

ATS Qualifying Exam Policies

PhD Qualifying Exam Process and Guidelines for Atmospheric Science

All students in the PhD program are required to pass the qualifying exam. Students should pass the preliminary exam before attempting the qualifying exam. The qualifying exam is intended to test the depth of knowledge in a student's research area and the proposed research. The student must also take ATS 782 (the Professional Development course) before attempting the qualifying exam since proposal writing is emphasized in that course.

The exam has a written and an oral component. Note that, although there are two components to the qualifying exam, they are in fact one exam. A student has two attempts to pass the qualifying exam.

1. **Proposal.** The student must write a 15 page proposal including figures (excluding references) in single spaced 12 pitch font 1 inch margin format. The format for this proposal is outlined in the ATS 782 course. The proposal must include an outline detailing when the student will finish the research and defend the dissertation. The advisor must approve this proposal.
2. **Initial committee meeting.** At least two weeks before the initial committee meeting, the student must email the proposal to committee members (CMs).
3. **Committee meeting.** At the committee meeting, the student will make a 15-20 minute presentation that will provide an overview of the research proposal. This initial committee meeting is for introductory purposes only and not to be construed as an exam.
4. **Questions to Advisor.** Two weeks after this meeting, each committee member should email two to three questions to the advisor. Note that the minimum required number of committee members for a PhD is five for graduate school, but sometimes a student has more committee members. A total of eight to ten questions is reasonable for this 70 hour exam.
5. **Written exam.** Typically, the student takes this exam over the weekend. Therefore, the advisor must email the questions to the students between 11:30 a.m. and 12:00 noon on Friday. The questions must also be emailed to the department chair (chair@nsstc.uah.edu). The student has 70 hours to answer the questions. The answers must be emailed back the advisor **and the chair** on or before 10:00 a.m. on Monday. The student can scan the exam and email it to the advisor. To ensure fairness for all students who take these exams, no extra time to answer these questions will be allowed. If the advisor does not receive the student responses on or before 10:00 a.m., the student must retake the exam. The committee will write new questions, and the process will be repeated. At this point, the student has only one more attempt to pass the exam. The guidelines and format with example questions are listed in the attached file.

6. **Student responses to CMs.** The advisor then provides the student responses to the CMs.
7. **CM evaluations.** The CMs must provide a pass or fail grade to the responses that must be on file in the department.
8. **Oral Examination.** The student should take the oral examination two weeks after the written exam. This portion of the exam is used to a) test the students knowledge in the proposed area of research that will include a testing of the fundamentals of Atmospheric Science and b) follow up questions to the written portion of the exam. At the end of the oral exam the CMs will collectively decide (with a vote) to Pass, Fail, or Conditionally Pass the student. Remedial work for conditional pass must be clearly outlined and must remain on file in the department. If a student fails the exam, they have another attempt to pass the exam that could include both oral and/or written portions.

**Paperwork (All forms in the Graduate Studies website,
<http://www.uah.edu/gradschool/forms.php>)**

1. Student must first have an approved program of study with signature of committee members before taking the qualifying exam.
2. Two weeks before the student takes the oral component of the qualifying exam he/she must fill out Notification for qualifying exam.
3. The advisor must pick up the qualifying exam form on the day of the exam. At the end of the oral exam after the committee has made its decision, they must sign and return the form to the ATS staff assistant.
4. For students on GRAs, upon successful completion of their qualifying exam, their stipend will be increased by \$100 per month beginning the following semester. Students must successfully complete the qualifying exam with a passing grade at least 3 weeks before the start of the next semester to obtain this pay raise.