

# Ph. D. in the Built Environment, General Examination Policy

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Here is a summary of the **General Examination Policy**, taken from our Program Application & Approval, with some clarifying additions. See [Graduate School requirements](#).

After the student has completed the required coursework (normally in about five quarters—see Program Coordinator, Neile Graham <<mailto:neile@uw.edu>> for program and Graduate School credit requirements), she or he will take the examinations to demonstrate mastery over the major dimensions of their identified domain. The intention is to ensure that the student has a broad understanding of their domain of specialization, including the background contexts, major figures and concepts, relevant research methodologies and approaches, as well as mastery of what is focally important for their particular intended dissertation research.

## Examination, Steps:

1. Through discussion, the student asks and a faculty member agrees to chair the supervisory committee. Then together they select the other committee members. The committee is then formally appointed (by the Dean of the Graduate School, upon our request and recommendation) no later than 4 months prior to a General Exam. We recommend forming the committee as early as possible to shape the coursework preparing for the exam and subsequent research. There are some limitations as to who can be on the supervisory committee, see the [Graduate School's policy Doctoral Supervisory Committee Roles and Responsibilities](#) and Program Coordinator, Neile Graham for more details.

The committee must consist of at least 4 faculty members, of whom \*

- a) the Chair must be a member of the BE Program Faculty [this is an approved, specific sub-set of BE-UW faculty—see Program Director or Program Coordinator]
  - b) one member must be the UW Graduate School Representative (GSR), who can not be from the core faculty (nor an associate of the committee chair). The GSR is a full, functioning member of the Committee.
2. The design of this supervisory committee is that they work collaboratively to discuss and agree on what should be covered, what the student is responsible for. The student should be involved in this discussion as well. Throughout the advising, the student should expect to meet periodically with individual committee members on one or two areas of specialization (and at least once with the committee as a whole), developing a reading list to correspond to what the committee decides should be covered. The reading list is the “basic agreement of content” of the materials in the student’s domain that the examinations will cover.

**There are 3 areas to be covered in the examination (3 question sets):**

- **theoretical, historical, cultural issues & context**
- **research methodology and research design**
- **student's intended dissertation subject matter and approach**

**The exam itself consists of 3 sets of questions, with a choice among at least two alternatives in each area. All three question sets are related to the student’s domain of study—as has been previously determined by the judgment of the supervising committee when developing the reading list. The first question set covers the overall theoretical, historical, and cultural context relevant to the area of study; the second question set covers the research methods and design that the committee requires the student to know, whether specifically for the dissertation research or as part of what the committee deems important for the student’s**

**general competence; the third question set covers the specific aspects of the student's intended research.**

3. The student, chair, and committee must schedule the examination timing together, taking attendance at the oral portion of the exam into consideration\*. This date, time, and place must be conveyed to the Graduate School by the student through [MyGradProgram](#), at which time the program approves it and the official notification is automatically sent to the participants. The Graduate School is only concerned with this oral portion of the exam. The timing of the written portion of the exam is up to the student, chair, and committee, giving the student writing time and the committee reading and evaluation time.
4. At examination time, all the committee members write several questions, so the student has some choices (at least two for each of the areas): individual committee members might write several questions in one area &/or might write a question for 2 or 3 of the areas to be covered.
  - The Chair of the committee initiates, oversees, and collects these questions, making a coherent package (with some power of editing—omitting, etc.).
  - The Chair administers the exam (the written portion is take-home, due within 7 days of being given to the student by the Chair) and collects the student's essay responses answering the questions (or, the student can send the essays directly to the entire committee).
  - The entire committee reads and evaluates all three essays. Committee members use their own judgment whether they read each essay as regular faculty expert, read it as a non-expert but certainly as competent to discern a good or bad answer, or choose not to read it given their expertise and interest.
  - If the written answers are acceptable, there follows an oral examination\*
  - In the oral examination, the student should be prepared to further discuss the questions presented in the written examination. The committee members also may ask the questions left unanswered in the written examination and/or ask the student to elaborate on or clarify the answers given in the written examination.
  - If the student passes the oral examination

→ then onward toward Research Proposal and Dissertation

After passing the examination, the formal Research Proposal is written as the next step (usually within the same or next quarter). A separate committee meeting is held to approve the proposal (at which point the Program Coordinator, Neile Graham should be so notified); then the actual dissertation can be begun.

\* at both the General Exams and the Dissertation Defense at least 4 of the committee members must be present; there is some allowance for electronic participation from a remote site, but the Chair and the GSR must be present. See [Graduate School General Exam policies](#).