

MCEB Capstone Exam for First Year Graduate Students

All graduate students that enter the School of Biological Sciences through the MCEB graduate program must pass a Capstone Exam at the end of their first year. This exam will take place during the final two weeks of the spring semester, concluding with an oral exam.

Each student will be assigned a research paper, which they will read and critically evaluate. Students may use any resource to further their understanding of the paper and are encouraged to read relevant background papers and consult with faculty not on the examining committee. Students will then write a critical review of the paper, addressing its important findings, their significance, and the quality of the evidence supporting those findings. The written review should be 2-3 pages, 1.5 spaced, Arial 11 font, and will be due 2 weeks following the assignment of papers.

Shortly following the written review due date, each student will present the review to a panel of three MCEB faculty (the examining committee) in a 1-hour oral exam. While this oral exam will focus on the assigned paper and review, questions and discussion may cover any MCEB topic considered appropriate by the examining committee. The exam will be scored as “pass”, “fail”, or “conditionally pass”. Students who fail the exam will be allowed to re-take the exam once, using a different assigned paper, to be completed within 2 months of the original exam. Students who conditionally pass will be expected to correct the deficiencies cited by the examining committee (by taking an additional class, for example) before taking their qualifying exam in the second year. Failing the second exam will result in dismissal from the program.