Advancement to Candidacy for Doctoral Degree
Overview

• Pre-Candidacy Exams (i.e., Preliminary, Qualifying Exam)
• Advancement to Candidacy
• Committee Composition
• External Committee Membership
• Reconstitution of Committee process
• Next steps after Advancement to Candidacy
• Projected Deadlines for Advancement to Candidacy
• Additional Resources on Graduate Engineering Students website
Pre-Candidacy Exams (i.e., Preliminary, Qualifying Exam)

Some Graduate Groups require a Preliminary Examination be taken within the first two years of graduate study before the Research Proposal and Qualifying Examination, and Advancement to Candidacy for the Ph.D. degree.

Currently only the following programs have this requirement:

• ME – Doctoral students must pass a written Preliminary Examination at the end of their first year of study that will cover undergraduate core material from ME focus areas.

• BIOE – Doctoral students must pass a written Preliminary Examination to show mastery of fundamental bioengineering topics in the spring semester of their first year of study.

• MBSE – Doctoral Students must pass a Core Knowledge Examination administered at the end of the first year to verify mastery of the core materials science knowledge.
What is a Qualifying Examination?

The oral qualifying exam tests:

- Breadth of a student’s comprehension of fundamental facts and principles that apply to their major field of study.
- Ability to think critically about the theoretical and practical aspects of the field.
- Focused on the student’s field of research.
- May test other areas of scholarship that underlie or impinge on the research topic.

Typically, the exam consists of two parts:

1. A written research proposal to be submitted to the dissertation committee at least four weeks prior to the exam date arranged by the student and committee chair.
2. An oral exam conducted by the dissertation committee.

Acing your Qualifying Exam

1) Understand the qualifying exam.
2) Know your examiners.
3) Prepare early.
4) Reduce your stress.
5) Have an exam day plan.

https://grad.ucdavis.edu/academics/acing-your-qualifying-exam
Qualifying Examination General Requirements

Students are admitted to candidacy if they pass by unanimous vote a candidacy examination administered by a Candidacy Committee and meet all other conditions (such as specific course requirements) set by the Graduate Group.

• Pass the Preliminary Examination before beginning to prepare for the research proposal and qualifying examination.—Required by the MBSE, BIOE, ME graduate programs only.

• Approved Application for Qualifying Examination - Complete and submit the application for Qualifying Examination at least 1 month prior to your proposed examination date. The application must be signed by all Committee Members and you must indicate the proposed date of the examination.

• Report the outcome of the Qualifying Examination to the Graduate Dean- Results of Candidacy Committee vote should be reported using the Qualifying Examination Report. The final vote and recommendation of the Committee must be unanimous and unequivocal. The Committee Chair is responsible for submitting the signed Qualifying Examination Report to the Graduate Staff at soe-grstaff@ucmerced.edu within 48 hours of the completed examination.
Qualifying Examination Workflow Process

The purpose of a formal Qualifying Examination is to evaluate both general preparedness in the discipline, and specific competence to pursue the proposed dissertation topic for successful completion of a doctoral program.

1. **Complete requirements** for the Qualifying Examination, including any preliminary examination if required by your Graduate Program.

   Tip: Review your Graduate Program’s requirements and website for requirements and/or preliminary examination procedures.

2. **Complete Application for Qualifying Examination** form and submit the form to SoE Graduate Staff for review and routing. **Graduate Services** will notify you via email once your application has been approved.

   You will need to have your committee members already identified to complete this form.

3. **Schedule your Qualifying Examination date** in consultation with your Graduate Advisor and Candidacy Committee.

   After the examination is completed and a decision reached, the Committee Chair is responsible for submitting the signed **Qualifying Examination Report** to the Graduate Staff within 48 hours of the completed examination.

4. Graduate Services finalizes processing of the **Qualifying Examination Report** form and will notify you via email once you are able to move forward with your Advancement to Candidacy.

Visit **Ph.D. Pre-Candidacy Examinations** for scheduling and exam procedures.
Advancement to Candidacy General Requirements

Advancement to Candidacy signifies that you have completed your coursework and academic requirements to achieve the milestone of becoming a candidate for the Doctorate degree.

You are ready to Advance to Candidacy when you have:
✓ Successfully passed the Qualifying Examination
✓ Completion of all candidacy requirements set by your graduate program
✓ Maintained a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0.
✓ Completed the Advancement to Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy form, including the Statement on Conflict of Interest form included in the Advancement to Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy form.
Graduate students must be advanced to candidacy for their degree prior to the beginning of the final semester of enrollment (preferably 30 days before). An Application for Advancement to Candidacy initiated by the student and approved by the Graduate Group should be submitted to the Graduate Dean.

**1. Complete requirements** for Ph.D. Advancement to Candidacy.

Tip: Review your degree audit via MyDegreePath and contact your Graduate Coordinator in case you notice any discrepancies or incomplete requirements.

