

General Exam Instructions

From: OU Graduate College Requirement for General Examination

(<http://www.ou.edu/gradcollege/forms/bulletin/doctoral-info#8.5>)

8.5 The General Examination

When the student is enrolled in or has completed the final semester of coursework, the student should prepare for the general examination. The general examination is intended to test the student's mastery of a number of related fields as well as the student's capacity for synthesis, sound generalization, and critical ability. The first part of the general examination consists of written examinations. A satisfactory written examination will be followed by an oral examination in the presence of the entire committee.

- The student's [*Advisory Conference Report*](#) (ACR) must be approved by the Graduate College before the student may apply to take the general examination. The ACR must be up to date. Any changes to the ACR must be approved by the Graduate College before the exam can be authorized (see [*Changes to the Advisory Conference Report*](#)).
- The student must apply for the general examination and receive authority from the Graduate College before beginning work on the written portion of the exam. The result of an unauthorized exam will not, under any circumstances, be considered valid.
- A student may not proceed to the oral portion until the written portion has been satisfactorily completed.
- Both the written portion and the oral portion must be completed within the same semester.
- A student should be in good academic standing during the semester the general examination is scheduled.
- The student must be enrolled in at least two graduate credit hours at the University of Oklahoma during the semester the general examination is held.
- A student who does not pass the general examination on the first attempt may, at the discretion of the committee, repeat the exam once in a future term. No more than two attempts to pass the general examination are permitted.

8.5.1 Scheduling the General Examination

- Before applying to take the general examination, the student must work with the committee to determine the date they will begin work on the written portion of the exam, as well as the date, time, and location for the oral portion of the exam.
- No changes in committee membership are permitted 30 calendar days before the general examination.
- The general examination should be held before the deadline indicated on the [*Academic Calendar*](#). The exam may not be held during the period of final course examinations, nor may it be held while the university is not in session.

8.5.2 Participation in the General Examination

Advances in electronic media have made it possible for meetings to be held without the presence of every member at the same location. Nevertheless, the integrity and significance of the oral examination process must be maintained. The following rules apply to the oral portion of the general examination:

- All members of the committee must participate for the full duration of the event, whether in person or remotely.
- If any member of the committee participating remotely is unable to connect or loses their connection, the event must pause until the connection is restored.
- Prior approval may be sought from the dean of the Graduate College if the absence of one committee member (other than the committee chair or Graduate College representative) is unavoidable. An event cannot be held in the absence of more than one committee member.
- All committee members must have full access to materials relevant to the evaluation of the student's performance. Audio of the student and other committee members, and visual materials including slides and handwritten information, must be clearly transmitted. If these requirements are not met, the event must pause until the issue is corrected.
- Only members of the committee may be present for deliberations about the result.
- For events involving remote participation, we recommend the following practices:
 - Ensure that all committee members can access the selected remote meeting platform. Test the remote participation set-up with the student and all members well in advance to ensure there are no predictable technical or connection problems.
 - Have the committee chair or another faculty or staff member who will be present serve as host of the meeting.
 - Ensure that there is not a time limit that will truncate the meeting.
 - Ensure that the remote meeting platform supports the feature that allows the host to remove participants.
 - Plan for transmission of visual materials including handouts, slides, and handwritten information. If the event will involve live handwriting by the student, use of a whiteboard application, document camera, or similar should be practiced by the student and tested in advance.
 - Plan for the committee's confidential deliberations (e.g. through breakout room or waiting room functions within a remote meeting platform).
 - Minimize distractions by muting participants' audio on entry and disabling audio notifications of participants' arrival or departure.
 - Ensure that the student and each committee member are in appropriate private or professional environments with audible and visible distractions minimized.
 - Request that committee members keep their cameras on as much as possible during the event. The student should have their camera on for the duration of the event.
 - Make a backup connection plan in case there are difficulties with the remote meeting platform or individual connections.
 - Host blended events (combining in-person and remote participation) in a space that is designed and equipped for such events. If this is not possible, consider solutions such as an individual laptop for each in-person participant so that remote participants have a clear view.

8.5.3 Authority for the General Examination

- The student must submit the completed [General Exam Application for the Doctoral Degree](#) form to the Graduate College no later than the end of the second week of the semester in which the exam will be taken. This form requires original signatures from the student, the committee chair, and the graduate liaison.
- If the application can be approved, the Graduate College will issue the *Authority Report Form for the General Examination* to the doctoral committee, the student, and the graduate liaison via OU email. The student may not begin work on the written portion of the exam until this form has been issued. The result of an unauthorized exam will not, under any circumstances, be considered valid.
- The *Authority Report Form* is valid only for the period indicated on the form.
 - If no portion of the exam is held during this period, the graduate liaison or committee chair must notify the Graduate College in writing as to why the exam was not held and the form must be returned marked “Not Taken.”
 - The exam must then be rescheduled for a future term and the student must submit a new *General Exam Application for the Doctoral Degree*.

8.5.4 Result of the General Examination

After the written portion has been completed, the doctoral committee should meet to determine the result of the written examination.

- If the result of the written portion is satisfactory, the student may proceed to the oral portion as scheduled.
- If the result of the written portion is marginal, but not unsatisfactory, the committee may find it appropriate to request to hold the result of the exam in abeyance (see [Marginal Result of the General Examination](#)).
- If the result of the written portion is unsatisfactory, the student has failed the general examination and may not proceed to the oral portion (see [Unsatisfactory Result of the General Examination](#)).
- After the oral portion of the general examination, the committee will report its decision on the *Authority Report Form for the General Examination* by indicating a “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory” result for each portion. This completed form, including original signatures from all committee members, must be received in the Graduate College within 72 hours of the exam.
- In the event that the committee does not reach a unanimous decision:
 - The committee member(s) who dissent from the majority opinion should not sign the *Authority Report Form*, but should instead attach a memo explaining the rationale for the dissent.
 - The dean of the Graduate College will review the dissenting opinion and may choose to confer with the dissenting member(s), the committee chair or the entire committee.
 - The decision of the dean of the Graduate College is final.
- If the result of the oral portion is satisfactory, the dean of the Graduate College will admit the student to candidacy for the doctoral degree.

