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.

Process:
1. Form doctoral supervisory committee
   a. Details regarding the composition of a doctoral supervisory committee are located in the UW Graduate School Memo 13.
   b. 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.
2. 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 proposal should contain an appendix that lists the proposed supervisory committee members. Students should prepare the short-proposal prior to the official formation of the Supervisory Committee and submit it to the Student Services Counselor (SSC). The SSC will forward the short-proposal to the department chair’s assistant who will post the document for faculty review on portal and schedule its discussion in a faculty meeting. The short-proposal will be presented to the faculty by the student’s advisor in a faculty meeting (closed session). Presentation of the short-proposal to the faculty is intended to be informational and would allow suggested changes to the proposal and/or the supervisory committee. Feedback will be communicated to the student via their supervisor. Typically students will have the short-proposal completed within one year after passing the PhD qualifying exams.
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 – 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 -- 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.