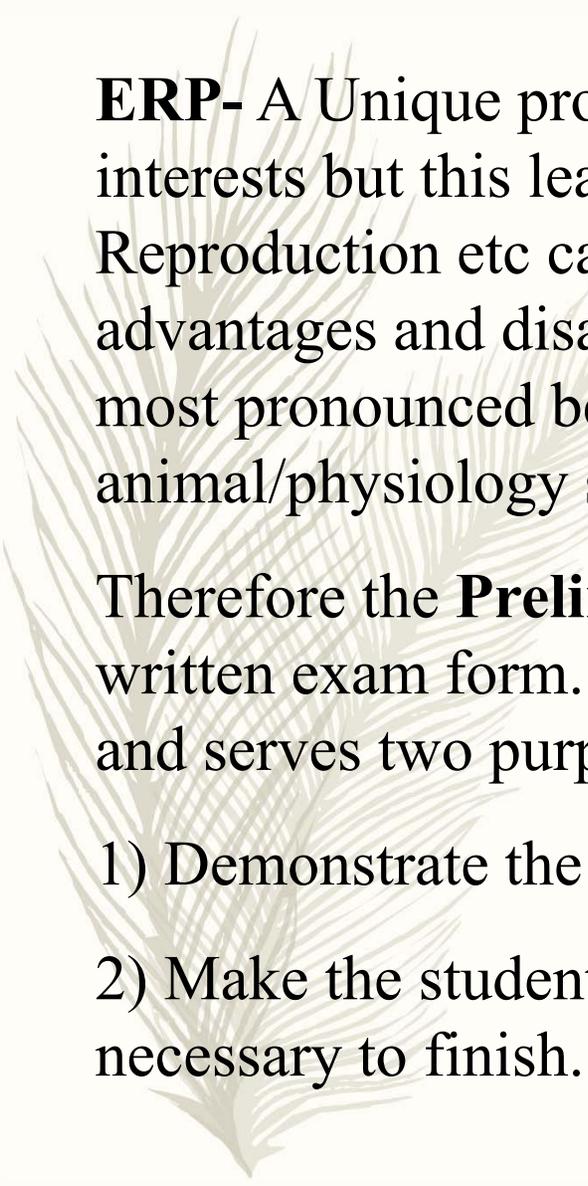




ERP Prelim Exam: How and Why.

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ERP- A Unique program with diverse Faculty and Student interests but this leaves us with a problem- no one exam on Reproduction etc can cover all students without creating unfair advantages and disadvantages. Most notably the differences are most pronounced between cellular molecular and whole animal/physiology students.

Therefore the **Prelim exam** does not take place in a traditional written exam form. Instead the exam is in the form of a grant and serves two purposes:

- 1) Demonstrate the students knowledge and understanding
- 2) Make the student focus down and understand what is necessary to finish.

Of course there are in reality other purposes to this exam:

1) Give some first hand experience of the Grant Process as training for the future or at the very least what goes in to funding their project.

2) A safeguard to make sure if the students project is based on poor thinking or is overambitious it gets reigned in before it is too late.

3) While the prelim may be difficult to master, it is a safeguard against failure in the final thesis exam. Better have the arguments and identify the problems while there is still time to deal with them! For this reason while a prelim is required for a PhD it is also recommended for an MS.

How it works:

1) Around the end of year 1 for a MS or Year 2 - early in Y3 (for a PhD), plan a date at least 3 months ahead and check for committee availability. (If you want to be extra smart make this about one month before a real agencies deadline for Predoctoral Fellowships).

2) Prepare the proposal along the lines of a major agencies Grant format (NIH, USDA, NSF etc) and follow their rules. You do NOT need to prepare anything other than the scientific proposal for the Prelim. You do NOT have to make it the length they give, it can be shorter but should not be longer than the agencies limit.

3) You absolutely need someone with experience to help you. Make sure you work with your advisor to review your proposal.

Make sure you start with a **1 page summary** of the background principles, hypothesis and specific aims.

Then clearly describe the **Background Literature, Relevance** to the agencies mission (often overlooked), **Preliminary Data**, and then the **Specific Aims** in detail.

NOTE If you give a Specific Aim for work that is as yet not complete then you **MUST** say what the anticipated result is **AND** what you will do if you do not get it (Alternate Strategies). Alternatively if you have completed any Specific Aims then include a summary of that final data in this section.

