

DRAFT – 6/24/13; [revised for committee action, 10/9/13](#)

OIGS Policy Proposal 2013.1

Background:

The college currently has limited policy regarding appropriate procedures to Doctoral Candidacy Examinations. These procedures need clearer and more detailed definition, including regarding the types of examinations available, and the procedures to be followed in the event of a failure in a first exam.

Doctoral Candidacy Examination Procedures

Following is the existing Doctoral Candidacy Examination policy and procedure text published in the ESF College Catalog and Graduate School Website (<http://www.esf.edu/graduate/phd.htm>), with edits noted to address concerns identified during several examinations this semester:

Doctoral Candidacy Examination

The objectives of this examination are to determine the breadth and depth of knowledge in the chosen field of study and assess the student's understanding of the scientific process. The doctoral candidacy examination is taken when the majority of coursework is completed and no more than three years from the first date of matriculation has elapsed or the student may be dismissed from the doctoral program. This examination must be taken at least one year prior to the dissertation defense.

Upon the recommendation of the appropriate department chair, the Dean of the Graduate School appoints the doctoral candidacy examination committee consisting of the student's major professor, the student's steering committee and an additional faculty member from an appropriate area. Additionally, the Dean of the Graduate School appoints a committee chair who is not from the department of the student's degree program. The examination must have both written and oral components [for successful completion; in the event of an unsuccessful candidacy examination, a student may re-attempt to successfully complete candidacy examination requirements no more than once. Successful completion of a second candidacy examination must occur within one calendar year.](#)

The role of the examination committee chair is to manage the examination, ensure its integrity, and represent the interests of the faculty and student. Any member of the faculty may be an observer. The student examinee may invite a silent student observer to attend the oral examination with notification of the chair of the student's exam committee.

The composition of a candidacy examination committee, once formally appointed and constituted by the Dean of the Graduate School, may not change following the commencement of the candidacy examination. In the event of a suspension of proceedings, or a failure of the examination, the composition of the committee may only be changed in the presence of a legitimate extenuating circumstance (illness, departure from the institution, sabbatical leave, etc.) which prevents the participation of one or more of its members.

Written Examination: The examining committee shall convene at a planning meeting with the student. During the first part of the planning meeting, the committee determines the schedule for the process and establishes the date for the oral component. The student is then excused

from the meeting and the committee develops and discusses the exam content. This discussion should also include a determination as to whether or not specifics of the results of the written examination shall be shared with the student prior to, and in preparation for the oral component of the examination (this determination may vary at the discretion of the committee).

Comment [A1]: Added in response to comments from C. Whipps

There are three alternative forms for the written component, as follows:

Form 1: The members of the committee submit questions or problems addressing the objectives of the exam. The topics for questions are discussed and agreed upon at the planning meeting.

Comment [A2]: Added in response to comments by D. Sonnenfeld

The major professor administers the written examination. Usually, one-half day each is allocated to questions submitted by each examiner. Upon completion by the student, the examination questions are reviewed and graded by the committee members who prepared them. The committee and chair then reviews the entire examination.

Comment [A3]: Added in response to comments from D. Sonnenfeld

Form 2: The student prepares a written report on a topic or problem assigned by the examining committee. The topic or problem must meet the objectives of this examination in both breadth and depth of knowledge in the student's discipline, and its content cannot be directly related to the student's thesis research. The student has approximately one month to develop a thorough understanding of the assigned topic and prepare a written report. The report is reviewed by the committee members and committee chair.

Form 3: The student prepares and defends a written proposal of future research likely to be carried out during his or her Ph.D. project. This research prospectus must be presented to the examining committee two weeks prior to the candidacy exam and should include preliminary studies supporting the feasibility of the proposed research. The exam will test the candidate's understanding of concepts directly related to his or her immediate area of research, knowledge of prior related research that has been conducted by others, his or her ability to design and interpret experiments in this area, and capacity to think and write independently and to present work plans orally in a clear and rational manner. The report is reviewed by the committee members and committee chair. ~~This option is available only to doctoral students in the Department of Chemistry.~~

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Evaluation of the Written Examination: Prior to the commencement of the oral phase of the examination process, the members of the committee shall determine the degree of success achieved on the written exam. A simple majority of steering committee must agree that the written component has been successful to proceed to the oral phase of the exam. If the written component of the exam is determined to be too weak to defend under oral examination, the examination process shall be suspended. The student shall not be charged with a failure of the candidacy examination if the written examination can be re-administered successfully within 1 calendar year. While the question may be substantially similar, particularly for an exam using "Form 3," the student's written response for a re-administered examination must be substantially different in content from that used in the first, suspended exam. To proceed to the oral phase of examination, the re-administered written exam must be determined to be successful by a simple majority of the steering committee. If the re-

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administered written examination is unsuccessful, the first candidacy examination shall be deemed a failure, and the student charged with a failed first attempt to achieve candidacy.

Oral Examination: Following the written examination under Form 1, completion of the report under Form 2, or completion of proposal under Form 3, the committee meets with the student for an oral examination, usually lasting two hours. However, the duration can be longer if required. The questions may address the report or other areas appropriate to the objectives of the examination, including subject matter in allied fields as appropriate. Through the process of questioning, the committee should address both breadth and depth of knowledge in the student's discipline. At the conclusion of the examination period, the student examinee and observers are excused from the room and the examination committee determines whether the student has passed the examination. Unanimous agreement is required to pass the student. If less than unanimous agreement is reached, the student is considered to have failed the first doctoral candidacy examination. The student can request a second examination, which must take place no more than one year from the date of the first examination. A student is considered to have passed the second examination if there is not more than one negative vote. A student who has failed the second examination is terminated from the graduate program, effective immediately.

Comment [A4]: Addition of 2.5 hours maximum time limit redacted in response to noteworthy feedback from C. Whipps & M. Fierke

Comment [A5]: Added in response to formal feedback provided by C. Whipps and M. Fierke and informal feedback from others