identify Chair with input from GPD	No later than February 1	No later than June 1
3. GPD assigns two additional committee members	No later than February 1	No later than June 1
4. Draft thesis statement, questions or themes: select references	No later than February 1	No later than June 1
5. Meet with committee	January 1-February 15	May 1-June 15
6. Prepare final thesis statement	February 1-February 15	June 1-June 15
7. Thesis statement submitted to GPD for approval	February 15	June 15
8. Prepare paper exam	March 1-April 30	July 1-August 30
9. Paper Exam Due	No later than April 30	No later than August 30
10. Evaluation reported to student	No later than June 1	No later than October 1

(Approved as modified 1/25/07)