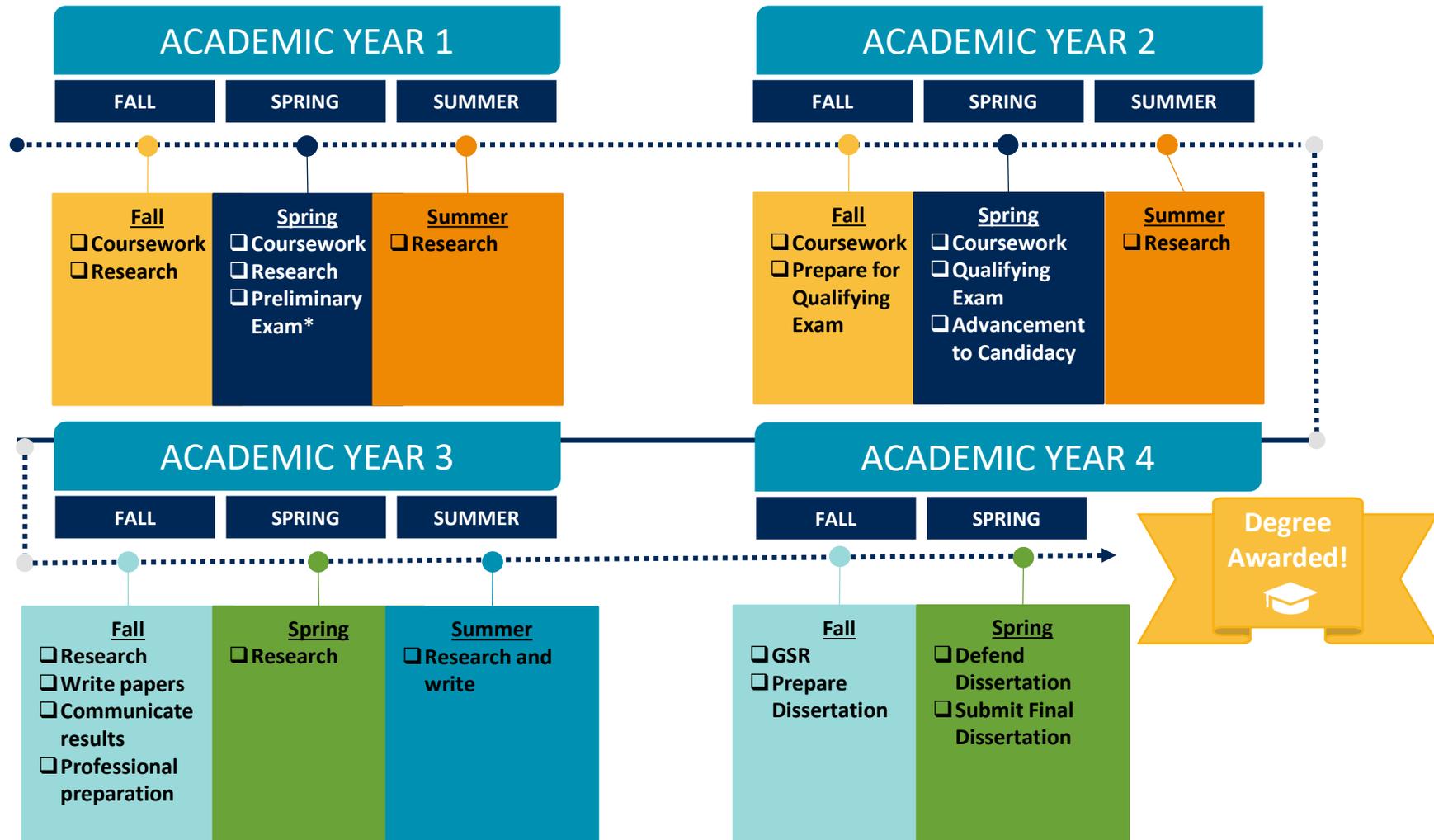


**Ph.D. Time to Degree:  
Qualifying Examination and  
Advancement to Candidacy**



**SOE**  
School of  
Engineering

# Roadmap to Success: Sample Timeline Doctoral Degree\*



\*This graphic is for demonstration purposes only. For specific details regarding the Ph.D. requirements, please consult with your graduate program handbook and your advisor.

# 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.
- 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.

**NOTE:** Advancement to Candidacy does not automatically happen after a Qualifying Exam

# 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.

# Qualifying Examination Checklist

- Pass the Preliminary Examination before beginning to prepare for the research proposal and qualifying examination.– Required by the MBSE, ME graduate programs only.*
- Form a Qualifying Exam Committee after discussion with your faculty advisor.
- [\*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.
- Complete the SOE Examination Date webform so SOE staff can begin preparing supporting documents for your exam.
- 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](mailto:soe-grstaff@ucmerced.edu) within 48 hours of the completed examination.
- Complete your Advancement to Candidacy form.

# 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.
- ✓ Note the deadlines for the Advancement to Candidacy form

Date	Term
<b>Deadlines for filing Advancement to Candidacy for the Fall/Spring with Graduate Division for Academic Year 2023-2024:</b>	
December 8, 2023	Spring 2024
July 12, 2024	Fall 2024



Visit Graduate Division website for additional dates and deadlines:

<https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/current-students/calendar-and-deadlines>

# Advancement to Candidacy Workflow Process

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](mailto: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.

[Advancement to Candidacy Approval Flow](#)

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](#)

# Committee Compositions

Committee Membership nominations are made in consultation with your Graduate Advisor, Graduate Program Chair, and approved by the Graduate Dean. Review your Graduate Program Policies and Procedures for specific requirements.



## 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](mailto:soe-grstaff@ucmerced.edu) for review and routing purposes.*

# Remote Committee Participation

In-person committee participation is required by default. However, if a committee member must participate remotely and is the student or an active status graduate faculty, you will need to:

- Submit a general petition to Graduate Services for the participants wishing to participate remotely.
- General petitions are not required for remote participation by an external member or graduate faculty on sabbatical or inactive status. In these cases, the Chair of examination committee will need to notify Graduate Services via email at [gradservices@ucmerced.edu](mailto:gradservices@ucmerced.edu) .