

QUALIFICATION FOR DOCTORAL CANDIDACY

OVERVIEW

At the time of admission to the Ph.D. program, you become a “doctoral student.” After about a year’s work in the department (see below for details about timing), you will be invited to apply for Qualification as a “doctoral candidate.” For this process, the Graduate Steering Committee reviews your progress to date through the program, your skills as a critical writer, and your progress in planning for the Comprehensive Examination. After its review, the Graduate Steering Committee makes one of two decisions: to admit you to candidacy for the degree or to deny admission to candidacy. After admission to candidacy, you become a “doctoral candidate” and begin formal preparation for the Comprehensive Examination. If your application is denied, you may re-apply one more time in the following academic semester.

DETAILED ACCOUNT

A. Choosing an Adviser

If you have not already done so, Qualification is the moment to specify a field of concentration and select an interim adviser. The adviser will confer with you about your academic record, including future plans within the program, and any academic problems perceived by the student or the adviser. After Qualification, students may change advisers if they wish. Such changes should be registered with the Graduate Program Coordinator.

B. Timing of Qualification

Students will be invited to apply for Qualification after 12-15 s.h. of **graded** coursework in literature and/or criticism at or above the ENGL:5000-level (12 s.h. for students holding an MA, 15 s.h. for students holding a BA). Because this tally does not include language courses, coursework in other departments, courses taken at the 3000-level, and independent studies, this point will vary, but for most students it will occur during the third or fourth semester of graduate study. There may occasionally be reasons for a student to delay an application for candidacy beyond this point, which may be accomplished through a request to the DGS. Because it is vital that students maintain an active commitment to finishing the degree expeditiously, however, if a student does not apply for Qualification in the semester after he or she has completed 21 s.h. of work in literature and/or criticism at or above the ENGL:5000-level, the student must switch from the Ph.D. program to the MA program or, if the student already has an MA in English, resign from the doctoral program.

C. Process of Qualification

The department requires that a student fill out an Application for Candidacy online (see Graduate Webforms at <https://english.uiowa.edu/graduate-program/graduate-webforms>). This provides an opportunity to reflect upon your progress so far through the degree program. You will use the form to indicate your progress towards the language, distribution, and seminar requirements and to explain how you plan to complete these requirements. This is also an opportunity for you to formulate your plans for the Comprehensive Examination. While plans may be tentative at this stage, students must include the names of at least two faculty members, including one designated as “interim adviser,” with whom they have discussed the Comprehensive Exam and who have expressed provisional agreement to work with them.

Students must also submit a sample paper of at least 15 pages, written in an English course at the ENGL:5000-level or above. The sample paper may be revised based on the professor’s comments at the time of the course, as long as the original graded paper with the professor’s comments accompanies it. Revision is an option, however, not a requirement. We do not intend to encourage students to polish an already strong paper but rather to address certain challenges that may arise regarding the essay requirement. As examples, the following two circumstances might make revision an attractive option:

- 1.) The student’s strongest work was written for a readings course and is shorter than fifteen pages. The student can use the revision option to lengthen the essay.

2.) The student's best work meets the page requirement for qualifications and has potential but also has substantial problems. The student can use the revision option to address some of those problem areas. The sample paper need not concern your expected area of expertise. However, it should demonstrate promise regarding such literary critical skills as: pursuing a lucid argument, drawing upon sustained research, providing nuanced and careful readings, engaging with theoretical methodologies, and contributing to ongoing scholarly debates.

You will be evaluated on your progress through the Ph.D. program as indicated by your course grades **(candidates should have a GPA of 3.67 [A-] or above in graduate English literary studies courses with no outstanding incompletes)**, by your progress toward the requirements, by the feasibility of your plan for future work, and by faculty evaluations of your course work, which are added to your file after each course. Your abilities at Ph.D.-level research and writing will be assessed through faculty evaluations of course work and through the sample paper.

The Graduate Steering Committee—comprised of the directors of admissions, qualifications, the MA Program, finances, placement, and the director of graduate studies—judges the applications for candidacy. The committee makes one of two decisions: pass or deny. If passed, the student turns his or her attention to further coursework and preparation for Comprehensive Exams. If denied, the student must reapply the next semester in order to remain in the doctoral program. A student who has been denied should meet with the Director of Qualifications and the DGS to discuss the committee's assessment and recommendations, and to plan strategies for strengthening the student's case for reapplication. If a student is denied a second and final time, the student is dismissed from the doctoral program. She or he does retain funding through the current one-year funding cycle. The MA option remains open to students denied doctoral candidacy.

D. After Qualification

Formal admission to candidacy marks the department's intention to see a student through the Comprehensive Examination and the completion of a dissertation. Regardless of the semester in which you qualify, you must take your Comprehensive Exam within five semesters from the semester in which you reach 24 s.h. If at the time of Qualification you have fewer than 24 s.h. of total graduate credit at Iowa, you will have five semesters after the 24th semester hour within which to take the Comprehensive Examination. If this deadline is exceeded, you must re-apply to the Graduate Steering Committee for admission to candidacy. Where progress toward the degree has been sustained, the department may grant an appropriate extension (normally of one calendar year) for completing the Comprehensive Examination.