

Graduate Program PhD Qualifying Exam Procedure for MCEB Students

Students from the MCEB program and the interdepartmental programs of Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry must pass a final exam at the end of their first year that entails intellectually independent work on a topic outside their proposed thesis research. The qualifying exam for MCEB students joining the Biology department consists of a written and oral proposal of the thesis work. The exam must be completed by the end of the second year in graduate school.

Supervisory Committee

The Qualifying Exam Committee will consist of the Supervisory Committee with the exception of the thesis supervisor (the thesis supervisor cannot be physically present during any part of the exam). One member of the Qualifying Exam Committee will serve as chairperson to ensure that the rules for qualifying exams are followed. A pass or fail decision for both the written and oral components of the exam will be by majority vote of the Exam Committee (at least 3 votes in favor).

Written and Oral Exam Components for the Qualifying Exam (PhD)

The written component will consist of a grant proposal on the topic of the student's proposed thesis research. The student should describe the Specific Aims, background leading to the proposed research, the significance of the research, the research approach (design and methods) for achieving the Specific Aims, the rationale for the proposed approach, potential pitfalls, and expected/alternative outcomes of the proposed studies. Formatting requirements are as follows: 1 page Specific Aims plus 12 pages Research Plan; single spacing; Arial 11 or Times 12 font; one inch margins. Figures are included but citations excluded from page limitations.

The student is encouraged to consult with his/her thesis advisor during preparation for the exam about the concepts and principles of the study. The thesis advisor can have conversations with the student about Specific Aims and provide guidance and recommendations on the development of the experimental approach. However, the student is responsible for crafting a document that speaks in his/her voice, and the thesis supervisor may not contribute to the writing or editing of the proposal. The student cannot solicit feedback or other help from committee members during the writing of the proposal. However, the student may solicit feedback from other faculty, postdocs and graduate students.

Exam Schedule & and Student Status

The committee will have two weeks to evaluate the written document. If revisions are requested by the committee, the student will have two weeks to complete them and resubmit the written component of the exam. In addition to the revised proposal, the student must submit a "Response to Reviewers" document that explicitly addresses the written comments and recommendations of the student's exam committee, itemizing changes made to the proposal and justifying any recommendations not followed in the revision. The committee will then have one week to reevaluate the written component of the exam. The oral component of the Qualifying Exam must take place within 30 days from the time the student passed the written component of the exam. In the oral defense of the proposal to the Qualifying Exam Committee, the student may give a formal presentation, but it may not exceed 10 slides with no animation. If

a student fails to pass the written or the oral component, the exam must be retaken by the end of the following semester. In cases where the oral component alone is failed, the committee will assess the extent to which the written component must be redone or revised.

Students who have not attempted their qualifying exams by the end of their fourth semester and have not passed the exam by the end of their fifth semester will be judged as not making satisfactory progress toward their degree. These students will be ineligible for departmental and university support.

Exceptions or modifications to these rules must be approved in advance by the Graduate Program Committee.