Ph.D. Program in Linguistics
CUNY Graduate Center

Assessment of First Exam in Linguistics

Learning Goals of the First Exam
The First Exam is intended to assess students’ mastery of a core area in Linguistics i.e. Phonetics, Phonology; Morphology; Syntax; Semantics, Pragmatics or the application of a core area in an ancillary subfield such as language acquisition, language processing, computational linguistics, language documentation, or sociolinguistics. This assessment is based on a review of First Exams attempted in the last 3 years.

Description of the First Exam in Linguistics
The First Exam takes the form of a Qualifying Paper, termed QP1. The QP1 must demonstrate control of the literature in at least one of the core areas as stated above. The research question of the QP1 may be in any area of linguistics, but the analysis applied to it must be informed by knowledge of a core area commensurate with 30-45 credits of study. The QP1 must be written with a linguistically informed audience in mind, including readers not specialized in the topic area. It must adhere to a style that is commonly accepted in major journals in the field.

In order to aid students in the preparation of a timely and successful QP1, the Program has put in place several mechanisms:

Advising: Students must secure the participation of two faculty advisors, one of whom shall be the main advisor. Both will be selected by the student and approved by the Executive Officer. It is strongly recommended that, at the outset of preparing for the QP1, the student meet with each advisor to establish a reasonable working plan.

QP1 Workshop: Students preparing to submit their QP1 are required to enroll in the QP1 Workshop. The QP1 Workshop will be offered every Fall semester as a regular three credit course. The purpose of the QP1 Workshop is to enhance students’ research, argumentation and writing skills. For the content of the QP1, students should consult with their advisors and other faculty members specializing in the chosen topic.

Abstract submission: The student must submit an abstract approved by both advisors, including a brief description of the topic
The QP1 is evaluated by 2 faculty members selected by the EO. Three grades are possible: Pass, Pass with Revisions and Fail. In the case of Pass with Revisions or Fail, evaluators are asked to provide detailed comments.

In the case of a Pass with Revision, the student must follow the readers' comments to revise the QP1 under the supervision of the main advisor. In the case of a Fail, the student will be allowed to re-take the QP1 once, within one year of having submitted it initially. For the re-take, the student may change advisors, topic or core area(s). In the case of a Fail the student will receive written feedback from the QPC, detailing the reasons for the Fail. Students may not continue in the Program following a second failed submission.

Assessment:
30 students attempted to pass their first exam in the last 3 years (Jan 2010 - Feb. 2013). Of these attempts only one resulted in a Fail and two in Pass w/ revisions. The failed QP1 received ample comments and suggestions for revisions, was rewritten under the guidance of the original faculty mentor, resubmitted within 4 months and passed. The two QP1s receiving a grade of Pass with revisions were resubmitted within 3 months and passed.

Other statistics:
For this group, the average number of credits taken before passing the QP1 was 35.4, well below the maximum of 45 (range: 17-46). The average number of semesters before passing was 7.9.
4 of the 30 students have gone on to the second exam and passed.
We consider our First Exam to be an effective assessment, largely due to the supporting mechanisms that are in place, including the mentors who provide guidance, the QP1 workshop, which creates an atmosphere of peer support, and an evaluation process that provides feedback for weak QP1s.