Ph.D. Written and Oral Comprehensive Exams: Recommended CMB Procedure (1/2015)

A research proposal will serve as the written portion of the comprehensive. After passing the written portion of the exam, the student will schedule the oral portion of the exam. The oral exam will be a defense of the proposal (from the written portion of the Comprehensive Exam) and all general knowledge contained within the proposal.

Selection of the research topic: The topic for the research proposal cannot be directly related to the research being conducted in the lab in which the student is working. The topic will be pre-approved by the student’s Ph.D. committee. It is strongly recommended that the student meet with their doctoral committee to make a short (10-15 min) oral presentation on one or two topics that they have selected as potential topics for the written proposal. The committee members may discuss the topic(s) and offer suggestions to the student. After the presentation, the committee will either approve one of the topics or suggest that the student present another topic for discussion and approval.

The student is encouraged to talk with the faculty about her/his proposal.

Format for the proposal:
1. Introduction with specific aims – not to exceed 1 page
2. Significance of the proposed research – maximum of 1 page
3. Background – maximum of 3 pages
4. Research design and methods
5. Figures and/or tables – maximum of 2 pages
6. Literature cited – no limit to pages

The total number of pages for the text & figures (excluding the literature cited) is not to exceed 12 pages.

Time for completion of the written proposal: Once the topic for the proposal has been decided upon and accepted by the student’s Ph.D. committee, the student will have a total of three weeks to prepare and submit a copy of the proposal to the doctoral committee members. The committee has one week to read and comment on the proposal. The committee may approve the proposal as submitted, indicating that the student passes the written portion of the comprehensive exam.

If the committee members find major flaws in the proposal, they may provide comments indicating these problems to the student. After receiving written comments on the proposal from the committee the student has one week to edit the proposal and submit a final copy to the committee for approval. If the committee approves the edited final version of the proposal, the student passes the written exam. If the committee does not approve the edited version, the student fails and will be allowed to retake the exam, as per the Graduate Manual.
If the proposal is acceptable to the committee the student will have passed the written part of the exam and will schedule the oral part of the exam. If the student does not pass the written portion of the Ph.D. comprehensive, the student will, after a 10-week interval, get another chance to write an acceptable proposal.

**Oral Comprehensive Examination**

Once the student has passed the written portion of the examination, the student will schedule the oral examination with the members of their committee, as per the Graduate Manual (see: 7.57.1.2 Part II). The exam should be scheduled within four weeks of passing the written portion.

The oral portion will be carried out as per the Graduate Manual (see: 7.57.1.2 Part II) and will last no more than two hours. The oral exam will be a defense of the proposal (from the written portion of the Comprehensive Exam) and all general knowledge contained within the proposal. The student will be notified orally of the results of the examination as soon as the committee has completed its deliberations. A student who fails the examination may be permitted one re-examination if re-examination is recommended by the committee and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. A second examination, if permitted, may be taken only after a minimum of ten weeks has passed to allow for additional student preparation. In all cases, a second examination must take place before one year has elapsed.