GMAT Qualifying Exam Guidelines (DRAFT)

As expressed by the Dean of Graduate Studies, the Doctoral Qualifying Examination is not only a major benchmark in the student's career, but a point at which the faculty must reflect with wisdom on the student's general qualifications for a respected position as an educator or leader as well as the student's preparation in a special area of study. The intended outcome of this examination is a unanimous decision by the committee based on:

- Relevant portions of the student's previous academic record;
- Performance on specific parts of the examination; and
- Overall evaluation of the student's performance and potential for scholarly research as indicated during the examination.

GMAT Guideline for Qualifying Exam committees

The QE will consist of a written proposal (which should be reviewed and approved by the thesis adviser) and oral examination. The written proposal should consist of a research proposal and a coursework syllabus. The research proposal should be between two and four pages in length [NOTE: the guidelines on the department webpage says 1-3 pages for the entire proposal, but this is way too short] containing an outline of the general context of the thesis research, a description of the specific problem(s) to be addressed, and an indication of the methods and techniques to be used. The syllabus of coursework material must cover graduate material falling in at least 3 different subject areas, including Analysis and Algebra. The Graduate Program Committee (GPC) reviews the proposal and approves it if it satisfies a breadth and depth requirement. It is very important that the coursework is actually tested in the exam; see the rationale below.

The following is a recommended breakdown of a qualifying exam; the actual time for each portion of the exam is left to the discretion of the chair.

Ideally, the talk should be no more than 45 minutes, or one hour including questions from the committee. This is followed by a brief break (5-10 minutes). The separate question-and-answer period could be up to two hours.

Rationale:

It is very important that a thorough examination of coursework is included in the exam, no matter how strong or weak a candidate's performance in the research component. Our strongest students study very hard for the qualifying exam and may be disappointed if no (or too
few or too shallow) coursework questions are asked. Our weakest students will be motivated by a consistently thorough coursework examination to study harder for the qualifying exam. Studying for the qualifying exam will counter the oft-observed phenomenon that the material of a course is forgotten quickly after the finals have been written. Also, knowing the tools and methods of a broader field of study reduces the risk of getting stuck in a particular research direction.