GUIDELINES FOR THE PRELIMINARY EXAM AND THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Each Ph.D. student is required to take a preliminary examination and to submit a dissertation proposal. This exam is given no earlier than a date at which the student is within approximately 6 credit hours of completion of the formal course work on the degree plan (excluding 681 and 691) and no later than two years after the initiation of the doctoral studies. This deadline can be extended by one more semester if the student has still more than 6 credit hours missing from his required courses, but should be no less than 6 months before the thesis defense.

The examination is both oral and written. The written part of the examination covers the fields of study included in the student’s degree plan. Each member of the advisory committee is responsible for administering a written examination in his/her particular field, unless he/she chooses to waive participation. Each written examination must be completed and reported as satisfactory to the chair of the advisory committee before the oral portion of the examination may be held. The oral part will be closed. If it includes a presentation of the thesis proposal this part of the exam may be open to the public if the student and all the members of the committee request it in writing from the Department’s graduate office.

The purpose of the preliminary examination is for the student’s advisory committee to satisfy itself that the student has demonstrated: a mastery of the subject matter of all fields in the program and an adequate knowledge of the literature in these fields and an ability to carry out bibliographical research. Upon approval of the student’s advisory committee with no more than one member dissenting and the approval of the office of Graduate Studies, a student who has failed the preliminary examination is given one re-examination, when adequate time has been given to permit the student to address the inadequacies emerging from the first examination (normally six months). The student and the advisory committee negotiate a mutually acceptable date for this purpose.

The student’s research proposal must be approved at a meeting of the student’s advisory committee, that may coincide with the preliminary exam, at which time the feasibility of the proposed research and the adequacy of available facilities are reviewed. The proposal should make clear the topic to be addressed, its background, the motivation for the study, and the general approach to be followed. The approved proposal is submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies before the end of the second year after initiation of the doctoral studies and at least 6 months prior to the close of the semester or summer session in which the student expects to receive the degree or prior to scheduling of the final examination, whichever comes first, for final approval. The narrative portion of the proposal does not have to be more than 10 pages long, and the proposal also includes a list of the selected references.