

**Qualifying Paper Examination Requirement  
Gerontology Ph.D. Program  
Department of Gerontology  
McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies  
University of Massachusetts Boston**

Purpose

The qualifying paper exam (QPE) provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to lay the foundation for a substantial, independent research project. Students will critically review the appropriate scholarly literature and develop a sound conceptual or theoretical framework that reflects the literature that may conceivably be used in an empirical research project. While the QPE need not have any relationship to the student's dissertation, each student is strongly encouraged to select a topic that will lead to a dissertation. The paper will not be an empirical examination of the topic. Rather, the QPE will review, summarize, and integrate relevant social and behavioral science literature in order to provide a synopsis of the "state-of-the-science" regarding a specific topic relevant to the field of gerontology and aging studies. The QPE serves as evidence of the student's readiness to begin a dissertation project and may serve as a pathway into the broader literature surrounding her/his dissertation topic. Thus it is reasonable to think of the QPE as a preliminary step toward a more comprehensive review of the literature associated with the dissertation topic. The QPE will take a broad view of the topic, given the challenge of representing and integrating interdisciplinary scientific literature, as required by the exam.

Structure and Procedures

To be eligible to write the QPE, students should have completed all required course work. Exceptions may be granted by the Graduate Program Director (GPD) under compelling circumstances.

Students may review certain previous QPE's submitted by other students before commencing their final QPE. However, it is important to note that as of January, 2017, the faculty have decided to reorient the focus of the QPE and thus aspects of previous exams may not be entirely helpful. Students may borrow hard copies of these exams from the program administrator. Only one prior exam may be "checked out" at a time. Students must keep the example exams in the student room/office area and return them within 24 hours so that other students may review the material. Once the qualifying examination period begins, student access to the example exams will no longer be permitted.

The process begins with the student submitting a QPE prospectus to the GPD. (A list of steps in the process is provided below.) The prospectus is a double-spaced, one-page statement identifying the topic and providing a discussion of the importance of the topic to the field. Upon submission of the prospectus by the GPD, the student will identify a Gerontology faculty member to serve as Chair of the Qualifying Paper Exam Committee (QPEC). Students must seek input from the GPD regarding the selection of the Chair. By agreeing to serve as the QPEC Chair, the faculty member is not necessarily making a commitment to serve as the Chair of the

student's dissertation committee. Conversely, the student is not necessarily making a commitment to have the Chair of the QPE also serve as Chair of his/her dissertation committee. However, this will be a reasonable outcome in most cases. The GPD will then assign two other tenure-track/tenured gerontology faculty members who teach in the PhD program to serve as members of the QPEC. Committee membership will be determined, in part, so as to distribute the workload evenly among the faculty.

After the identification of the members of the student's QPEC, a meeting between the student and the committee will be arranged by the student at a time and day mutually convenient to all persons. Prior to the meeting, students should present to the committee a draft statement of the topic, guiding questions to be addressed, a preliminary outline of the final exam, and an initial bibliography containing a list of major references. The committee will help the student to refine his/her thesis statement and outline, as well as suggest additional references. A follow-up meeting may be arranged if the Chair of the committee and the student agree that such a meeting is necessary.

Following the meeting, the student will prepare a final written thesis statement. The thesis statement should introduce the topic and its significance, carefully defining key concepts and presenting an outline of the final paper. The thesis statement should be no more than five double-spaced, typewritten pages, using Times New Roman 12-point font and one-inch margins on all sides, and follow the current American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines. This length refers to the main text only. It excludes the title page, figures (optional), tables (optional), and bibliography. The bibliography should consist of approximately 20 scholarly works (e.g., peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters) central to the emerging QPE topic. (Additional references should be identified both before and while preparing the final QPE.)

As noted above, the initial reference list will be compiled with input from the Chair and other members of the QPEC. The scholarly reference material should be selected to reflect multiple perspectives and/or multiple disciplinary approaches to the topic. The final thesis statement must be approved by the QPEC. Prior to beginning the exam, the thesis statement, outline, and bibliography must be submitted to the GPD for approval.

After the thesis statement and bibliography are approved, the QPE will be completed by the student without input from the QPEC or other persons. The final paper exam should be no more than 35 double-spaced pages. This length, again, refers to the main text only. It excludes the title page, references, figures, and tables. The final paper should be prepared using Times New Roman 12-point font and one-inch margins on all sides, and follow APA guidelines. During the exam period, students may ask only clarifying questions of the QPEC Chair.

There are two QPE periods each year; one in the winter, and one in the summer. The completed paper will be reviewed by the QPEC during the month following the exam period. The qualifying paper will be assigned one of four grades; Pass, Conditional Pass, Revise and Resubmit, or Fail. If a student receives a grade of Fail on the paper, he or she may repeat the process for a maximum of one additional time at a subsequent exam period. Conditional Passes are given when the exam needs only editorial changes to be acceptable. Students will be given one week to make these changes. Students who are given a Revise and Resubmit will be given

comments from the committee describing why revisions are deemed necessary and will be given two weeks from the time they receive the comments to submit revisions. The committee will then assign a Pass or a Fail to the revised exam. With input from the other members of the QPEC, the QPEC Chair will provide the student with written comments supporting the **final** grade assigned to the QPE.

Exams turned in after the deadline will receive a grade of Fail absent extenuating circumstances and prior approval from the QPEC and GPD. Equipment failure is not a valid reason for turning an exam in late. Students are strongly urged to back up their work during the exam period.

Upon successful completion of the QPE, the Chair of the QPEC will notify the GPD and the student. The student will provide one copy of his/her paper to be placed in her/his Program file. These copies should be free of typographical and grammatical errors.

Successful completion of the QPE is required for admission to Ph.D. candidacy.

**Policy on Academic Integrity:**

It is assumed that all work handed in for a grade in this class is your own work, and that it includes proper reference to outside published or unpublished sources. To read the UMass rules on academic dishonesty, see the following: [http://www.umb.edu/life\\_on\\_campus/policies/code](http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/code)

**Schedule for Preparation and Completion of Exam**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Spring Session</b>	<b>Summer Session</b>
1. Prepare one-page prospectus/submit to GPD for approval	November 1 - January 15	March 1-May 15
2. Identify Chair with input from GPD	No later than January 15	No later than May 15
3. GPD assigns two additional committee members	No later than February 1	No later than June 1
4. Draft thesis statement, questions or themes: select references	No later than February 1	No later than June 1
5. Meet with committee	No later than February 15	No later than June 15
6. Prepare final thesis statement	February 1 - 25	June 1 - 25
7. Thesis statement submitted to GPD	February 25	June 25
8. Prepare paper exam	March 1-April 30	July 1-August 30
9. Paper Exam Due	No later than April 30	No later than August 30
10. Evaluation reported to Student	No later than June 1	No later than October 1

Revised 4/24/18