

Advancing to PhD Candidacy

Summary

- The initial two years of the MS and PhD programs are similarly structured, with a common core curriculum and research project requirement. This facilitates transitions between programs, in either direction.
- Students in the PhD program advance to PhD candidacy by satisfying the qualifying procedure, which consists of a written exam based on the core courses and an oral exam based on a research portfolio including the research project (see below).
- In order to advance to PhD candidacy, students must successfully complete both components of the qualifying procedure, normally by the end of their second year in the program.
- Students admitted into the MS program may be promoted into the PhD program if they successfully complete the qualifying procedure.

Qualifying Procedure

All students in the PhD program must pass a qualifying examination after completing the core curriculum and prior to embarking on the PhD dissertation project. Students admitted to the MS program may also be granted permission to attempt the PhD qualifier, in order to transfer into the PhD program. The purpose of the examination is to ensure the student has the necessary background knowledge and intellectual skills to carry out doctoral-level research in the subject areas of AST.

The examination is in two parts, both of which must be passed separately.

- I. A written examination based on the core courses.
- II. An oral examination based on the student's research portfolio, which will include a written report on the master's level research project.

Both components of the Qualifying Procedure must be passed before the student will be permitted to advance to PhD candidacy. For full time students, this requirement must be satisfied by the end of their second year in the program.

The two-year time limit may be extended, in special circumstances, at the discretion of the Program Director.

When the Qualifier may be attempted

Students will normally attempt the PhD Qualifying Procedure during the Summer of year 2, after completing all 6 core courses and compiling a research portfolio.

However, a student may elect, after consulting with his/her advisor or mentor, to attempt one or both parts of the qualifying procedure during the Summer of their first year in the program. This applies to students enrolled in both the PhD and MS programs.

A student wishing to attempt the qualifying procedure early must inform the Program Director no later than four weeks prior to the end of the Spring Quarter of that year.

AR 8/23/10

In general, students may take the written and oral exams in the same year (either Year 1 or 2), or in consecutive years (e.g., written exam in Year 1, oral exam in Year 2). However, both components (written and oral) must be passed before the student can advance to PhD candidacy.

Written Exam

The written examination is based on material covered by the AST core courses. It will normally be held in early June.

The Exam will be compiled, administered, and graded by an Exam Board, which will normally consist of the core course instructors and an independent chair nominated by the Program Director.

The Board will compile the results and make a pass-fail recommendation for each individual student. In the case of Year 2 students, the board may permit the student to retake all or part of the written examination. Make-up exams will normally be scheduled in August of Year 2. Year 1 students attempting early qualification will not be allowed to retake the written exam in the same year, but are free to attempt it again in Year 2.

Research Portfolio and Oral Examination

The oral examination is based on a Research Portfolio compiled by the student. It will typically include

- a record of graduate research seminar activities.
- A list of oral or poster presentations
- a written report on a masters-level research project
- published papers or manuscripts submitted for publications (if any)

One or more papers published in, or accepted by, major refereed journals may be submitted as part of the research project report. The report must nevertheless include an introduction that explains the context and significance of the work reported in the paper(s). It must also include a detailed statement, endorsed by the advisor, describing the student's contribution to the work.

The oral examination will take the form of a 40-minute public presentation by the student, followed by a closed question session with the Qualifying Exam Committee.

The Qualifying Exam Committee will be chaired by an AST faculty member appointed by the Program Director and will include the student's research advisor, mentor (if different) and one other faculty member.

The Committee will make a pass-fail recommendation based on its evaluation of the quality of the student's research portfolio and overall performance in the oral examination. In the case of a fail, the committee may require the student to re-submit an improved research portfolio within a specified time limit.