

PLEASE NOTE: ALL documentation **MUST** be submitted to the IMS office a minimum of six (6) working weeks prior to the examination date. See [Qualifying/ Transfer Examination Scheduling](#) for details.

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PURPOSE

The purpose of the IMS Qualifying and Transfer Oral Examination is to closely review the research proposal, recommend revisions, and test the student’s knowledge of his/her field of study, in order to determine that the student may transfer to (or continue in) a PhD program.

Qualifying Examinations are completed by Direct Entry PhD students with no previous Master’s degree. Their purpose is to ensure that the student has a well-formulated research plan under way and is able to ultimately defend a PhD thesis.

MSc-to-PhD Transfer Examinations are completed by MSc students who wish to enter the PhD program without first finishing their MSc degree. They are intended to allow **exceptional** students to transfer and thus accelerate completion of the PhD degree. When the student transfers to the PhD, time spent and credits earned in the MSc program will be counted as part of the PhD degree.

TIMELINE

BOTH examinations must be completed within 18-21 months of initial registration in the IMS (i.e. Sept. 2015 registrants must transfer/hold qualifying exam by May 2017, Jan. 2015 registrants must transfer/hold qualifying exam by Sept. 2016). Extensions to this deadline are NOT available.

Writing up and completing your examination takes an AVERAGE of 3.5 months (1 month for writing up, 1 month for proposal proofing and review, and 1.5 months for the examination process).

QUALIFYING AND TRANSFER EXAMINATION GUIDELINES

- Discuss the process with your Supervisor and PAC members as early as possible. Set up a PAC meeting for recommendation to hold the examination. A decision to transfer from the MSc to PhD program should be made 12-15 months into your MSc program.
- Complete current degree program course requirements early in your program (ideally in the first 12 months).
- Send research proposal drafts regularly to your supervisor and PAC members to review (allow at least one month for this). Revise the research proposal according to PAC members' suggestions.
- Once your proposal has been reviewed by your PAC members, hold a PAC meeting to prepare you for your exam.
- Meet with a Graduate Coordinator if there are any concerns about the examination.

QUALIFYING/ TRANSFER EXAMINATION SCHEDULING

When settling on a Qualifying/Transfer examination date and time with your committee, please note the following scheduling limitations:

- The exam may start no earlier than 9am and no later than 3pm, Monday through Friday.
- The exam may only take place on days that the University is open. Please visit the SGS [sessional dates calendar](#) for holidays and University closures.
- The University is closed for approximately 2 weeks during the winter holidays. These 2 weeks do not count toward the minimum 6 weeks' notice needed to schedule the exam. Please visit the SGS [sessional dates calendar](#) for winter holiday closure dates.
- SGS does not allow examinations typically 1 week prior to University closure for the winter holidays and in the first 3 business days after the university officially opens in January. Students and faculty will receive an e-mail MEMO at the end of September, notifying them of these dates. Dates vary by year.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Make an appointment with an IMS Graduate Coordinator early in your degree if your student stipend is derived from a contract or your research project is associated with an industrial contract. Industrial support of research may limit the communication of research findings. This may affect your thesis and defense. *Guidelines for Faculty of Medicine Graduate Students and Supervisors in the Context of Commercialization of Inventions based on Thesis-Related Research* is available [here](#).

GOING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL?

We recommend that you complete your IMS degree, and then enter medical school. Most Medical Schools demand degree completion BEFORE starting Medical School. Offers of admission are issued up to the start of Medical School classes. If you plan to start in the Fall you must defend by mid-June.

- Discuss the issue with your Supervisor and Program Advisory Committee when you apply to medical school .
- Meet with your committee often to ensure you all agree on a timeline for completion and work expectations
- Confirm with your medical school(s):
 - Does admission demand degree completion prior to entry?

- If yes, what is their final deadline for submission of degree?
- What is the final date when you'll hear about your acceptance?
- Get all research for your degree completed **WELL IN ADVANCE**.
- Book your defense early. Defend your thesis by mid-June.

EXAMINATION REQUIREMENTS

For the Qualifying Examination

- One full graduate course equivalent with a cumulative **B+** average
- Preparation of a PhD research proposal
- Approval of the supervisor and Program Advisory Committee (PAC) that all are in agreement that the student may proceed with the qualifying examination

For the MSc-to-PhD Transfer Examination

- One full graduate course equivalent with a cumulative **A-** average
- Achievement of a high level of research productivity and scholarship (i.e. scientific presentations, published abstracts and manuscripts)
- Preparation of a PhD research proposal
- Approval of the supervisor and Program Advisory Committee (PAC) that all are in agreement that the student may proceed with the transfer examination
- A letter from the supervisor to the IMS Office (See [Required Examination Documentation](#) for details)

THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A written, minimum 10-15 page, double-spaced research proposal is required for your examination.