Also include at the beginning or end of Sp Aims or as a separate section (as required) the **Methods** that will be used in sufficient detail for say a Postdoc in your lab to run.

Finally give an estimated Time Line for completion.

Once your **advisor** has approved the document as complete, then **ONLY** Submit the **document** to Grace for distribution. This is very important since HER email starts the 30 day clock.

From the date of distribution of the document from the ERP office, the committee has two weeks to read it and get questions back to your advisor and cc GRACE. If they meet this deadline then they are entitled to a written reply of up to 2 pages each. If they do not then a verbal reply at the exam will be the only requirement.

The advisor then moderates the questions to prevent replication of questions and make sure they are fair. At the end of the two week period your advisor should pass the finished questions to the student for preparation of the written answers and be sure to COPY BACK TO GRACE.

Questions can vary- they may concentrate on a weakness in your thesis study such as in background, alternate strategies, choice of methods, suitability of model systems, data interpretation etc, or if the thesis study is strong they may go into much more detail on a topic relevant to the thesis to stretch you to your limits! A mixture is most common.

Questions should be possible to answer in only a few pages (no more than 2, not including diagrams etc), not in book form! If you need clarification before answering you are free to contact the committee member directly.

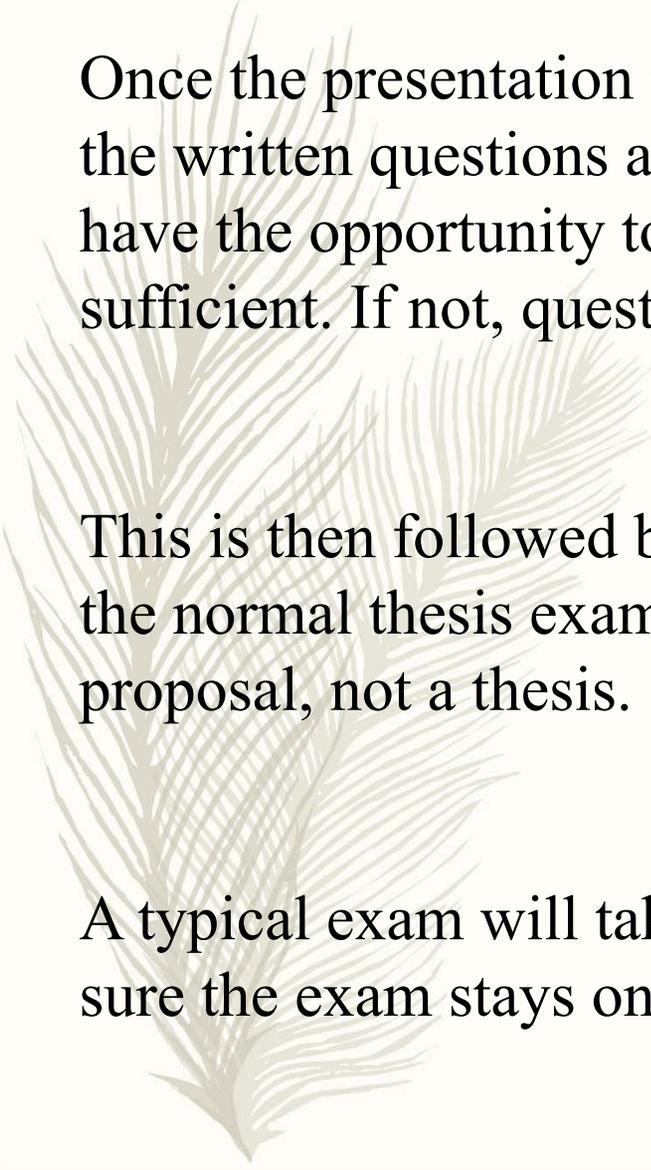
Answers should be prepared in clear and legible fashion and submitted back to the examiners AND AGAIN COPIES TO GRACE inside of two weeks. The exam can take place a few days later.

The Oral exam:

An underlying principle of the exam is to mimic the Grant submission and review process and give guidance. It is not a practice for Seminar etc. It is not required to begin with a slide show but most students do. If this is the case KEEP IT BRIEF!

It is assumed that all participants are familiar with the document just as the Primary/Secondary grant reviewers will be at a national agency. Presentation should be to supplement or update the documents and written answers, not repeat/replace them.