Visit MyDegreePath to review your audit.

**2. Complete Application for Advancement to Candidacy.** The Graduate Coordinator will email you the link to the online Ph.D. Advancement to Candidacy Form.

You will need to have your committee members already identified to complete this form.

Please email soe-grstaff@ucmerced.edu

**3. Advancement to Candidacy form approval flow:**

- Graduate Services receives form and reviews validity of committee.
- Each committee member will need to approve form separately.
- Graduate Advisor approves.
- Graduate Program Chair approves.
- Graduate Dean approves.

**4. Graduate Services** will finalize processing of your form and notify you via email to confirm approval and your Advancement to Candidacy status.

Review the Graduate Division website for graduation application instructions, important dates and deadlines, as well as the Engineering Graduate Students website for examination and filing instructions.

Graduate Division Dates & Deadlines
Projected Deadlines for filing Advancement to Candidacy for the Fall/Spring with Graduate Division:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Term</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please contact <a href="https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/calendar-and-deadlines">SoE Graduate Staff</a> if you are planning to graduate Fall 2021 and have not completed the application for Advancement to Candidacy.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, July 16, 2021</td>
<td>Fall 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, December 15, 2021</td>
<td>Spring 2022</td>
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Committee Compositions

Committee Membership nominations are made in consultation with your Graduate Advisor, Graduate Program Chair, and approved by the Graduate Dean.

Committee Chair Nomination
Please note, some programs do not allow the Faculty/Research Advisor to serve as your examination chair. Review your Graduate Group’s specific requirements for Committee Membership.

Candidacy Committee overseeing Qualifying Examination, is comprised of at least of three faculty who are voting members of the University of California Academic Senate:
• Candidacy Committee Chair – A member of the student’s Graduate Group.
• General Membership (2 or more) - A majority of voting members hold appointments in the student’s Graduate Group.
• Oversight Member (if applicable) - Appointed in addition to the three general members.

Doctoral Committee is comprised of at least three voting members of the University of California Academic Senate. A majority of the committee must hold Core or Affiliate appointments in the your Graduate Group:
• Doctoral Committee Chair: a member of the student’s Graduate Group.
• General Membership (2 or more) - A majority of voting members hold appointments in the student’s Graduate Group.
• Oversight Member (if applicable) - Appointed in addition to the three general members.
External Committee Members

Under some circumstances one of the committee members can be a UC Merced faculty member from outside the group or a regular or adjunct faculty member from any UC campus or an individual from outside the University of California who has special expertise and qualifications. External committee members must be approved by the Graduate Dean.

The following is required for review and approval of an External Committee Member:

✓ A justification letter from the graduate advisor indicating the appointee’s affiliation and title and how the prospective appointee has special expertise or qualifications that are not represented on the campus.
✓ A curriculum vita from the proposed appointee.
✓ A letter from the proposed appointee indicating a willingness to serve on committee.

Please submit all documents to soe-grstaff@ucmerced.edu for review and routing purposes.
Requesting Reconstitution of Committee

When Committee membership changes must be made, the graduate advisor in consultation with the student should recommend a new committee member, giving the reason for the change. The change must be reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Graduate Group and the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education.

The student may request that the committee be reconstituted:

• If a committee member’s absence from campus for an extended period of time makes scheduling of examinations unreasonably difficult.
• If there is a substantial change in the thesis topic.
• If there is a departure of a committee member from the university.

Complete the Request for Reconstitution of Committee Membership form in advance (at least 2 weeks prior to your scheduled examination date) to allow for review and processing time.

Please submit all documents to soe-grstaff@ucmerced.edu for review and routing purposes.
Next Steps after Advancement to Candidacy...

Advancement to Candidacy begins with the first academic term following completion of all requirements (including submission of all forms).

- **Continued working with your Graduate Advisor and Committee**
- **Make satisfactory progress toward your doctoral degree.**
- **Meet with your Graduate Advisor and Committee for the regular annual committee review.**
- **Complete Seminar/Conference presentation requirement as required by your graduate program.**
- **Review your degree audit and complete any incomplete requirements.**
- **Schedule defense date in consultation with Committee**
- **Final Examination**
- **Defend Dissertation**
Additional Resources

The Engineering Graduate Students website https://engineeringgrads.ucmerced.edu was designed with students in mind.

- Ph.D. Pre-Candidacy Examinations (preliminary examination and Qualifying Examination)
- Advancement to Candidacy
- Ph.D. Dissertation Defense, Exam and Filing instructions

This very helpful resource includes general information about guidelines, policies, various procedures (i.e. Qualifying Exam, Advancement to Candidacy, Graduation Procedures) as it relates to your Doctoral Degree, and resources that will aid in your successful completion of graduate studies at UC Merced. Program specific degree requirements are listed on each graduate program’s website.

Questions? Please contact SoE Graduate Staff at soe-grstaff@ucmerced.edu
QUESTIONS?