8.5.5 Marginal Result of the General Examination

If the result of either portion of the general examination is marginal, but not unsatisfactory, and the committee wishes the student to do further reading, investigations, etc., the committee can request to hold the result of the exam in abeyance.

- The committee and graduate liaison may submit a written request for abeyance to the dean of the Graduate College.

- The request must identify the additional work required of the student and state a specific time period, usually limited to two months, during which the student must complete the extra work.
- If the request for abeyance is approved by the dean of the Graduate College, the student may complete the additional work specified by the doctoral committee.
 - At the end of the time period approved for abeyance, the committee must report its decision to the Graduate College on the *Authority Report Form for the General Examination* by indicating a “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory” result for each portion.
- If the request for abeyance is denied by the dean of the Graduate College, the committee must report the unsatisfactory result of the examination to the Graduate College on the *Authority Report Form for the General Examination*.

8.5.6 Unsatisfactory Result of the General Examination

If either the written or the oral portion of the general examination is failed, the signed, completed *Authority Report Form for the General Examination* must be submitted to the Graduate College within 72 hours.

- A student who has failed the first attempt of the general examination may, at the discretion of the committee, attempt the exam a second time in a future term. If the committee and the graduate liaison approve the second attempt, the student must submit a new *General Exam Application for the Doctoral Degree* to the Graduate College. Both the written portion and the oral portion must be repeated. The committee must administer a new exam for the student’s second attempt.
- A student who has failed the second attempt of the general examination will be terminated from the doctoral program. (See [Disenrollment](#) and [Application of Credit from an Unsuccessful Doctoral Degree to a Master’s Degree](#).)

General Exam for PhD in Information Science

The Written Exam

The General Exam for the PhD in Information Science is intended to reflect a student’s knowledge, expertise, and ability to synthesize in their specialized areas of information science.

The goals of the General Exam are to:

- Demonstrate the student’s understanding and expertise in a significant aspect of information science
- Demonstrate the student’s ability to draw connections indicative of scholarly inquiry
- Demonstrate the student’s knowledge of theory and methodology as they apply to scholarly research
- Demonstrate the student’s readiness to begin in-depth research for their dissertation

The General Exam includes both a written and oral portion. The Advisory Conference will evaluate both the parts of the exam based on the student’s breadth and depth of knowledge, ability to write a scholarly analysis, establish the significance of the issues and problems, defense of the content and methodology, and suggestions of potential new directions of inquiry and/or discussion.

The components of General Exam and its preparation are as follows:

1. Reading List

During the semester prior to which the student will be taking the General Exam, the student will

work closely with their Advisor to compile a reading list of approximately 30 readings that address their area of specialization. The list will include both classic work and more recent work related to theory and methods applicable to that specialization. The student will submit this list to the Advisory Conference no later than the end of the week following the last day of classes. (E.g., if the student plans to take the General Exam in the Spring semester, the list must be submitted to the Advisory Conference in December, the week following the last day of classes.) The Advisory Conference will examine the list and will either approve it as is, suggest additional readings, or ask for other revisions no later than four weeks after the list has been submitted. If there are suggested changes, the student will send the revised list back to the Advisory Conference within two weeks.

2. **General Exam Paperwork**

The student must submit the completed [General Exam Application for the Doctoral Degree](#) form to the Graduate College no later than the end of the second week of the semester in which they will be taking the exam.

3. **Composition of the Exam**

The exam consists of both a written and oral portion. The exam questions will draw on and reflect the material in the students' proposed readings. Faculty on the Advisory Conference will develop two questions based on theory related to the student's specialization, of which students will choose one to answer; students will also be asked a more general methods question that applies to their area of specialization. The written portion will comprise approximately 7500 words, or 25-30 double-spaced pages. Students will be given two weeks to complete the exam at home (see dates below). After the written exam is graded, students will take an oral exam.

4. **General Exam Timeline and Procedures**

Written Exam

The written portion of the General Exam will be administered on October 1 and March 1, or the Monday following the weekend if these dates coincide with the weekend. The student will receive the questions from their Advisor, on behalf of the Advisory Conference, at noon on those dates. The student will have two weeks to complete their answers, and will return the exam to their Advisor at noon on October 15 and March 15 (note: if the exam begins on a Tuesday at noon, it will end two weeks later, also on Tuesday at noon).

Advisory Conference Review

The Advisory Conference will review and grade the written portion of the exam during the final two weeks of October and March, and at the end of that time period return the exam to the student with comments. During this time period, students and Advisory Conference will schedule a time for the student's oral exam. In the event that the student's written exam is graded as marginal or unsatisfactory, the Advisory Conference will confer to determine next steps.

5. **Oral Portion of Exam**

The oral portion of the exam will occur between November 1-14 and April 1-14. Once the written exam has been completed and turned in, students should review their answers and make note of which aspects of the exam might require further elaboration or explanation. This will afford students an opportunity to further reflect on their answers as well as be prepared for what might be asked during the oral exam. The purpose of the oral exam is for the Committee to probe the student's knowledge and discuss the content of the written exam, including clarifying questions, expansion on what the student has written, examine the topic more deeply, or gain additional insights and reflections on the student's written work. The oral exam will also serve as a way to

delve into the student's dissertation research and to act as a bridge between the exam and the dissertation proposal. The oral portion of the exam will take no more than three hours.