Qualifying Exam Policies
and Procedures
I. Eligibility to Sit for the Qualifying Exam (QE)

The QE must be taken either in the semester the student is completing her/his coursework or the following semester. Coursework refers to all core courses, all advanced theory and applications courses, and all advanced research methods and statistics courses. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) must receive the student’s updated program plan that has been signed by the student’s faculty advisor in the specific space on the program plan indicating eligibility to sit for the QE.

Students must pass all sections of the In-School and Take-Home examination within two attempts before advancing to candidacy and before commencement of dissertation research. If a student does not pass one or more sections of the exam after two attempts, the student will be dismissed from the doctoral program.

II. Preparing for the exam

Orientation Session

A one-hour orientation session is held each semester (either in February or October) for any students planning to take the exam at the end of the current semester or at any time in the future. Exam logistics and preparation tips will be covered. Students may ask any questions about the exam content and or preparation; however, specific questions about the exact content or structure of a specific semester’s exam will not be revealed. The session is not mandatory for students to attend, but it is highly recommended that all students attend at least once prior to sitting for the exam.

In addition to attending the orientation session, some students prepare for the exam by forming study groups while other students prefer to study on their own. Some students even work with faculty to help them review material depending on faculty availability and willingness. There is no right or wrong way to prepare. Use your own judgment as you know your studying style the best of anyone.

Disability Accommodations

If you have any acute or chronic physical or mental disability or problems, please inform the DGS PRIOR to the exam so that proper accommodations can be made within the department and/or through University Student Disability Services. It is imperative to inform the department ahead of the time if accommodations are needed as your performance may be adversely affected and will not be appealable after the fact should you not pass one or more sections of the exam.

III. The Exam

The exam consists of two sections or parts (in-school and take-home) based on the PhD competencies and learning objectives. Each section is described below.
**In-School Section**

The in-school section is administered first and is typically held on a day either at the end of finals week in December or May or on day in the week following finals week. It is a 6-hour in-school, closed-book written exam that is designed to test whether the student can successfully synthesize, integrate, and apply the content and concepts of his/her coursework and other relevant experience (e.g., independent study work, work as a research assistant). The in-school section is comprised of three main domains/questions: (1) Theory, (2) Study Design and Research Methods, and (3) Measurement and Analysis (Statistics).

The in-school section is typically held in the department conference room from 9:00am to 3:00pm on the scheduled day. Students are provided with laptops with power cords and a blank removable disk. At any time before 3pm or at 3pm, students must bring the removable disk that contains their exam responses to the DGS’s office. The DGS will print out a copy of the student’s exam and request that the student review his/her exam. It is imperative that the student review the hard copy of his/her exam to be certain that all responses are complete and nothing was accidently deleted or left on the laptop hard drive. If the hard copy is complete, the student will hand the hard copy of his/her exam and any scratch paper they may have written on to the DGS. Students should shut down their laptops and leave them in the conference room. Upon departing, the students will be given a hard copy of the take-home exam, which will be due two weeks from the day of the in-school section.

For each of the three domains/questions of the in-school section, a committee of three faculty members will create the questions and evaluate the student responses. The final pass/no pass result will be based on a consensus or majority vote of three faculty members who comprise the committee. Therefore, a total of nine different faculty members will be involved in evaluating student in-school responses (i.e., three faculty members for each of the three domains/questions). All faculty members will be blinded regarding the identity of the student. Therefore, no personally identifying information should be included on any of the answers. Students will be asked to put a 4-digit identifier code of their choosing in the footer of their exam.

**Take-Home Section**

The second section of the exam, which is distributed to students when they complete the in-school portion, is a 2-week take-home, open-book written exam that is designed to test whether the student can synthesize literature and develop a state-of-the art demonstration and evaluation project proposal. The take-home portion the exam will consist of challenging and innovative questions for which the student will provide a concise Statement of the Problem, Theoretical Basis for an Intervention, an Intervention and an Evaluation Design. In some instances, the student will be asked to write a grant proposal in response to an actual Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for Application (RFA). In many instances, yet not all, a health topic and target population will be assigned. Students will be required to hand in four (4) hard copies of their take-home exam response to the
DGS by 12:00 noon on the day it is due. Students must put the same 4-digit identifier code that was used for the in-school portion of the exam in the footer on each page of the take-home exam. Late exams are not accepted so please plan accordingly for potential printer issues (e.g., printer ink cartridge running out, overall printer malfunction), childcare issues, and traffic issues related to weather, construction, volume, accidents, etc.

As with the in-school section, the take-home section will be created and evaluated by a committee of three faculty members. The final result of pass/no pass will be based on a majority vote of the committee.

IV. Examination Results

A detailed results letter will be e-mailed to the student and the student’s faculty advisor by the DGS within 30 days of the student’s exam date. Overall comments outlining strengths and weaknesses and a final pass/no pass grade will be included for each of the three in-school questions and the take-home portion of the exam. If a student does not pass one or more questions on the exam, he or she must re-take only the question(s) that the student did not pass within one calendar year. It is expected that the student will meet with his/her faculty advisor to put together a remedial plan. This may include additional coursework, repeating courses, auditing courses, reading assigned articles and/or textbooks, or conducting independent study credits with faculty members.

V. Appealing Examination Results

If a student wishes to appeal the results of his/her examination results, he/she must do so in writing to the Chair and DGS within 30 days of receiving results. Please note: if the exam is taken in December/January, 30 days will be past the period for registering for spring classes whether they are remedial courses or post-QE courses so it is essential to act quickly when filing an appeal in January. All appeals will be discussed by all faculty and a decision will be communicated to the student.

If students wish to see a copy of their in-school exam during their appeal process or during their remedial process, they may do so by making an appointment with his/her faculty advisor who will be given a copy and can review their responses with the student in the faculty member’s office. Students may not keep a copy of their in-school exam. It is recommended that students review their response(s) along with their advisor while consulting their results letter.

VI. The PhD Program Post-QE

Once students have passed all sections of the QE, they may begin their 15 credits of Individualized Research Plan credits (HLTH 898) and any additional courses they wish to take. It is expected that students will apply for candidacy within two semesters of passing all sections of the QE. Once advancing to candidacy, students must complete a minimum of 12 credits of dissertation research (HLTH 899) before graduating.