

Auburn University

Department of Psychology

General Doctoral Examination Policy

(Revised, Fall 2008)

Preamble

According to Graduate School requirements (Auburn University Bulletin, 1999-2000) "*[the] general examination consists of written and oral testing by the student's advisory committee in the student's major and minor. The primary purpose of the general examination is to assess the student's understanding of the broad body of knowledge in a field of study. The examination also affords the advisory committee an opportunity to review the student's proposed research and understanding of research methods and literature in the chosen field*" (p. 179).

In addition, the Bulletin (p. 180) articulates that the "*Doctor of Philosophy is conferred in recognition of the mastery of a special field of learning as shown by the satisfactory completion of a prescribed course of study and investigation, the successful passing of general examinations covering the major and minor fields, the preparation of an acceptable dissertation.... and the passing of a final examination.*"

The degree is a research degree. It is not conferred merely upon fulfillment of technical requirements, but awarded in recognition of the ability to think and work independently, originally, and creatively in a chosen field.

The preceding statements implicate an evaluative process that involves a synergistic relationship among areas deemed to represent general and specialization domains of psychology (recognizing semantic interpretive differences inherent in these terms). The department strives to evaluate the doctoral candidate's skills as articulated in the *Bulletin* through a mechanism that facilitates an integrative process. The department also strives to recognize the crucial role of the student's research advisory committee in conjunction with the valuable contribution afforded by members of the faculty who may not serve in such a capacity.

The General Doctoral Examination (GDE) serves as an essential process by which the above goals are attained. In an effort to articulate the orientation

taken by psychology faculty, the department adopted (5/98) certain goals and processes (and guiding principles) of the GDE. Specifically, the GDE should:

1. Promote critical and integrative thinking
2. Promote breadth and provide an opportunity to fill in gaps of knowledge
3. Be timely
4. Be circumscribed
5. Assess competence in relevant areas
6. Have "ecological validity" (with due respect to ambiguities in that phrase)
7. Meet graduate school requirements (including written and oral component)

Each criterion speaks to important components that form the basis of an incremental experience to the student's graduate education and developing professional identity.

General Doctoral Examination Policy

1. The General Doctoral Examination (GDE) will meet the requirements of the Graduate School as expressed in the Graduate School Bulletin.
2. Graduate School requirements stipulate the formation of a doctoral advisory committee (documented by an approved plan of study) as a prerequisite for pursuing the GDE.
3. The GDE (written and oral) shall be overseen by the student's "Examination Committee." This committee will be comprised of the student's doctoral advisory committee.
4. Students will have a maximum of twelve months to complete the written portion of the GDE. The timeframe designated for the written portion of the GDE shall begin no later than one year following the successful *defense* of the student's thesis. The final draft of the Master's thesis must be submitted to the Graduate School (including electronic submission of final draft) before the student may initiate the GDE. For students entering their program with a Master's recognized by the department, the written portion shall begin no later than the Fall semester of their third year. Students who cannot meet the above deadlines due to extenuating circumstances may petition the faculty of the

department, in writing, through the department chair. This petition will initiate departmental procedures used to review students who are at risk of not remaining in good standing.

5. The Examination Committee shall be charged with ensuring that the examination process extends the student's knowledge base and evaluates the student's ability to integrate and think critically about program-related content areas, his/her developing specialization, and areas of psychology represented in the department's core curriculum.

6. The written examination shall involve two options:

a. Major Area Paper (3.5 GPA or higher in departmental and program core courses plus permission of major professor is required)

b. Written Prelim Examination

General Doctoral Examination

Implementation

I. Major Area Paper

A. This examination will involve the production of a paper modeled after those appearing in *Psychological Bulletin*, *Psychological Review*, *Psychological Methods*, or other review journal specific to the student's intended doctoral degree. Thus, products would reflect, but not be limited to:

1. Evaluative or integrative reviews and interpretations of issues in scientific psychology, fostering a cross-disciplinary orientation;
2. Theoretical contributions to an area of scientific psychology;
3. Contributions to the development and dissemination of methods for collecting, analyzing, understanding, and interpreting psychological data.

