

ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY

Preliminary examinations, or such other substantial tests as the graduate programs may elect, are prerequisites for advancement to candidacy. A student must be admitted to candidacy for the doctorate within five years after admission to the doctoral program and at least six months before the date on which the degree will be conferred. It is the responsibility of the student to submit an application for admission to candidacy when all the requirements for candidacy have been fulfilled.

Applications for admission to candidacy are submitted to the graduate program for further action and transmission to the Graduate School. Applications must be received by the Graduate School prior to the 25th of the month in order for the advancement to become effective the first day of the following month. Doctoral candidates will be registered for six (6) credits of Doctoral Dissertation Research (899) by the Office of the Registrar until program completion for which they pay the flat candidacy tuition.

The Specialty Exam Committee

The 5 member committee should consist of a minimum of 3 full members of the AOSC faculty unless approved otherwise by the advisor and DGS. Outside members can serve on the committee provided they have established membership on the UMD Graduate Faculty. Non Graduate Faculty members can serve with the approval of the advisor but will be required to apply for membership on the graduate faculty prior to the dissertation defense. Please Note: Though permitted, the Dissertation Dean's Representative are not required to (and typically do not) serve on the prospectus committee.

AOSC Guidelines for Specialty Exam

After completing all core courses and obtaining some preliminary research results, students should be ready to take the Specialty (candidacy) Examination consisting of a no-more-than 20 pages, single-spaced, dissertation prospectus (excluding references, appendices, tables, and figures) and an oral examination. For the oral exam, each student will present his/her thesis proposal in ~45 minutes in front of his/her advisor and the mentoring committee, followed by questions from some weak areas of the candidate's Comprehensive Exam or questions of a general nature.

Elements of the dissertation prospectus/proposal may contain:

1. A preliminary dissertation title
2. An Abstract of less than 1 page to state clearly what motivate(s) you to do, what preliminary results are, what goal(s) of your study are, and what potential significance you may expect.

3. An Introduction of 2-3 pages to provide a literature review appropriate to your research question(s), summarizing significant research achievements to date, the remaining scientific issues/limitations, and the research questions and hypotheses being put forward. The hypotheses should be well thought out, and they should be testable, exploratory, and evaluable.
4. A Methodology/Data/Tool/Experiment Design section of 2-4 pages to describe the methodologies and procedures used to test/evaluate your hypotheses.
5. A Preliminary Results section of 7-8 pages to show what you have achieved in your hypothesis testing and describe what tasks/questions remain to be completed.
6. A Work Plans section of 2-3 pages to describe realistically what you plan to do in the few years to complete your Ph. D. dissertation objectives. Work plans often look too ambitious.
7. A Timeline section of no more than 1 page for completing your work.

The exam committee will evaluate (i) the quality of the written proposal in terms of clarity, organization, literature review, figures, and tables; (ii) the quality of research plan in terms of motivation, preliminary results, experiment design, possible significance, and timelines to finish; and (iii) the quality of oral presentation in terms of organization, clarity, general knowledge, and ability to defend.

The dissertation prospectus should be well written, and its oral presentation and defense should be thoughtful and robust. Passing the Speciality Exam is also contingent on successfully answering the general questions posed by the committee while conveying a nuanced understanding of the involved topics

Students will have two opportunities to pass the Specialty Exam.

Read carefully the specific requirements for the doctoral degree as set forth in the [Graduate Catalog](#). Complete [this form](#) and have it endorsed by your advisor and the Director of the Graduate Program in which the degree is offered. This form must be received by The Office of the Registrar prior to the **25th of the month** in order for the advancement to be effective the first day of the following month. All admission provisions must be met in order to advance to candidacy.