

GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
OF
BRYN MAWR
COLLEGE

(updated 3/12/2024)

**PH.D. PRELIMINARY EXAMINATIONS GUIDELINES
for Chairs and Members of Ph.D. Supervising Committee**

The responsibilities and procedures of Ph.D. Supervising Committees are outlined in the Academic Rules of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. The Rules can be found here:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/gsas/about-school/policies-forms#Academic%20Rules>

The present summary is intended for ready reference. Chairs, Supervising Committee members, and students are encouraged to consult the Academic Rules for more complete information.

HIGHLIGHTS

Role of the Chair

The role of the chair of the Ph.D. Supervising Committee is to be an impartial moderator at oral examinations, to ensure that examinations are civil and fair, and to ensure that all requirements are completed and that documentation of examinations is accurate and complete. The student may appeal to the chair in the event of irreconcilable differences with the Dissertation Director. The chair convenes the Supervising Committee before the Ph.D. oral Preliminary Examination or the oral Final Examination if one or more committee members are dissatisfied with the student's performance.

Constitution of the Ph.D. Supervising Committee

The Committee must have at least four members plus the Chair. The four members must include the Dissertation Director of the student's work (if named/designated), two other members from either the student's department(s) or allied department, and one or more additional members of the faculty. If the Dissertation Director is not a member of the student's department, another member of the Supervising Committee who is in the student's department must be designated to serve as Departmental Director of the student's progress toward the Ph.D. Committee members are recommended by the Dissertation Director or by the Director of Graduate Studies in the student's department at the time of the student's application for Ph.D. candidacy submitted through the online Ph.D. Candidacy Application form. Appointment of a committee member not on the faculty of Bryn Mawr College requires the prior approval of the Dean.

Responsibilities of the Ph.D. Supervising Committee

The Supervising Committee shall have the responsibility of the preliminary examinations and final examination of the dissertation. The Dissertation Director takes major responsibility for planning the candidate's program of study, for informing the Director of Graduate Studies and the Supervising Committee of the fields to be offered for examination, and of the subject of the dissertation. The Dissertation Director shall keep the Director of Graduate Studies and the Supervising Committee informed of any changes in the student's fields for examination or in the subject of the dissertation. The Dissertation Director shall take major responsibility for supervising the preparation of the dissertation and such changes as may be required by the Supervising Committee at the final

examination. The fields covered by the preliminary examinations will be established by the Director of Graduate Studies or Dissertation Director (if already named) in consultation with the members of the Supervising Committee.

Format of the examinations

In *Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology, Greek, Latin and Classical Studies, and History of Art*, there are four written examinations and an oral. The oral must be held within five weeks of the first written exam. All examiners should have read all four examinations and all participate in the oral.

In *Chemistry*, the Preliminary Examinations consist of one written examination focusing on an original research proposal on a topic outside their dissertation research, accompanied by a public presentation and oral defense. A period of longer than five weeks is permitted because of the special form of these examinations.

In *Mathematics*, the Preliminary Examinations consist of a short course of 3-4 lectures addressed to graduate students and faculty in mathematics, a written component, and an oral examination.

In *Physics*, the Preliminary Examinations consist of four four-hour examinations demonstrating proficiency in core areas of physics, and a one-hour oral examination on the proposed dissertation research. A period of longer than five weeks is permitted because of the special form of these examinations.

Timing of the examinations

Preliminary Examinations may be taken only **during the academic year** and **not within the 30 days immediately before the December degree date or Commencement**. Examinations are scheduled by Ph.D. students through their department or program, often assisted by the department [Academic Administrative Assistant](#). They must be scheduled by the beginning of October in semester I and by the beginning of February in semester II (the scheduling deadlines are posted on the GSAS website). Exceptions may be granted by the Dean of Graduate Studies, upon request of the Director of Graduate Studies or Dissertation Director in consultation with chair of the Supervising Committee.

Written examinations

Written examinations should be distributed to members of the Supervising Committee as soon as they are completed. The members of the Supervising Committee shall read all examinations promptly, and if any of the examinations is unsatisfactory to any member, they should notify the chair so that it can be determined if the Ph.D. student should continue with the Preliminary Examinations. If multiple examiners find one or more examinations unsatisfactory, or if one examiner feels especially strongly, the Chair may decide to convene the committee before the oral to determine whether the oral exam should be deferred or cancelled (in which case, no votes on the written examinations are recorded, and the student may be required to take them again at a later time).

Conduct of the oral examination

By the day of the oral exam, the Chair must pick up the necessary paperwork, including the student's *Record of Preliminary Exam completion form*, from the GSAS office (Old Library, room 120) or print the form from the following link:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/gsas/about-school/policies-forms#Prelim%20Exam%20Form>

Oral examinations must last **at least one hour and no longer than two hours**. Time and conduct are monitored by the Chair. At the beginning of the exam, the Chair asks the student to leave the room so the committee can briefly discuss the written examinations and fix the time and order allotted to each examiner (the exam must last at least one hour; normally, examiners are initially allotted 15-20 minutes apiece). The student is then invited back into the room, and the Chair sees that the examination proceeds in the order agreed upon. Committee members should not interrupt their colleagues unless it

has been previously agreed that this is acceptable. After every examiner has finished their allotted time, the Chair should ask if any member of the Committee has further questions for the Ph.D. student. The Chair is not a voting member of the Committee but may put questions to the Ph.D. student after the other Committee members have finished. After the last question the Ph.D. student is asked to leave the room while the Committee deliberates. The student is invited to return a final time to hear the results. The outcome of the examination is recorded on the candidacy form.

Possible outcomes

The only permissible outcomes are: *Satisfactory*; *Partially Satisfactory*; *Unsatisfactory*. The vote of the Supervising Committee shall be recorded on the student's *Record of Preliminary Exam completion form* (linked above) and signed by the members of the committee. The committee shall state explicitly on the form when the Ph.D. student is to make up any deficiencies and whether by written examination or in some other manner approved by the committee, as appropriate to the seriousness of the deficiency. All deficiencies must be made up before the Ph.D. student may submit the dissertation as a Ph.D. candidate. If the result is "Unsatisfactory," the Ph.D. student may be refused permission to continue work for the Ph.D. degree and excluded from the program or may be asked to retake the Preliminary Examinations. If there is a difference in opinion in the Supervising Committee, the majority vote shall be decisive. The vote of the dissenting members shall be recorded on the Ph.D. student's Ph.D. application form, and they may file a minority report.

Get the signatures

The Chair ensures that every examiner signs the student's *Record of Preliminary Exam completion form* (linked above) in the proper place at the end of the examination. The Chair also signs the form (in a different place) to confirm their oversight of the exam.

Return the form

At the end of the examination the Chair delivers the signed form and, in the case of a deficiency, any instructions, to the GSAS office. The Dean communicates the result of the examinations in writing to the student. If additional work is assigned to correct deficiencies, the Committee must attest that the additional work is satisfactory, and this result must be recorded on the student's Ph.D. candidacy form. Preliminary Examinations must be passed satisfactorily within one year of the first written examination. **No candidate may be permitted more than one reexamination when the first examination is unsatisfactory.**