

DEPARTMENT OF ORAL HEALTH SCIENCES (OHS) GENERAL EXAMINATION POLICY AND FORMAT

Purpose of Ph.D. General Examination

- The purpose of the general exam (GE) is "an inclusive evaluation of the candidate's mastery of the major and related fields of study, including the tools of research in which competence has been certified." As administered Oral Health Sciences Graduate Program, for the Ph.D. degree, the general consists of two components: a written research **proposal** in research grant application format, and an oral defense of this proposal.
- The general exam is to propose experiments that have not yet been performed, although it is appropriate to include preliminary data (but not required).
- Additionally, the purpose is to determine if the student is capable of recognizing questions appropriate for research projects, developing these questions into a written research proposal, and orally defending the proposal.

A. Administrative Preparation

Prior to scheduling the General Exam, a student must:

- **Carefully review the Graduate School's [Degree Requirements](#)** for the most comprehensive information on defending and graduating.
- **Identify a Supervisory Committee.**
- **Email the Graduate Program Advisor (GPA)** with the names and emails of committee members to be noted formally in MyGrad.
- **Schedule a pre-general exam meeting with your committee.** The purpose of the meeting is for the student to present a research outline (slide deck) and receive feedback from the Supervisory Committee on that outline.
 - A quorum is required, and the GSR must be included, but not every single member must be present.
- **Email the GPA confirming that you and your committee met for the pre-GE meeting.**
- **Finalize a defense date, time and location** that works for you and your supervisory committee. It is highly recommended to schedule your exam no later than the last day of **instruction** in case any unexpected issues arise.
- **Email your GPA to reserve a room, including what equipment you require.** At least a 25-person capacity room is recommended. Health Sciences [Room Matrix](#)
- **Submit a written proposal to the Supervisory Committee at least one week prior to the exam. Failure to meet this deadline may result in rescheduling the GE.**

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- **Schedule your exam in [MyGrad](#).** Notify your GPA so departmental approval is granted.
 - **Prior to the exam, the GPA will provide you with the Committee Signature Form** for your committee members to sign after the exam and discussion.
 - **Email/Return the signed Committee Signature Form to the GPA after the exam.**

B. Timing and Format

- The student will take the General Examination in the second or early in the third year of graduate work.

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- This examination will be administered by the Supervisory Committee.
 - a written Ph.D. thesis project proposal in the form of an NIH grant.
 - an oral presentation and defense of the proposal in front of the Supervisory committee
- The Ph.D. thesis research proposal will be chosen with the approval of the Supervisory Committee members.
- The written proposal will broadly follow the general format of National Research Service Award (NRSA) Fellowship Applications (F31, F32, F30). The instructions are here: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/forms-f/fellowship-forms-f.pdf>. The only required portions are
 - **Specific Aims (described on page F-64),**
 - **Research Strategy (F-65 to F-66).**
 - **Bibliography and References Cited (page F-40).**
- The Specific Aims section will be no longer than one page. The Research Strategy section will be limited to 6 pages. Note that no budget or administrative pages will be required. Students will not be penalized for a lack of preliminary results supporting the proposal, and students should not delay scheduling the exam to obtain preliminary results. Detailed formatting instructions are included below ("Department of Oral Health Sciences General Exam Format").
- The student should plan to spend four to six weeks preparing the written application. The student will distribute copies of the proposal to the Supervisory Committee at least one week prior to the presentation.
- The closed-door oral examination will generally be 2 hours in duration and will comply with Graduate School regulations. It is not a public exam.

C. Evaluations and Outcomes

The student's performance on the oral exam will be evaluated by the thesis Supervisory Committee. If the student's performance should be less than satisfactory, then the Supervisory Committee will make appropriate recommendations to the OHS graduate faculty. The outcome of the general exam will be noted on the **Committee Signature Form**.

There are three possible outcomes to the General Exam:

- **Satisfactory (Pass)**
 - In the event of a report of satisfactory (pass), the supervisory committee will report to the Graduate Program Director and the student that the student has advanced to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree.
- **Reservations (Conditional Pass)**
 - In the event of a report of reservations, the supervisory committee will report these reservations in writing to the Graduate Program Director for transmission to the Graduate School and the student. The student must satisfactorily address the reservations in a timely manner, as specified in the report written from the committee. On the recommendation of the supervisory committee, remediation to address the

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reservations may include:

- assignment of additional course work
- assignment and discussion of specific readings
- further examination in a particular area
- rewriting of portions of the proposal
- specified academic or research work as appropriate.
 - When the reservations have been addressed to the satisfaction of the supervisory committee, the committee will inform the Graduate Program Director, the GPA, and the student.
- **Unsatisfactory (Fail)**
 - If the result is unsatisfactory, the committee can, at their discretion, require the student to be reexamined in the next quarter. The re-examination cannot take place sooner than two months, nor longer than 12 months, after the first examination. A second failure of this examination will result in the dismissal of the student from the Ph.D. graduate program. If the request for re-examination is denied, the student will immediately be dismissed from the OHS Ph.D. Graduate Program.

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Department of Oral Health Sciences General Exam Format

The General Exam requires preparation of a Research Plan or proposal in the format of an NIH grant. This plan should include sufficient information needed for evaluation of the proposed PhD project independent of other documents. It should be specific and informative, and include relevant background material, preliminary findings, and methods. You will need to discuss your specific aims with your mentor; however, writing the proposal is your responsibility.

The proposal (Research Plan)

Overall Format

The General Exam written document should have the format of an NIH Fellowship application, which is outlined below.

a. **Title Page. (One page)**

b. **Specific Aims. (One page Arial 11 font minimum, minimum 0.5 margins)** List the broad, long-term objectives and what the specific research proposed in this application is intended to accomplish. State the hypotheses to be tested.

c. **Research Strategy**

For the remaining sections, please keep the *entirety* to six pages single space, Arial 11 font minimum, minimum 0.5 margins, not including Literature Cited, which can be any length.

Background and Significance. Briefly sketch the background leading to the present application, critically evaluate existing knowledge, and specifically identify the gaps which the project is

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intended to fill. State concisely the importance and health relevance of the research described in this application by relating specific aims to the broad, long-term objectives.

Preliminary Studies. Use this section to provide an account of preliminary studies pertinent to the application. These preliminary studies may have been carried out by the student but need not to have been.

Research Design and Methods. Clearly state a falsifiable hypothesis, supported by the preliminary studies, and the experiments that will test it. Describe the research design and the procedures to be used to accomplish each of the specific aims of the project. Include how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Describe any new methodology and its advantage over existing methodologies. Clearly state expected results that will support the hypothesis, and alternative results that will not support the hypothesis, and how you will interpret them. Include a separate paragraph on Potential Pitfalls, which are ways that your experiment might not work – note, that this is different from the experiment working, but the results not supporting the hypothesis.

Literature Cited. List all references. Each reference must include the title, names of all authors, book or journal, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication. The reference should be limited to relevant and current literature. While there is not a page limit for references, it is important to be concise and to select only those literature references pertinent to the proposed research.

UW Graduate School General Exam URL: <https://grad.uw.edu/policies/1-1-graduate-degree-requirements/>