

## UA CS PhD Qualifying Exam Portfolio Effective Fall 2026

The UA CS PhD Qualifying Exam Portfolio constitutes the formal checkpoint through which the Department of Computer Science evaluates whether a doctoral student possesses the intellectual capacity, disciplinary grounding, and research aptitude necessary to undertake a Ph.D. dissertation.

### Required Components

1. **Cover Letter:** Students must provide a short cover letter requesting a review of their portfolio. This letter should summarize the highlights of the portfolio. It should include the following items:
  - a. Description of the research project, justification for the quality of the venue, explanation of the reviews received [if applicable]
  - b. Description of any awards received [if applicable]
  - c. Description of funding/fellowships received by the student [if applicable]
  - d. Other noteworthy achievements (e.g., noteworthy GitHub repositories, media articles) [if applicable]
2. **Academic Transcript:** Students must have completed at least 2 of the core courses (students who utilized the block transfer must have completed at least 9 hours of graduate CS coursework at UA) and have an overall UA Graduate GPA of 3.0 or above. The student must submit their transcript containing all graduate coursework completed at UA. The transcript provides evidence of academic standing and course performance. The transcript must reflect a good academic standing consistent with departmental policy and the requirements of the Graduate School.
3. **Research Product:** The research product is the portfolio's central evidentiary component. It must constitute a student-led scholarly work that demonstrates the student's capacity for independent research inquiry, problem formulation, methodological rigor, and written communication of results. The student must be the **first and primary author**. The paper should describe work done while at UA. The paper should be submitted to an appropriate, peer-reviewed venue. The cover letter and Advisor's letter must provide evidence justifying the choice of venue. If the paper has co-authors, a letter/email from each co-author confirming that the student is the primary author must accompany the paper. The faculty committee will review these materials to determine whether the paper meets this criterion. The research product must fall within one or more of the following categories:
  - a. A **full-length** research paper or literature review (excluding posters, extended abstracts, invited papers, or other similar works) that has been accepted or published.
  - b. A **full-length** research paper or literature review (excluding posters, extended abstracts, invited papers, or other similar works) that is either under review, in revision or has been rejected but received positive review comments. In this case, the student must submit the original paper, the reviews (if received), and any revisions made to the paper based on the comments (if applicable).
4. **Research Statement:** The student must submit a research statement, which should be a **one-page** document in the ACM two-column template. The research statement articulates the student's prospective intellectual agenda and demonstrates the capacity for coherent, self-directed doctoral-level thinking. The research statement must address the following with clarity and precision:
  - a. The student's proposed research direction, including preliminary methodology or approach, where applicable, should be a forward-looking direction derived from their research product, such as new ideas stemming from the research product, or addressing any limitations of the research product.
  - b. The anticipated scholarly contribution is articulated in terms of what new knowledge, techniques, or understanding is expected to produce.

The research statement need not commit the student irrevocably to a specific dissertation topic; it is understood that doctoral research directions evolve. However, it must demonstrate that the student can identify a substantive problem and articulate a credible path to its investigation. The statement will be assessed for intellectual clarity, disciplinary awareness, and the coherence of the proposed research direction.

5. **Advisors' Recommendation Letter (Confidential):** The student's primary advisor (or advisors if there are co-advisors) must submit a letter that directly addresses the following:
  - a. The advisor's professional assessment of the student's research capability and potential.
  - b. The advisor's explicit endorsement of the student's readiness to pursue doctoral-level research.
  - c. An evaluation of the research statement's coherence and the student's preparedness to pursue the stated research direction.
  - d. Any relevant context regarding the research product, including confirmation that the study was the primary author and the quality of the venue.
6. **Faculty Recommendation Letters (Confidential):** The portfolio must include recommendation letters from two UA Computer Science tenure/tenure-track faculty members who have direct, substantive knowledge of the student's academic or research performance. These recommenders are chosen by the student, in consultation with their advisor. Eligible recommenders include:
  - a. Faculty members who have taught the student in a graduate-level course.
  - b. Faculty members who have supervised or collaborated with the student on research.
  - c. Faculty members who have observed the student in a research setting, such as being part of larger research group.

### Timing

- There will be one deadline each semester (Fall - October 15, Spring – March 15).
- Students must submit their portfolio no later than their fourth semester in the PhD program. If the student uses the Block Transfer, then they must submit their portfolio no later than their third semester in the PhD. program.
- Each student should work with their advisor to determine whether they are ready to submit the portfolio prior to the required semester.

### Evaluation

- During a faculty meeting, the tenure/tenure-track faculty will evaluate and discuss each portfolio to determine whether they believe the student has the capacity to do a PhD.
- Each faculty member present in the meeting will vote Pass or Fail. A student must receive a Pass vote from 2/3 of the faculty members present.
- If a student fails, they will receive written feedback and have one more attempt in the next semester (excluding Summers).

### Submission

- Instructions will be provided each semester about how to submit the portfolio.
- The recommendation letters will be collected separately as they are confidential.