- The supervisor and Program Advisory Committee are responsible for guiding the student about proposal content and research completion.
- Include these elements (possibly in the form of a research grant application):
 - Title Page
 - Background
 - Work-to-date
 - Hypothesis (THE MOST IMPORTANT PART! It's your rationale and reasons for research. Remember, your hypothesis can't be proved or disproved; only supported by accompanying research.)
 - Experimental design
 - Projected outcome
 - Relevance
 - Predicted time to completion of PhD research. Include a detailed timeline.
 - References

Include appendices to illustrate preliminary results or details of a formal clinical trial.

Frequent reviews of your research proposal by your supervisor and Program Advisory Committee will help you to make corrections and changes early and help you to maintain continuity throughout the writing process.

FINAL PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC) APPROVAL

When the supervisor and Program Advisory Committee have approved the written research proposal, a final committee meeting should be held to prepare the student for the examination. The student should practice the 20-minute slide presentation and answer questions posed by the supervisor and PAC members that will be typical of questions asked during the examination. Supervisor and committee sign the appropriate section on the PAC Meeting Form recommending transfer.

The supervisor must also recommend **IN WRITING** to the IMS Office that the student may proceed with the examination and that the supervisor will continue to supervise the student in a PhD program. See [Letter of recommendation](#) below for details.

REQUIRED EXAMINATION DOCUMENTATION

The following required documentation must be submitted to the IMS office a minimum of [six \(6\) working weeks](#) prior to the proposed **Qualifying Oral Examination**:

- Most Recent PAC report form
- Updated student CV
- [PhD research proposal](#)
- [QUALIFYING / TRANSFER EXAMINATION Nomination Form](#)

The following required documentation must be submitted to the IMS office a minimum of [six \(6\) working weeks](#) prior to the proposed **Transfer Oral Examination**:

- Most Recent PAC report form
- Updated student CV
- [PhD research proposal](#)
- [QUALIFYING / TRANSFER EXAMINATION Nomination Form](#)
- Letter of recommendation for transfer from supervisor. Letter **MUST** indicate:
 1. Supervisor's willingness to supervise student for entire duration of PhD program
 2. Supervisor's willingness to provide minimum PhD student stipend for the duration of the PhD Direct Entry funding cohort (see [IMS funding policy](#) for details)
 3. Supervisor's membership status with IMS. PhD supervisors must have full member status.

Letters of recommendation should be no longer than 2 pages in length and bear the signature of the supervisor. Letters which do not contain the criteria listed above will not be considered.

Supervisor Responsibilities:

- Recommend transfer or qualifying exam as early as possible (no later than 15 months after initial enrolment, in order to allow for the examination).
- Review, edit, and approve research proposal drafts
- Oversee submission of the following documentation to the IMS Office at least [six \(6\) working weeks](#) in advance of the Examination:
 1. The signed Program Advisory Committee form

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2. List of suggested Examiners (use the [Qualifying/Transfer Examination Nomination Form](#)). *The IMS Office must have an assurance of availability and agreement of ALL EXAMINERS to participate. The supervisor is responsible for contacting the examiners and confirming their willingness and availability to participate.*
 3. One alternate exam date and time
 4. FOR **TRANSFER** examinations, [letter of recommendation](#) for transfer (following guidelines listed above)
- At the examination, the Supervisor should carefully document items for revision and modification.

Student Responsibilities:

- Prepare the [research proposal](#)
- Discuss committee composition with the supervisor
- Send an updated CV to the IMS Office
- Distribute the research proposal to all committee members, plus the IMS Office, at least [six \(6\) weeks](#) before the examination

IMS Office Responsibilities:

- Approve/vet the exam committee composition
- Appoint the examination Chair
- Organize the room, equipment
- Officially inform all examiners (in writing) of the date, time, location and committee composition of the examination
- Formally invite the internal examiner/appraiser to the examination; provide written appraisal instructions and documentation. We will NOT distribute the research proposal to the examiners.
- Collect the appraisal
- Provide a complete examination file to the Examination Chair. This will include the exam summary form, proposal, current transcript, latest PAC form and, for transfer exams, the supervisor's recommendation letter.

THE EXAMINATION COMMITTEE

The purpose of the examination committee is to provide an objective analysis of the candidate's research proposal and background knowledge by faculty members of good standing, who are familiar with the standards of scholarship required by the School of Graduate Studies.

