

School of Meteorology “Best Practice” Statement On the PhD General Examination

On March 4, 2010, the School of Meteorology approved a new policy regarding the administration of the PhD General Examination.

The present document provides general guidelines and recommendations or “best practices” to be used by students and faculty in connection with the General Examination.

For the following discussion, Written Examination and Oral Examination are used to refer to the written and oral portions of the General Examination, respectively.

What is the purpose and format of the General Examination?

The Graduate College requires that all students pass a General Examination as part of the requirements for a PhD. A student becomes a doctoral candidate upon successful completion of the General Examination. The Graduate College Bulletin states: "The General Examination consists of a written and oral portion. It is intended to test the student's mastery of a number of related fields as well as the student's capacity for synthesis, sound generalization and critical ability".

When should a student take the General Examination?

As mandated by the Graduate College and stated in the Graduate College Bulletin: “When the student is enrolled in or has completed the final semester of coursework, and all Tools of Research have been completed with grades of B or better, the student should prepare for the General Examination.” Note that the School of Meteorology has no “Tools of Research” requirements.

What types of questions or tasks should one expect as part of the General Examination?

There are no actual restrictions on the type of task that a Doctoral Committee could put before a student during the General Examination, but the School of Meteorology does make some recommendations in this matter

- The task may be relevant to the student's specialty within meteorology, but should not be about material that is planned to be directly incorporated into the student's Dissertation
- The task should be sufficiently challenging that the written report stemming from it would allow indication of (i) a breadth of knowledge of graduate-level meteorology, (ii) an intellectual capacity to proceed with independent research at the doctoral level and (iii) written communication skills necessary for the research to culminate in the production of a Dissertation.

Do the Committee members need to agree on the General Examination task?

Yes. The definition of the task and the evaluation criteria that are given to the student must be in writing, and a copy, signed by all members of the student's Doctoral Committee, should be submitted to the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee for record keeping.

How long should a student be given to complete the General Examination?

The School of Meteorology recommends the time limit for completing the written report to be approximately one month after the task has been revealed to the student. Other time limits could be used, but should be roughly commensurate with expected half-time labor by the student toward completion of the task. As mandated by the Graduate College, "The student must complete the General Examination during the semester in which the authority is given." and "Both the written and oral portions should be taken during the same semester."

What resources are allowed when completing the General Examination?

The School of Meteorology recommends that the student be allowed full access to all written resources for completion of the written report: all books, journals and online resources. However, the student is not allowed to receive personal tutoring from any source, except perhaps clarification of the task from the Doctoral Committee (the Committee will decide based on the wording of the original task and of the background knowledge expected of the student whether such clarification is warranted).

Is it expected for the student to complete the General Examination in parallel with other tasks and course work?

No. It is recommended that the student be given time to devote his or her full attention to the task of completing the General Examination. If a student is enrolled in regular classes during the time the Examination is given, then he or she is expected to continue fulfilling the course requirements. In such a case, the Doctoral Committee and student are encouraged to consider the timing of class assignments when scheduling the General Examination.

What is the recommended length (number of pages) of the written portion of the General Examination?

The School of Meteorology has not made a formal recommendation on the length of the Written Examination. Furthermore, length can vary depending on formatting, the number of figures & tables shown and so forth. Expectations on the length of the report should be commensurate with amount of time provided to complete the task. As a rough guideline, it seems reasonable for a student to complete a single-spaced written report of 25 – 35 pages in one month.

When should the oral portion of the General Examination be given after completing the written part?

The School of Meteorology requires that an oral examination of the task also be undertaken and recommends that this Oral Examination occur within the two weeks following submission of the written report.

Can the student get feedback from the Doctoral Committee after the Written Examination has been completed in preparation for the Oral Examination?

Yes. After the submission of the written report, and prior to the oral Exam, the Doctoral Committee members may provide feedback to the student about the written report and the upcoming Oral Examination. During that time, the student may freely discuss the task with any source. A written record of the feedback provided to the student from the committee members should be provided to the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee and a copy placed in the student's file.

What should one expect during the Oral Examination?

The Oral Examination procedure should be akin to the procedure traditionally used for a defense of a Dissertation. That is, the student will be asked to present an explication and defense of the written report accompanied by thorough questioning confirming the student's mastery of a number of related fields as well as the student's capacity for synthesis, sound generalization and critical ability.

How long should the oral portion of the General Examination take?

Given that the Oral Examination procedure should be akin to the procedure traditionally used for a Dissertation defense, the School of Meteorology recommends that three hours be reserved for the Oral Examination.

Who can attend the Oral Examination?

Only the student and student's Doctoral Committee will be present for the Oral Examination.

How will results of the General Examination be announced to the Graduate Studies Committee and the School of Meteorology faculty?

Within one week of having administered the General Examination, the Chair of the Doctoral Committee will provide a photocopy of the official *Report of General Examination* to the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee. The photocopy will be placed in the student's School of Meteorology file. The result of the General Examination will be announced during executive session of the next faculty meeting by the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee.

Are there any quality control measures in place regarding the administration of the General Examination?

- The definition of the task and the evaluation criteria that are given to the student must be in writing and approved and signed by all members of the Doctoral Committee.
- A copy of the signed document will be presented to the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee and will be kept with the student's records.
- The Graduate Committee is encouraged to also present a copy of the written report to the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee, which will also be kept with the student's records.

What steps are involved to obtaining permission from the Graduate College to take the General Examination?

- The Graduate College Bulletin states: The student must apply for the General Examination at least two weeks before any portion of the General Examination will be held.
- *Any changes to the Advisory Conference Report* require explicit mention on the form with the advisor's initials in approval. This includes taking a course that is newly offered (nonexistent when the Advisory Conference Report meeting occurred).
- Any incomplete/"no grade" marks (even for research hours) cause problems. Make sure the advisor submits grades for each semester!
- If course hours have not been completed, then an additional form must be completed.