

## ACING YOUR QUALIFYING EXAM: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

### 1. Understand the qualifying exam.

- a. Ask all your committee members the questions:
  - i. How much time does the exam usually take?
  - ii. What is the format of the exam?
  - iii. How is your performance assessed?

### 2. Know your examiners.

- a. You should research the following:
  - i. What is your committee member's academic training? Where did they get their degrees, in what departments?
  - ii. What are your examiners publications? What do they write about? In what journals do they publish papers?
- b. When you meet with them should ask each of them the following questions:
  - i. What is their philosophy towards the examination?
  - ii. Ask them if your lab/department has a book of commonly asked qualifying exam questions?
  - iii. What types of questions do they usually ask?

### 3. Prepare early and systematically.

- a. Begin your systematic studying in advance
- b. First review the basics and specifics of your field
- c. Prepare and practice your dissertation proposal
- d. Prepare a "how I came to be here speech."
- e. Prepare for anticipated questions
- f. Hold a practice, or "mock" qualifying exam
- g. Review recent journals

### 4. Reduce your stress.

- a. Have a plan and time table
- b. Schedule exam at good time and location for your comfort
- c. Decide in advance:
  - i. How will you respond to "off the wall" questions?
  - ii. How will you respond to questions that you do not know?
- d. The week before
  - i. Reconfirm date and location of exam room with all committee members
  - ii. Visit exam room and check keys, lighting...etc.

### 5. Know what you will do the day of the exam.

- a. The morning of
  - i. Dress up, eat a small meal, drive or have someone drive you, do not bike or take public transportation.
  - ii. Get to the exam room early, but do not wait in the room, go for a walk and watch your time.
- b. During the exam
  - i. Utilize the break for a walk, or stretch.
  - ii. Speak clearly, slowly, and do not interrupt when examiners are talking.
  - iii. Be sure to thank all of your examiners.