The committee is composed of:

- Exam Chair (**appointed by IMS Office**)
- **Supervisor**
- **2 Program Advisory Committee** Members (you can invite them all if you have more)
- **2 Examiners** who are members graduate faculty with expertise in the field BUT *neither affiliated with the student's research project nor collaborating with the supervisor in the past 6 years*
- **1 Internal Examiner/Appraiser**
 - who is a member of the graduate faculty with expertise in the field BUT *neither affiliated with the student's research project nor collaborating with the supervisor in the past 6 years, or a member of the supervisor's primary ACADEMIC department. In the case of*

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larger departments such as the Dept. of Medicine, Psychiatry or Surgery, Pediatrics, s/he should not be from the same DIVISION as the supervisor.

- Submits a written appraisal of the proposal at least 5 working days prior to the Exam to the IMS office
- Attends the exam
- Supervisor and student contact the Internal Examiner/Appraiser ONLY to ascertain willingness and availability to attend the examination. DO NOT discuss proposal content with the Internal Examiner/Appraiser.

All examiners must be members of the University of Toronto Graduate Faculty, as an Associate Member, Full Member, or Member Emeritus. You can determine the graduate faculty status of a proposed examiner by checking with:

- (a) the examiner
- (b) the [SGS Faculty Listing](#)
- (c) the [IMS faculty database](#)

If in doubt, consult the IMS Office.

Contact the IMS Office in advance if you wish to have a non-voting member attend. This requires the approval of the student, supervisor, and IMS Graduate Coordinator.

QUALIFYING AND TRANSFER EXAMINATION PROCEDURES

Before the presentation

- The Exam Chair collects the Examination File from the IMS Office or by arrangement with the IMS Thesis and Examination Officer
- The Chair introduces the members and the candidate and ensures that all examiners are present. If members are missing, the Chair advises the IMS Office at 416-978-6696 and discusses action to be taken. The examination may be cancelled
- The Chair instructs the Supervisor of his/her responsibility to carefully document items for revision and modification (if necessary) during the examination
- The Chair asks the student to leave the room
- The Chair advises the examiners whether the student has completed degree requirements and inquires whether there are any major concerns about the upcoming examination
- The Internal Examiner/Appraiser presents his/her appraisal. Discussion may follow reading of the appraisal
- The Supervisor is provided with a copy of the appraisal

Presentation by Candidate

- The student is invited back into the room to give a 20-minute (uninterrupted) presentation. This is a strict time limit. A PowerPoint presentation usually accompanies the presentation. Make sure you bring backup in case of technical difficulties.

Question Period

- Following the presentation, questions are posed to the student. These are presented in two rounds, with 10 minutes allotted to each examiner per round.

- The Chair allows only one Examiner at a time to ask questions (discussion by Examiners among themselves will only detract from the 10 minute time period) and should intervene if another examiner, or the Supervisor, starts to join in the discussion.
- Order of questions is usually: Internal Examiner/Appraiser, Examiners, PAC Members, and Supervisor.
- The Chair should keep informal notes about the content of questions that may lead to proposal revisions for reference during the analysis of defense.
- Following questioning, the student is again asked to leave the room.

Committee discusses the Examination and Votes on the Examination Evaluation

The Chair asks the following specific questions of the examiners. All the examiners must address the questions.

Is the Research Proposal acceptable?

- a) With no modifications
- b) With minor or organizational corrections (typos, change in format, additional information, no new data or new interpretation of data required). The student has 1 month to complete the corrections.
- c) With minor modifications (rewrite part of the proposal, addition of new experimental data and/or completely new interpretation of data). The student has 3 months to complete the modifications.
- d) Not acceptable

Was the Oral Defense:

- a) Excellent
- b) Very good
- c) Acceptable
- d) Not acceptable

Is the student acceptable for entry/continuation in the PhD program?

In the case that a consensus about the recommendations is not reached, then the Chair must ask for a vote on each question. More than one negative vote (or abstention) causes the examination to be adjourned. The Chair does not vote.

If minor modifications are required, the Chair appoints a Modifications Subcommittee (see [After the Examination](#)).

The student is invited into the room and the Chair advises the student about the outcome of the examination.

A clear statement about who will review the revised research proposal is given to student and supervisor and the defense is adjourned.

After the Examination

The Exam, Chair returns the file to the IMS Office.

