Qualifying Exam: Procedures and Expectations

After passing your comprehensive exam, you must decide on your major professor. Your major professor is the term used at UC Davis for the person who will direct your dissertation, also known as the “dissertation chair.” You should have your qualifying exam committee in place no later than the beginning of the winter quarter of your third year, although many students will begin assembling their committee much sooner. Please note that your language requirements should be satisfied prior to completing your qualifying exam:

The qualifying exam committee will consist of five individuals:

a. a chair—who cannot be your major professor/dissertation chair

b. three professors from the Music department, one of whom can be your major professor/dissertation chair

c. a professor from a department other than Music, but related to your area; a professor from an outside college or university is also acceptable

In addition to mapping out your dissertation, you and your major professor/dissertation chair should begin preparing for the qualifying exam. In the exam, you will need to do the following. Note that composers will present their composition first, and then follow with the three different topics and dissertation prospectus:

a. give an oral presentation on three different topics (25 minutes per topic). These may relate to your dissertation topic or depart significantly from it. The topics you choose are meant to broaden your knowledge base, with the intention of adding perspective and range to your research.

Your major professor/dissertation chair must approve these topics no later than two months before the date of your exam. Plan to speak for approximately ten minutes per topic, first offering a brief overview and then focusing on a detail that you find especially compelling and through which you show your mastery of the subject. You will be asked to distribute hard copies of substantive bibliographies for each of your topics. Plan to read your presentations, just as you would in an academic conference. The text of your presentation should be at a professional level of writing. Audio examples should be brief so as not to cut into your commentary.

The committee will then ask questions for approximately fifteen minutes. These questions may address any aspect of your topic. This procedure will be repeated for each of your three topics.

b. identify works from various periods and/or cultures, either aurally or from the printed score (20 minutes). The committee may ask you to justify your answer by explaining your understanding of a given style.

c. present your dissertation prospectus (40 minutes). A dissertation prospectus demonstrates that you have thought deeply about a particular problem and have devised a means to address it. It also indicates that you have posed an original question, have absorbed what others have written on the subject, located your sources, and devised a logical organizational scheme. For composers a dissertation involves an original composition and an analytical paper focusing on another piece, i.e., not on the dissertation piece.
At the conclusion of the qualifying exam, the candidate will then leave the room so that the committee may confer. The total time for the qualifying exam will be between two to three hours.

Samples of successful prospectuses are posted on Google Drive. Request access from your graduate coordinator.

Planning. Work closely with your major professor / dissertation chair to ensure that your prospectus is as solid as possible. Your writing should be at a professional level. It should be clear that you have laid the groundwork to enable you to fulfill the research goals you describe. Questions about the format of the qualifying exam itself should be directed to the qualifying exam chair.

Two months before the date of your qualifying exam, submit the first draft of your prospectus and the three topics to your major professor / dissertation chair if you have not done so already. Make any necessary revisions and resubmit further drafts. If your major professor / dissertation chair feels that the prospectus and three topics are not yet ready, he or she may advise you to reschedule your exam.

One month before the exam, circulate the prospectus and three topics to the rest of your committee, giving them two weeks to communicate their reactions to you. Make any necessary changes.

If you PASS the qualifying exam, you will have advanced to candidacy when you file the advancement to candidacy form (see checklist below). Other possibilities, specified in UC Davis Graduate Council Policy GC 2005 (rev. 2011), include the following:

“NOT PASS” (the Chair’s report should specify whether the student is required to retake all or part of the examination, list any additional requirements, and state the exact timeline for completion of requirements to achieve a “Pass”) or “FAIL”. If a unanimous decision takes the form of “Not Pass” or “Fail”, the Chair of the QE committee must include in its report a specific statement, agreed to by all members of the committee, explaining its decision and must inform the student of its decision. Technically, a unanimous committee is making a recommendation to the Administrative Committee of the Graduate Council; however, the Administrative Committee has delegated authority to make a decision to a unanimous committee. The decision of a unanimous committee may be changed only for cause, e.g. procedural error or probable bias, or in details of the conditions attached to a “Not Pass” decision.”

Qualifying Exam Committee versus Dissertation Committee. Members of your qualifying examination committee may serve on your dissertation committee. Please note that the qualifying exam committee and the dissertation committee are not the same. The majority of the dissertation committee should be from the Music department; it is acceptable to choose committee members only from the Music department.

In some cases, however, a committee member might be chosen from another UC Davis graduate program, another UC, or from another college or university. The Office of Graduate Studies must assess the qualifications of a member from outside UC Davis. It is common to invite three or four (rather than five) faculty to be dissertation committee members, including your major professor/dissertation chair who chairs the committee. Your dissertation committee major professor/dissertation chair will work closely with you before recommending that you send out your dissertation to the committee members. Final versions of your dissertation should be in
REVISED: K. Rohde, March 8, 2020

possession of the full dissertation committee not less than 4 weeks prior to the exit seminar date.

**PhD Program Checklist.**

1. Listen to a wide variety of works (beginning from the date of your acceptance into the program)
2. Take the diagnostic exam (orientation week)
3. Consult with the appropriate adviser and begin to remedy any deficiencies (from first quarter of year 1)
4. Begin coursework, making sure to schedule the three proseminars (from first quarter of year 1)
5. Pass comprehensive exams (spring break of year 2)
6. Pass first language exam (before end of year 2)
7. Choose your major professor / dissertation chair, consulting with that person, before the end of fall quarter of year 3.
8. Choose your QE committee chair before the end of fall quarter of year 3, consulting with that person about the QE requirements, the assembly of your QE committee members, the paperwork that will need to be completed for your QE, and timeline management.
9. Pass second language exam (prior to qualifying exam)
10. Finalize qualifying exam committee members (at the beginning of winter quarter of year 3)
11. Choose three specialized topics (approved by your major professor / dissertation chair) for your qualifying exam, no later than winter quarter of year 3
12. Schedule your qualifying exam at least two months prior to the exam date.
13. Complete the qualifying examination application by declaring your committee members with this form [link]. Obtain signatures and submit to your graduate coordinator.
14. Complete all coursework (before qualifying exam is held)
15. At least two months before the qualifying exam, submit draft 1 of your *prospectus and three topics* to your major professor / dissertation chair. Edit according to his or her suggestions.
16. At least one month before the qualifying exam, submit your *prospectus and three topics* to the rest of your committee members. Edit according to their suggestions.
17. Take your exam. If you pass, begin planning the mechanics of your dissertation (dissertation committee, work schedule, and the like).
18. If you fail, consult the qualifying exam chair and take appropriate action
19. Formally declare your advancement to candidacy and dissertation committee members with this form [link]. Pay the $90 candidacy fee, obtain signatures, and submit to your graduate coordinator prior to December 1.