

2.1.3 Ph.D. Preliminary Exam

The preliminary exam is scheduled when the candidate has completed the required course work and is ready to enter dissertator status to devote the remaining degree time to bench work.

Contact the Program office 3-4 weeks prior to the examination date to obtain the appropriate examination application form for submission to the Graduate School and request that a warrant be obtained from the Graduate School office. Be prepared to provide the date of examination and members of your examining committee. Have available at time of examination:

- (a) a complete transcript or record of undergraduate and graduate courses taken and grades received
- (b) a copy of certification, and evidence of having completed the requirements for the degree (for Preliminary and Final examinations)

Ideally the preliminary exam will be done in the third year unless there are extenuating circumstances. If exam hasn't been taken by the beginning of the 4th year, Program will enquire as to the student's plan or circumstances. The purpose is to identify problems at the prelim exam and this will then help determine if the student should re-evaluate the project, lab environment or continue in the program. The exam's aim is to see the thinking process of the project and clarify the plan for the thesis project by using a grant format; a significant amount of data is not required although many aim to at least show the project is technically achievable. Ideally all course work would be completed before the prelim is taken, however if there is a course requirement outstanding, the committee can sign the form, but withhold the date of completion until the course is complete. Student will not achieve dissertator status until the signed warrant is returned to the Graduate School.

2.1.3.1 Ph.D. Preliminary Exam Format

First and most important note all written documents, questions, answers etc must be channeled through the appropriate personnel. Specifically, the initial proposal must be submitted to and approved for format by the program administrator before it is formally accepted and the clock begins. Note all written questions must be submitted by faculty for collation to the administrator in order be recorded and the administrator will communicate these directly to the faculty advisor for moderation before passing on to the student. Likewise students answers will be made to the administrator who will record them prior to forwarding to the committee members. Be aware deviation from this procedure can only mean unnecessary delays for all concerned.

1. Pre proposal preparation
 1. Before you begin to prepare your written document for the preliminary exam, you should discuss the following issues with your faculty advisor and your thesis committee:
 2. Major Grant Guidelines that you will follow (NSF, USDA, NIH)
 3. Scientific Content
 4. Availability of ALL concerned (candidate, advisor, committee) for the oral review. Keep in mind that the oral review cannot take place within 30 days of the submission of the written document.
2. Proposal development

1. The written portion of the exam must follow the specified guidelines of your selected grant agency. You are only responsible for the Scientific Proposal section. You do not need to include resource pages, biosketchs, budgets etc...Ask your advisor or committee members for sample proposals to review formatting and content style.
 - i. Page formatting
 1. Use the font, text size, margin and spacing guidelines as required by the grant agency
 2. Number the pages consecutively
 3. Stay within the specified page limitations for the scientific proposal section; the proposal does not need to be maximum number of pages allowed.
 - ii. Content
 1. Your faculty member is responsible for reviewing the scientific content of each section
 2. Follow all heading requirements
 3. Follow all guidelines for the use of graphs, photos, tables and figures
 4. Review guidelines for inclusion of literature reviews and publication requests. If not generally included with a proposal to your agency, include this information following the main document.
 - iii. General Presentation
 1. Document must be word processed in a commonly available format (MS Word)
 2. The completed document must be a single file with all images, tables, figures and graphs embedded into the document laid out in the style of the chosen national granting agency.
 3. Include a brief table of contents and cover page with your name, date submitted, and advisor's name.
 4. Follow all rules regarding the use of fonts and color. Do not rely only on color to convey your information as some will not have access to a color printer.
3. Proposal Submission
 1. Contact the Program Coordinator at least 24 hours prior to your expected date of distribution to check formatting and accessibility.
 2. The Program Coordinator will review your document to verify that it meets the formatting grant guidelines of your selected agency. You and your advisor are responsible for reviewing the scientific content.
 3. Proposals that do not meet the proper formatting requirements will be returned to the student for corrections.
 4. The student may work in the program office to correct the formatting issues. PC computers are available.
 5. If the proposal passes the formatting check it will be converted to an Adobe Acrobat format.
 6. The Program Coordinator will be responsible for sending out the final approved exam document to the committee members with a carbon copy of the message and document to the student. This is the day at which the clock starts, not the day of submission by the student.
4. Question Submission

1. Committee members are required to send their written questions to the Program Coordinator during the two week timeframe specified in the email.
2. The Program Coordinator will compile the questions received into a single document and forward them to the student's advisor for review at the end of the two week period.
3. The faculty advisor is responsible for reviewing the questions for clarity and repetitiveness and preparing a final copy to be given to the student and Program Coordinator.
4. The student has two weeks from the date of receipt of the committees' questions to reply. The student must send the written replies to the Program Coordinator who will compile the written responses into a uniform document to be distributed to the committee members at the end of the two week period.

5. The Oral Exam

1. Purpose

- i. The aim of the oral exam is to discuss the student's answers to the written questions and the scientific aims of the proposal as well as develop a sound timeframe for degree completion. By the end of the meeting the student and committee members should have a firm understanding of the remaining work to be completed, papers to be written and semester of completion.

2. Format

- i. The student may elect to give a brief presentation, not longer than 30 minutes to update the committee on new developments since the time the written document was sent.
- ii. The student's faculty advisor is the chair of the committee and is responsible for keeping the meeting on track and completed in a reasonable amount of time.
- iii. The discussion should be similar to grant review session.

6. After the exam

1. If the student has passed the exam each committee member should sign the warrant.
2. The student should return the signed warrant to the Program Coordinator to make a copy for the file and be returned to the Graduate School.
3. The Graduate School will send the student an email letter confirming dissertator status for the following semester.
4. In cases where the student does not pass the preliminary exam, the committee can recommend two options:
 - i. Retake the exam at a later date provided that the committee has given clear instructions for areas of improvement
 - ii. Recommend that the student terminate with an MS degree