

ACING YOUR QUALIFYING EXAM: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

1. Understanding 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, you 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 the exam at a 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 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 your examiners.

Written by Rhea Presiado, U.C. Davis Professors for the Future, using exam preparation material from Dr. Louis Grivetti, U.C. Davis Department of Nutrition.