If minor or organizational corrections are recommended:

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- Student consults with Supervisor and PAC members about changes, revises proposal and submits it to the committee.
- Supervisor writes to the IMS Thesis and Examination Officer at pa.medscience@utoronto.ca to confirm completion of revisions within 1 month of the examination
- Student submits revised proposal to the IMS Office

If **minor modifications** are recommended:

- Examination Chair will appoint a subcommittee
 - Includes the Internal Examiner/Appraiser and 2 other members
 - Subcommittee Chair cannot be the Supervisor
- Student consults with Subcommittee members about changes, revises proposal and submits it to the subcommittee
- Subcommittee Chair writes to IMS Thesis and Examination Officer at pa.medscience@utoronto.ca to confirm completion of revisions within 3 months of the examination
- Student submits revised proposal to the IMS Office

The IMS Office will complete paperwork required for reporting the examination to the School of Graduate Studies.

The student is allowed one Transfer/Qualifying Examination ONLY.
Repeat examinations are not permitted

EXAMINATION TIPS

One day before the exam:

- Check all presentation equipment: computer, projector, overhead
- Briefly review your proposal, get familiar with your figures
- Get familiar with several key references, including authors' names, research groups and major points that may support your defense

On the day of the exam:

- There is no proscribed dress code, but we recommend dressing in business attire
- Come earlier to check the equipment again
- Bring a bottle of water and/or refreshments for your committee
- Bring your research proposal

Presentation

- 20 minutes MAXIMUM (about 20 slides)
- Remember: everyone has read your proposal. You don't need to teach your examiners.
 - Background: provide the rationale and significance of your research
 - Hypothesis: This is the most important part of your research
 - Method: concentrate on the experimental design

Examination Questions

There are several types of examination questions, which fall into 4 categories:

- Related to your research: background, significance

- Questions from your proposal: statement, presentation of figures, additional information, your mistakes
- Background knowledge: statistics, etc
- Unpredictable questions
 - If the *Globe and Mail* wants to release your research, what would be the title of the article?
 - What are the top 3 secrets of your success?
 - If you were allowed to re-do your project, what kind of new approaches would you like to use?

How to answer your questions:

- Make sure you understand the question properly. Repeating the question back can give you time to reflect
- Provide a clear, brief answer
- Use references to demonstrate your knowledge and support your point
- Don't be defensive
- Be honest. Sometimes, "I don't know" could be the best answer
- If the question is not related to your research directly, point it out first, then speculate
- After the first round, if you feel necessary, you may ask for a short break
- The Chair has the obligation to protect the student. If you feel "harassed" you may bring this to the attention of the Exam Chair

GENERAL FAQs

1. Can I invite members outside of my approved committee to my examination?

No. The IMS examinations are only available to those members who have been listed on your nomination form and pre-approved by the IMS office.

2. How should I deliver my proposal to my examiners?

Please deliver your proposal to your examiners either by pdf or hard-copy depending on their preference. If they request a hard-copy, the supervisor is requested to cover courier costs for the student.

3. I'm having difficulty finding a date that all my examiners are available, what should I do?

This is a common problem. Luckily there are logistical solutions that can make scheduling much simpler. The following tips may help alleviate some stress around coordinating your exam committee.

- Keep in mind that not all PAC members have to be present at the exam. If you are really struggling with having them all present at the exam, just ensure that your committee meets minimum voting quorum.
- If a member is out of town on your preferred exam date, they can still participate via teleconference. To do so, they must remain on the line for the duration of the exam. Up to two members can participate via teleconference. Request teleconference when you book your exam.

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QUALIFYING / TRANSFER EXAMINATION Nomination Form

PLEASE NOTE: ALL documentation MUST be submitted to the IMS office a minimum of six (6) working weeks prior to the examination date.

This is a: Qualifying Examination MSc-to-PhD Transfer Examination

Student Name: _____ Student #: _____

Student Phone #: _____ VALID UTmail+ E-mail: _____

Proposed Examination Date: _____ Time (3 hours) _____

Alternate Proposed Examination Date: _____ Time (3 hours) _____

Proposal Title: _____

| Examiner | Name & SGS Appointment | Mailing Address | Communications: |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Supervisor | Name: Dept: | | Phone: Email: |
| PAC Member # 1 | Name: Dept: | | Phone: Email: |
| PAC Member # 2 | Name: Dept: | | Phone: Email: |
| PAC Member # 3 (if applicable) | Name: Dept: | | Phone: Email: |
| Examiner #1 | Name: Dept: | | Phone: Email: |
| Examiner #2 | Name: Dept: | | Phone: Email: |
| Internal Examiner/ Appraiser | Name: Dept: | | Phone: Email: |

MAKE SURE ALL contact information on this form is correct and legible. The IMS will not be held responsible for any incorrect e-mail addresses and contact information provided.