

Qualifying Exams

Qualifying Examination

In the first semester of the second year, students choose three examiners from within the department (including faculty with joint or associate appointments), and obtain their consent to serve on the qualifying examination committee. In the event that there are special circumstances warranting the inclusion of one faculty member from outside the Department (whether in GSAS, or beyond NYU) the advisor should consult with the DGS and provide a justification, a record of which will go in the student's file. Two of the members will examine the student in the first field, and one will examine the student in the second field. The two from the first field will typically also serve on the student's dissertation committee. The student's advisor serves as convener of the exam committee. Students must submit to the Graduate Administrator a form signed by all committee members before the end of the first term of the second year.

The examination is not intended to be comprehensive, or to test the full range of the student's command of the field. It is based upon a sub-set of reading and study, namely a reading list generated by the student in consultation with her or his examiners. For the major field this list would normally include 75 to 100 items, less for a secondary field.

All three committee members read the entire exam. Students work with their committee members to compose reading lists in each field. In cases where several students are to be examined in the same field and similar reading lists with the same examiners, the committee may set one exam for one day of that field.

Students must take the qualifying examination in May of the second year. By March 15th of the second year, students intending to write exams should ensure that they have no outstanding incompletes from the fall of the second year. Students with more than 3 incompletes will not be allowed to take the exam and will be liable for termination from the program. Students in joint programs, or who transfer credits, or those with special requirements may take the exam on a different schedule, with the consent of their advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

The written qualifying examination is taken over three days: two days for the first field and one day for the second field. At 9 am on each day of the exam, students receive, in person or by e-mail, two or three questions, from which they select one question to answer. Students may write their exams either in the department or in another setting of their choice, and are permitted to consult whatever sources they deem necessary. Students may not, however, consult other people during the writing of the exams (in person, via telephone, via e-mail, or by any other means) or engage the help of others in writing, editing, or proofreading their exam essays. Faculty members are not permitted to give the exam questions to students beforehand; students will see the exam questions only at the start of each day of the exam. Prior to the examination, additional written instructions will be sent to all students; students must comply with these instructions.

The finished essay must comprise no more than 3000 words including footnotes (approximately ten double-spaced pages) and must be submitted by 4:30pm on the same day. *Failure to submit the exam by 4:30 pm will constitute a failure for that day.* There are three grades given for exams: High Pass, Pass, and Fail, and only a single grade is reported to Degree Audit for the entire exam, without distinguishing between the two fields or among the three days. A grade of Pass will be given only if a student passes both fields; a grade of High Pass will be given only if a student achieves High Pass in both fields.

Failure in either field will result in a grade of "F" for the independent reading course taken during the exam semester. This grade will not be changed, regardless of the student's results in subsequent exams.

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Students who fail either field are placed on probation and will be permitted to retake the failed exam(s) in the same field(s) and with the same examiner(s). If the student fails only one field, the entire exam committee must nonetheless read and evaluate the retaken exam. Faculty members cannot remove themselves from the process of a student retaking an exam, except with compelling justification to be determined by the chair and the DGS. Under extraordinary circumstances, a student may retake the qualifying exam in another field; these circumstances must be approved by the DGS, the student's former advisor, and the student's proposed new advisor.

Students who fail one field must normally retake the exam in August; students who fail both fields must normally retake the exam the following December. A second failure in either field will result in termination from the program.

If the student who failed chooses not to retake the exam, a failing grade is reported, and the student is terminated from the program. Terminated students may be awarded an MA degree if they are in compliance with grade-point average and course completion requirements for good standing in the MA program.

An exception to the foregoing is a student who fails either field of the qualifying examination while on probation. In that case, the student cannot retake the failed portions of the exam without prior approval from the DGS, the advisor, and at least one other member of the exam committee. If the student cannot obtain the necessary approvals, s/he cannot retake the exam and will automatically be terminated from the program.

Qualifying Exams: Special Circumstances

Students with registered learning disabilities who require special accommodations for the exams should present a memo from the Moses Center to the graduate program administrator specifying the nature of the accommodation requested when they submit their exam registration package.

Any student who experiences a medical emergency during the exam should contact the DGS and the graduate administrator as soon as it is safe and medically appropriate to do so (but certainly before 4:30 on the examination day). Should a student become unwell unexpectedly and choose to stop writing, s/he must attain immediate medical verification of her/his unexpected medical condition and resulting inability to continue. Such verification must be dated to the day of the exam and presented to the Department within 48 hours. The Department will consider the situation, and the student may be able to write the exam at a later date. Pre-existing medical conditions that may affect a student's ability to complete the exam must be reported to the DGS and the graduate administrator in advance of the exam date, together with medical verification.

If a student experiences a family or other emergency in the days before the exam, that information must be communicated immediately to the DGS and the graduate administrator. Special circumstances will be considered by the DGS, in consultation with the Chair.

Qualifying Exams: Joint Students

Students in the joint History/MEIS PhD program must take exams in two different fields. Both of these may be MEIS history fields (including modern Middle Eastern history and Islamic history) supervised by historians primarily based in MEIS, or one may be an MEIS history field and the other a History Department field supervised by a member of the History Department. Students doing a History Department field must take the exam prep course specified for that field in the

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spring semester before the exam; students doing an MEIS history field must take the “literature of the field” course or other form of exam preparation specified for that field before taking the exam.

A student who has prepared a History Department field will sit for one day of exams in that field on the day specified by the History Department in May of the student’s second year; the exam will conform to the History Department exam structure and procedures, with examiners drawn from History Department faculty. A student who has prepared for an MEIS history field will take that exam at a time, and in a format, specified by MEIS, with examiners who are either History Department faculty or historians based in MEIS. Both exams will normally be completed by no later than the end of a student’s fifth semester in the joint program.

With special approval of the DGSs of both departments, a student may define and pursue a field for which they will prepare by working with NYU faculty who are not historians based in either the History Department or MEIS. In such cases, the student will take the exam according to MEIS structure and procedures, with examiners to be approved in advance by the DGSs of both departments.

After passing their exams, joint History/MEIS PhD program students will defend their prospectus according to the MEIS timeline.

Following the Qualifying Examination

Students will be notified of their exam results (High Pass, Pass, or Fail) within two weeks of the exam date. Detailed written feedback is not provided. After passing the qualifying examination students must:

- a) Submit a Dissertation Research Proposal to the Dissertation Committee for oral examination and approval between September 15 and November 15 of the third year. The end of the first week of the sixth semester is a final deadline (and is designed as an allowance for students who fail the qualifying examination in May).
- b) Complete additional course work, largely through independent readings and research. Students must complete 72 points of course work by August 15 of the third year at the latest.
- c) Complete any additional language requirements beyond the departmental minimum.