This document specifies routine procedures for the Ph.D. oral examination in accordance with the NSE Doctoral Degree Requirements approved by the NSE faculty in May 2013 (and described in the companion document “Requirements for the Doctorate in Nuclear Science and Engineering”). It also clarifies interpretations of several matters in the Requirements document, and identifies responsible parties.

Field Exam Coordinator

It is the responsibility of the “Field Exam Coordinator”, a faculty member in the student’s field of specialization who is appointed by the Department Exam Coordinator, to choose or at least approve the proposed examination committee. It is also the responsibility of the Field Exam Coordinator to ensure that the examination committee receives a copy of the 5-10 page Prepared Paper, and to ensure that the question in the student’s field of specialization is prepared.

Prepared Paper

The 5-10 page Prepared Paper is prescribed in detail in the Requirements document. It should follow full professional standards, including citations, and it should not contain passages written by others without proper attribution. The paper should include reference to relevant theory, experiment, past practice, and methodological considerations.

Oral Examination

Part 1 of the examination should occupy one half of the total exam time. It will begin with a limited period of typically one quarter of the total time allocated for this part, during which the student presents the Prepared Paper. During this presentation the student will be interrupted only for brief clarification. Detailed questioning will then occupy the rest of the time. Like the written paper itself, any visual aids used by the student in this part of the oral exam should follow full professional standards.

Part 2 of the oral will consist of a question that is the same for all students in a particular field of specialization during that exam period. The Field Exam Coordinator will arrange for it to be prepared. It must be reviewed and approved by at least two faculty/research staff in the field of specialization.
Immediately following the exam, the student will leave the room and the committee will meet in its assessment session. Members of the oral committee will assign a score out of ten for the two parts of the exam separately, and the average will be used to determine the overall result. A score of 6 will correspond to the middle point of the “Marginal Performance” evaluation. In addition to the overall result, which the Requirements define as Pass, Marginal Performance, or Fail, the oral exam chairman will convey to the Department Exam Coordinator the average and the highest and lowest numerical grade for each part assigned by committee members at the evaluation. Those numerical grades will not be communicated to the student, but they will be available to the faculty in confidence if the student comes up for faculty discussion.

As stated in the Requirements document, the committee chair will provide feedback to the student shortly after the oral examination. If the student receives a grade of marginal performance or fail, at least one other member of the committee will also provide feedback.

Role of the Research Supervisor

The research supervisor cannot reasonably be forbidden from advising a student on the Prepared Paper. Nevertheless, the research supervisor should be able to verify that he or she composed no unattributed passages of the Prepared Paper.

A research supervisor will often be a member of the oral committee. No member of the committee should act as a student’s advocate during the exam. Committee members should not answer questions put to the student and should provide explanations to the committee only during the assessment discussion after the student has left the room.

April 2014
Attachment to Revision 31, August 2015
Attachment to Revision 32, June 2016