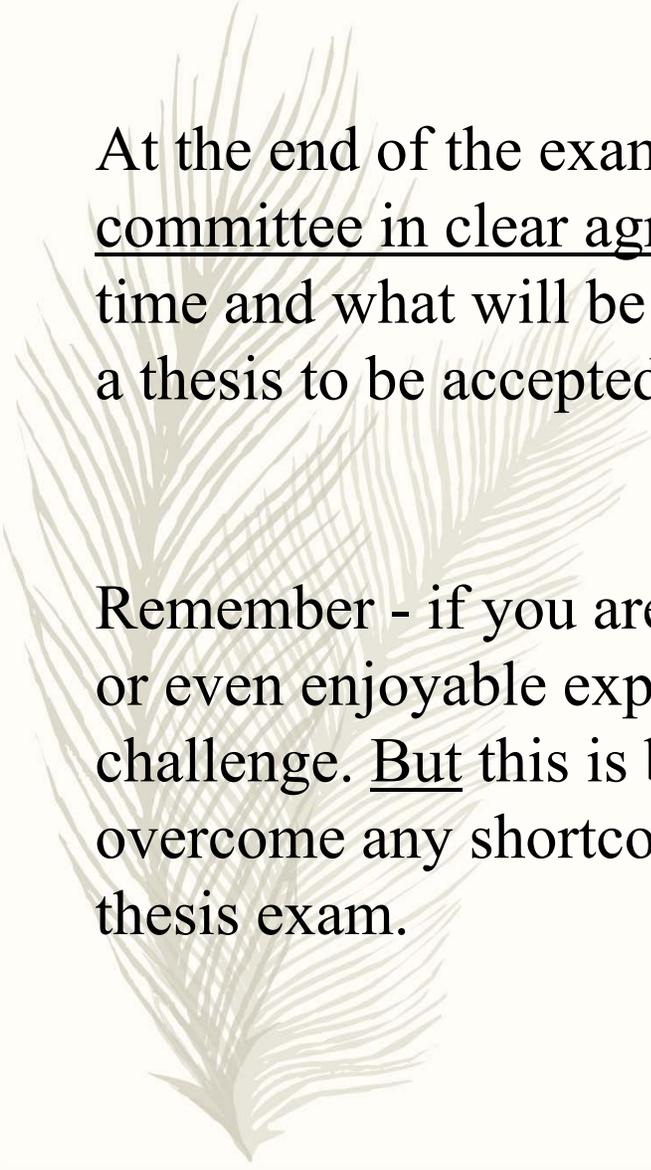
The advisor should review the planned presentation with the student BEFORE the meeting to check relevance/-time usage and advise the student what to expect.



Once the presentation is done it is best to proceed to covering the written questions and answers first. Each examiner should have the opportunity to indicate if the written answer was sufficient. If not, questions and answers should address this first.

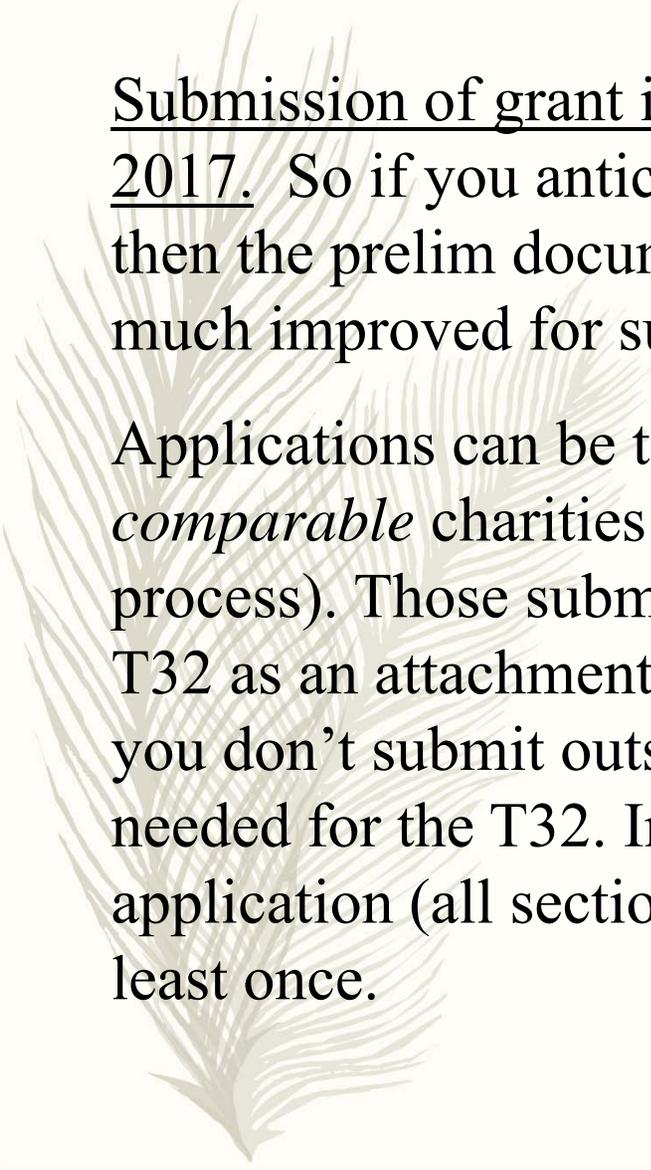
This is then followed by the general questions and answers as in the normal thesis exam style, but bearing in mind this is a proposal, not a thesis.

