

# STT Preliminary Exam Policy

*Updated March 2023*

Preliminary exams are given before the start of Fall and Spring semesters to gauge students' understanding. The exams have two parts: (a) Probability prelim based on STT881-882, and (b) Statistics prelim based on STT 867, 868 and 872. To remain in the doctoral program, students are required to pass both exams, which are taken in the semester following completion of STT 868, 872, 882. A student must pass the exams in at most two attempts for each and within 3 years of being admitted to the Ph.D. program.

A student is expected to attempt the preliminary examination the August after they have completed the courses on which the examination is based. Moreover, a student's first attempt for both examinations should occur within two years of enrollment in the program, and the second attempt, if needed, should occur within 2.5 years of enrollment in the program. The January administration of the exam is meant only for second attempts. Any exception to the above policy should only be granted by the graduate director (GD) in consultation with the Graduate Support Committee.

The GD has primary administrative responsibility for the preliminary examinations and is responsible for administrative oversight of the examination process.

## **The prelim examination committees**

There will be two prelim examination committees, one for the Probability prelim exam and one for the Statistics prelim exam. The graduate director names the exam committees (including naming a chair of each committee), each of which consists of at least two faculty members. Faculty members who teach 867/8, 872, and 881/2 are automatically on the corresponding committee. The GD will maintain close communication with the examination committees.

## **Accommodations for students with disabilities**

The Department of Statistics and Probability supports our students with disabilities. A student with a disability that substantially limits a major life activity can register with the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD) and may be eligible to receive accommodations for the preliminary examination(s). Upon determination of a reasonable accommodation, RCPD will issue a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA). The VISA is the primary method of documentation that enables a student to communicate their accommodations. The student is responsible for sharing their VISA with the chair of the preliminary examination committee after receiving the document from their RCPD Ability Access Specialist. The chair of the preliminary examination committee will facilitate implementation of the accommodations outlined in the VISA consistent with RCPD's policies and guidelines.

**Important Notice** - Students needing accommodations for the preliminary examination(s) are encouraged to register with RCPD as soon as possible to ensure there is adequate time to determine and coordinate appropriate accommodations. Accommodations are not retroactive, meaning they begin on the effective date of the VISA moving forward.

## **Other student concerns or issues**

If a student has concerns or issues related to the exam(s) (e.g., illness, death of a family member, etc.), or requires assistance for reasons other than a disability, the student should inform the GD at least four weeks before the exam(s) is(are) given or, in extenuating circumstances, as soon as possible. Such concerns or issues should be addressed and clarified before the student takes the exam(s). The GD will work with the student to determine whether the requested assistance is appropriate and if so, will communicate with the preliminary examination committee chair who will be responsible for implementing the assistance.

### **Prior to the exams**

Each student will be assigned a unique number by the graduate program coordinator (Ms. Tami Hankey). Students should only put their assigned number in their exam solution sheets. The number and name matching is kept confidential until after the vote is done (see **Post exams**) in the Committee of the Whole (CW) meeting following the exam(s).

The examination committees are responsible for administering the examinations to all students, including writing and proctoring the exams.

### **Post exams**

The students' solutions should be graded by multiple members of the examination committees independently and then discussed in order to limit any potential bias present in grading. A (scanned) copy of each graded exam should be kept for 6 months. The exam committees present the results of the grading along with a pass or fail recommendation to the faculty members of the CW, which then votes on each recommendation. A recommendation is adopted by a majority vote of the faculty members of the CW, which ultimately determines which students should pass the examinations. Each exam committee will provide a brief exam summary, including the difficulty level of the exam to justify their recommendation.

Students' identifies (i.e., names) are kept confidential before the vote. Discussions about a committee's recommendation are welcome before the faculty vote. The pass/fail decision should be based on the CW vote.

The two committee chairs will inform the students of the exam results either verbally or through email after the CW meeting. A formal pass/fail letter will be sent to each student through the graduate office.

A student, after the examination results are made known, may request a breakdown of the points awarded on each sub-question on the examination, as well as the cutoff used for passing, and an explanation of the errors that resulted in lost points on any of the examination sub-questions. A member of the examination committee will provide an explanation either verbally or in writing. If a student, after receiving this explanation, believes that one or more errors were made in grading, the student first will consult with the examination committee, which will re-examine the disputed parts of the examination and determine whether a change of grade is warranted. If, after this process, a student still believes that one or more errors remain, the student may appeal to the graduate director, who will make a determination based on input from the student and the examination committee.