The product ultimately reflects the student's ability to ask appropriate questions of the literature, learn how to structure the MAP task, and defend his/her analysis of the issues raised in the paper.

B. While the research conducted for the MAP may lead to the dissertation, the paper shall not constitute the primary portion of the literature review for the dissertation.

C. Completion of the MAP (including successful defense) is required within 12 months from the start date; the start date is to occur no later than one year following the successful defense of the student's thesis (or for students entering with a Master's by the end of his/her third year at Auburn). Failure to do so shall result in the termination of the MAP option. If a student does not successfully complete the MAP within 12 months, the department chair shall initiate a formal review to determine further action.

D. If the student believes that he/she has reached an impasse regarding the committee's decision to allow the student to proceed with the oral defense (see below), a student may appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School. The appeal shall be investigated and resolved by the Dean of the Graduate School

II. Written Preliminary Examination

A. Each student will be presented with six questions written by his/her Examination Committee, from which four questions will be selected by the student. Students may consult any published source or verifiable work in progress and seek clarification about the question from committee members. The committee chair will notify the Graduate Coordinator when the exam has been initiated. Typewritten responses are due 8 weeks after the exam is initiated. One typewritten, double-spaced copy (APA style) is to be submitted to each committee member. If responses are not submitted within 8 weeks after the exam is initiated, this will constitute failure, which will result in a formal departmental review to determine further action.

B. Grading will be completed by the student's Examination Committee within two weeks of receipt of the student's responses.

1. Each grader shall assign a "Pass" or "Fail" to each question. If a grader assigns a "Fail" to any question, this will initiate a discussion by the committee members regarding the basis of the failure. The final committee decision regarding failure on any question will be based on a majority vote.
2. Students will be provided with written qualitative feedback from committee members regarding their examination performance.

3. If a student fails any question on the written examination, the student will be permitted to retake a written examination on the area(s) represented by the failed question(s). The Committee will have the discretion to determine how the subsequent question(s) relate(s) to the original. The Committee should specify a timeline for completion of any subsequent questions, following the solicitation of feedback from members regarding suggested areas of remediation.

4. If the student fails any area of the written examination upon retaking it, the student's graduate status will be terminated.

C. Completion of the written preliminary examination is required within 12 months from the start of the semester following successful defense of the thesis (or for students entering with a Master's by the end of his/her third year at Auburn). Failure to do so shall result in the termination of the written preliminary exam option. If a student does not successfully complete the written preliminary exam within 12 months, the department chair shall initiate a formal review to determine further action.

D. A student may appeal failure of the written exam to the department chair or his/her designee within 14 days of notification of the failure. The appeal shall be investigated, with consultation from the Examination Committee and Program Director. The student shall receive a written response within 14 days of the receipt of the written appeal. Any further appeal shall be directed to the Dean of the Graduate School.

Oral General Doctoral Examination

The oral portion of the GDE allows the Examination Committee to further review the student's understanding of research methodology and literature in his/her program. Conducting the oral examination requires approval in advance by the Graduate School.

The oral examination is conducted:

1. In conjunction with the oral presentation of the MAP (the scheduling of which requires approval from the Examination Committee). Thus, a portion of the oral examination may be a public presentation of the student's paper, but this must not preclude the oral examination by the committee.

OR

2. Generally within two weeks following the successful completion of the written preliminary examination. The oral examination may also be used to discuss issues raised by the student's performance on the written examination.

Successful completion of the oral examination requires unanimous support of the Examination Committee.

If a student fails the oral examination, re-examination may be given on the recommendation of the Examination Committee, and with approval by the Dean of the Graduate School.

Approved by Psychology Department: June, 2000, revised November 2005, December 2005, Fall 2008

Lewis Barker,

Professor and Chair of Psychology

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