General Exam Guidelines

Intro: The General Exam is a University of Washington Graduate School examination that allows a student to advance to the level of doctoral candidate. This document serves to detail the recommended General Exam process for UW Biostatistics doctoral students. Typically students will have the “short-proposal” completed within one year after passing the Ph.D. qualifying exams.

Important: Student must follow the General Exam Guidelines presented here and meet the General Exam requirements listed on the Department of Biostatistics website.

Process:
1. Form doctoral supervisory committee
   a. The Graduate School recommends forming the supervisory committee at least four months prior to scheduling the General Exam. Modifications of the supervisory committee membership are possible at later dates. (Students may form their supervisory committee and submit their online application to take the General Exam prior to submitting the short-proposal with the understanding that committee changes may be recommended or required by the Department.)
   b. Details regarding the composition of a doctoral supervisory committee are located in the UW Graduate School Memo 13. Careful attention should be paid to the requirements for adequate representation of faculty having Graduate Faculty status and an Endorsement to Chair a dissertation.
   c. The supervisory committee should have an appropriate balance of faculty members having complementary scientific expertise relevant for the proposed research. The committee should have members with adequate diversity – where faculty rank and faculty training (e.g. academic background) are aspects that are important to consider. As a general rule, all supervisory committees should have at least one member whose primary appointment is at the University of Washington.

2. A short description of the proposed dissertation research (the “short-proposal”) is submitted for departmental faculty review. The proposal should be submitted no later than 14 calendar days prior to taking the General Exam.
   a. The student will prepare a 5-page short-proposal that summarizes the proposed dissertation research plan. The first page of the short-proposal should summarize the specific aims of the dissertation research. The body of the short-proposal should contain a brief summary of key background literature and should provide an outline of the research with only select major details. Finally, the short-proposal should
contain an appendix that lists the proposed or current supervisory committee members. In preparing this document, the student and advisor(s) should keep in mind that the short-proposal will be posted to a section of the departmental “intranet” (Portal) that is accessible in confidence to all members of the Department of Biostatistics.

b. The student will submit the short-proposal to the Graduate Program Advisor (GPA) no later than 14 calendar days prior to taking the General Exam.

c. The GPA will post the short-proposal in the appropriate section of the departmental “intranet” (Portal). The GPA will also forward to all departmental faculty an email containing 1) the student’s name, 2) the title of the research project, 3) the chair(s) of the supervisory committee, 4) the membership of the supervisory committee and 5) a link to the short-proposal. The email subject line will contain the short-proposal title and then the student name.

d. Faculty have at least seven calendar days to review the material. Review is intended to be informational and would allow faculty to comment on the short-proposal and/or the supervisory committee. Questions or concerns will be communicated to the GPA within the review period. Feedback for the student will be communicated by the GPD via the dissertation advisor(s).

e. At the first regularly scheduled faculty meeting following dissemination of the short-proposal, the Department Chair will announce the key information regarding the short-proposal, consisting of the student’s name, the dissertation advisor(s), and the membership of the supervisory committee. Additional information can be provided at the discretion of the Department Chair.

3. General Exam – Part 1: Written Background Material

a. The role of the committee is to rigorously evaluate the depth of knowledge obtained by the student in the general area chosen as their research focus.

b. Typically a background chapter will be prepared in advance and made available to committee at least 2 weeks prior to the oral exam.


a. Clear evidence of an adequate scope and of feasibility for completion within a proposed timeline.

b. The research proposal should refer to paper(s) or chapter(s) if prepared.

c. The written research proposal will be prepared in advance and made available to committee at least 2 weeks prior to the oral exam.

5. General Exam – Part 3: Oral Exam

a. The oral exam consists of a presentation of background, progress to
date, and details of the proposed research.

b. The written materials (background chapter, proposal) would be submitted to the supervisory committee at least two weeks prior to the oral exam and therefore should be thoroughly reviewed by the committee prior to the oral exam.

c. All faculty members are encouraged to attend General Examinations.

d. Based on the written and oral components the supervisory committee will make a recommendation of: Pass; Fail; or Retake.

6. General Exam – Part 4: Written Feedback:

a. The supervisory committee will provide feedback on the depth and clarity of the student’s review of key background literature.

b. The supervisory committee will either endorse the proposed research proposal or suggest modifications.

c. The General Exam Warrant indicating the committee’s decision and bearing member signatures will be returned to the GPA for processing as per UW requirements.

Approved by the Biostatistics Faculty on 05/28/2015