A typical exam will take 2.5 - 3 hours. The Advisor should make sure the exam stays on track.



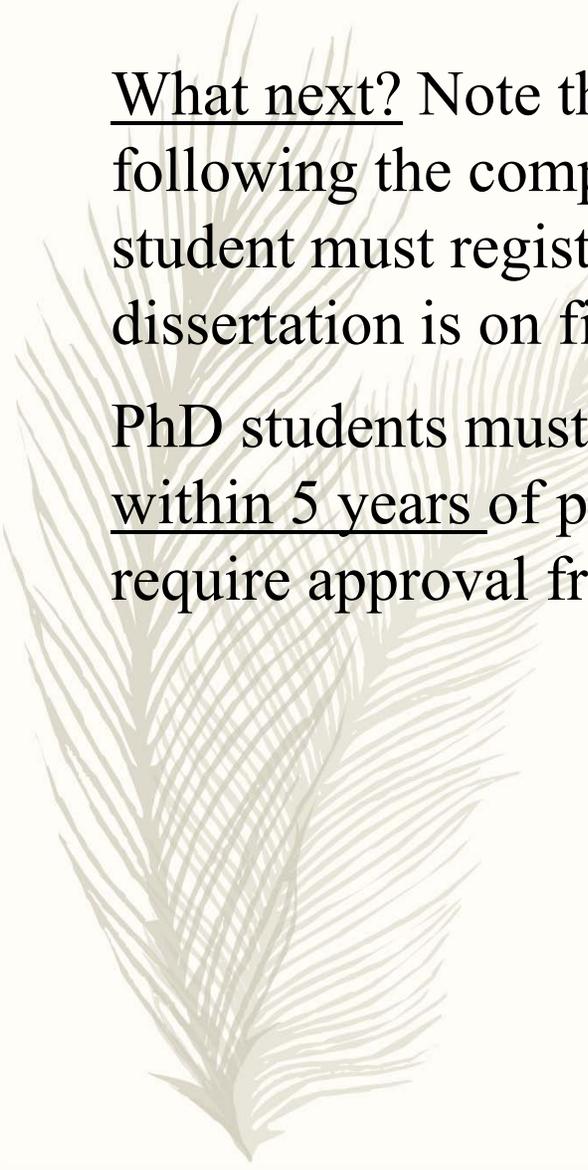
At the end of the exam the outcome should be the students and committee in clear agreement of what the state of play is at this time and what will be necessary to satisfy the requirements for a thesis to be accepted on the topic in question.

Remember - if you are well prepared this will be a reasonable or even enjoyable experience- if you are not it will be a real challenge. But this is better to face while there is still time to overcome any shortcomings than to be turned down in the final thesis exam.



Submission of grant is required for all ERP students admitted 2017. So if you anticipated a grant bodies submission deadline then the prelim document can now be reworked in its now much improved for submission.

Applications can be to regional or federal agencies or *comparable* charities or scholarships (ie using a similar process). Those submitted applications can also be used for the T32 as an attachment in place of the T32 Research Plan BUT if you don't submit outside first then a full application is still needed for the T32. In other words a submission of a complete application (all sections including budget etc) must occur at least once.



What next? Note that dissertator status begins the semester following the completion of the preliminary exam and the student must register for 3 credits each semester until their dissertation is on file at Memorial Library.

PhD students must defend and deposit their dissertation within 5 years of passing the preliminary exam. Exceptions require approval from the Graduate School.



Questions?