

## Comprehensive Oral Exam Instructions

- Must be completed at the end of the 3rd semester for MS students and at the end of the 4th semester for PhD students.
- The oral exam should be scheduled through the graduate secretary for use of one of the conference rooms in the LSB.
- The forms needed include one cover sheet and an evaluation sheet for each committee member, which forms should be distributed *before* the examination begins. All members of the committee must sign their individual forms as well as the bottom of the cover sheet. All forms should be submitted to the graduate secretary after the oral exam is complete.
- The oral exam will provide an opportunity for the advisory committee to probe in greater depth any issues they deem relevant to the student's research project. This may include coverage of previous coursework, although this will normally be a minor part of the evaluation.
- Examiners should evaluate the student on total performance and not merely on those questions that they ask.
- There are 3 possible grade options for the oral exam:
  - **Pass:** The student receives a 5 (outstanding) or 4 (adequate) to pass the exam without qualifications. No further work is required by the student unless defined by the committee.
  - **Pass with qualifications:** The student receives a 3 (retake portion), and all qualifications will be listed for the student to review and complete. The student must reschedule the exam in order to retake that portion of the exam.
  - **Fail:** If the student receives a 2 (marginal) or 1 (poor), the decision of what to do ultimately lies with the committee. There are 2 options: (a) terminate the student, or (b) reconvene at a later date (typically one semester or year later) to retake the exam.

### MS Students

- Committee members will examine students on basic biological principles and concepts related to the focal area of study as well as any material indicated on the Program of Study. Coursework is a larger part of the oral exam for master's students than for doctorate students.
- To prepare, students must meet first with their major advisor as well as each committee member for guidance on format and scope.

### PhD Students

- Prior to scheduling the Oral Exam, each student should set aside 4 to 6 weeks to complete the first draft of the following documents:
  1. **Grant Proposal:** This should be a complete research proposal prepared according to a pre-specified format (e.g., the NSF Dissertation Improvement Program guidelines). A budget and justification for all expenses should be included.
  2. **Literature Review:** This should be a thorough review of the literature relating to the major theme(s) of the dissertation research. This will give the student flexibility to more fully develop ideas and to consider alternative or controversial points-of-view. The assignment permits the students to demonstrate an in-depth mastery and synthesis of the relevant literature including formats and page limits. If done well, this document may also be submitted to a journal or used as a chapter in the final dissertation.
- The major advisor should read both documents and return edited copies to the student for revision. After revision, both documents should be sent to all members of the advisory committee. A final revision will be completed after suggestions are made by the committee. Scheduling the oral exam should be done at this point.
- Any weaknesses in project design or protocol may result in a committee's recommendation for further revisions, and the issues may be revisited at the committee's discretion.