Ph.D. in the Built Environment
General Examination Policy

October 2026

Upon completion of required coursework the student will complete the General Examination to demonstrate mastery over the major dimensions of their identified domain of study. Typically, students in the BE PhD program take their General Exam toward the end of their second year or early in their third year in the program. Students who expect their timeline for the exam to fall outside this general framework should consult the Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) and the Graduate Program Advisor (GPA), preferably late in their second year. The General Examination, which consists of a written and oral exam, ensures that the student has a broad understanding of their domain of specialization, including the background contexts, major figures and concepts, relevant research methodologies and approaches, as well as mastery of what is focally important for the proposed dissertation research. Students should consult this document, Graduate School policies, and the GPA for procedural requirements and deadlines.

Supervisory Committee

The student, in consultation with faculty, shall form a Supervisory Committee that meets all current requirements of Graduate School Policy 4.2: Supervisory Committee for Graduate Students at the time of the General Examination. The committee must include at least four members:

a) The Chair, or at least one co-Chair, must be a member of the BE Core Program Faculty
b) A second committee member must be a member of the BE Core Faculty.
c) A third committee member typically holds a UW faculty appointment but need not be a member of the BE faculty or hold a Doctoral Endorsement. Faculty or scholars from outside the university can also be included on the committee.
d) The Graduate School Representative (GSR) must be a UW faculty member who satisfies all current Graduate School eligibility requirements, including Graduate Faculty status, Doctoral Endorsement, independence from the student's program and the Chair's department, and absence of conflicts of interest.

The Supervisory Committee should be established at least three months before the General Examination unless otherwise approved by the GPC.

Examination Preparation

The Supervisory Committee, working collaboratively with the student, shall define the domain of study and develop a reading list that constitutes the basis for the examination. Students should meet periodically with committee members on their areas of specialization (and at least once with the committee as a whole), during this preparation period. These meetings can be in-person or remote.

The student, in consultation with the Supervisory Committee, must schedule the written and oral examinations. The date, time, and place of the oral exam must be conveyed to

the Graduate School by the student through MyGrad Program according to current Graduate School deadlines and procedures. The written exam precedes the oral exam, but its scheduling is up to the student and their committee. This should allow seven days for the student to write the exam responses, as well as sufficient time for the Supervisory Committee to read and evaluate the responses before the oral exam. Students must be enrolled for the quarter in which the general examination is conducted.

Written Examination
The examination shall address three areas: (a) theoretical, historical, cultural, and context; (b) research methodology and research design; and (c) the student's intended dissertation subject matter and research approach.

All three question sets are related to the student's domain of study as previously determined by the Supervisory Committee when developing the reading list. The first question set covers the overall theoretical, historical, and cultural context relevant to the area of study; the second question set covers the research methods and design that the committee requires the student to know, whether specifically for the dissertation research or as part of what the committee deems important for the student's general competence; the third question set covers the specific aspects of the student's intended research.

The committee shall prepare questions covering the approved examination areas. The examination itself consists of three sets of questions that provide the student with a choice among at least two alternatives in each area. Individual committee members may contribute several questions in one area and/or contribute a question for 2 or 3 of the areas to be covered.

The Chair (or co-Chairs) of the committee initiates, oversees, and collects these questions, and finalizes the General Examination. Unless otherwise approved by the Supervisory Committee, the written take-home examination shall be completed within seven calendar days.

Evaluation of Written Responses
The Supervisory Committee evaluates the written examination. If the written examination responses are satisfactory, the student will proceed to the oral General Examination. If the written exam responses are not satisfactory, the Supervisory Committee will determine the appropriate course of action on a case-by-case basis.

Oral General Examination
In the oral General Examination, the student should be prepared to further discuss the questions presented in the written examination. The Supervisory Committee may address questions not selected by the student for the written examination and/or ask the student to elaborate or clarify the answers given in the written examination.

A minimum of four supervisory committee members must participate in the Oral General Examination, including the Chair, the GSR, and at least one committee member who is a Graduate Faculty member. Oral examinations may be conducted in person, remotely, or

in a hybrid format consistent with current Graduate School requirements for doctoral examinations.

Upon completion of the oral examination, the committee shall determine whether the student's performance on the General Examination has been satisfactory or unsatisfactory and report the result through the procedures established by the Graduate School.

If the Advisory Committee determines that an examination is unsatisfactory, it may allow the student to take another examination after a period of further study. A maximum of two re-examinations is permitted. Recommendations for any re-examination shall be made in accordance with Graduate School policy 1.1.4.1.

Candidacy and Dissertation Proposal

Successful completion of the General Examination constitutes advancement to doctoral candidacy and demonstrates readiness to undertake independent doctoral research.
The student will proceed with the development and approval of the dissertation proposal under the guidance of the Supervisory Committee. A separate committee meeting is held to review and approve the dissertation proposal.

Referenced Policies:

UW Graduate School Policy 1.1 Graduate Degree Requirements
UW Graduate School Policy 1.1.4 Doctoral Degrees other than Practice Doctorates
UW Graduate School Policy 4.2 Supervisory Committees
Guidance (Academic requirements): Graduate School Representative (GSR) Eligibility
Guidance (Academic requirements): General Examination and Virtual Doctoral Examinations
Related Graduate School regulations and procedures.