



Department of Molecular & Cellular Biology
Guidelines for Ph.D. Qualifying Examination

February 2008

1. After completion of an Advisory Committee meeting, the Advisory Committee should submit a request to the Chair of Graduate Studies Committee to initiate the Ph.D. qualifying examination of the student. This request should include a brief description of the student's research project (including area of emphasis), an assessment of the student's progress to-date and the Committee's support to go ahead with the Qualifying Examination. This letter must be endorsed by all members of the Advisory Committee.
2. Depending on the Option chosen by the student, the request should include either: possible topics/research areas for the research proposal (Option 1); or subject areas where questions could be based on (Option 2).
3. The request should also include the following:
 - a) Members of the Advisory Committee that will serve on the Examination Committee (the Advisor is not a member of the Examination Committee);
 - b) A list of 2 Faculty members from MCB to serve on the Examination Committee, one may be chosen;
 - c) A list of 2 Faculty members from outside of MCB to serve on the Examination Committee, one may be chosen.
4. At the same time, the student should also submit a written request to the Chair of Graduate Studies Committee indicating their choice (Option 1 or 2) as the format of their examination.
5. Upon selection of the Examination Committee, the Chair of the Examination Committee will conduct a meeting with all examiners to determine either the appropriate subject of the research proposal (Option 1); or questions (Option 2). The subject area (Option 1) should not be directly related to the student's current research project. Suggestions from the student and the Advisor will be considered, but not necessary followed.
6. A date for the oral examination will be selected. The student will received his/her assigned research subject or questions counting back approximately 4 weeks from this date. The student has three weeks to submit the proposal or answers (5 copies) to the Chair of the Examination Committee for distribution and review.
7. For Option 1, the research proposal should be no more than ten pages (double space, 12 point), not including references, tables and figures. Full reference, including authors and title of the paper should be included.

8. For Option 2, the student will be given three questions. The answer to each question should be no more than 10 pages (double space, 12 point), not including references, tables and figures. Full reference, including authors and title of the paper should be included.
9. The student's Advisory Committee contributes to the Qualifying Examination by submitting a detailed assessment of the student's ability and potential to pursue research appropriate at the Ph.D. level. This letter should be addressed to the Chair of the Examination Committee, and will not be read by members of the Examination Committee until after the oral examination has been completed.
10. Members of the Advisory Committee do not advise the student on preparation of the research proposal (Options 1) or answers to the examination questions (Option 2). They should not read or comment on any drafts of the research proposal or the answers. Questions regarding the examination should be addressed to the Chair of the Examination Committee.
11. Additional individuals who wish to attend the oral examination component must request permission from the Chair of the Examination Committee at least one week in advance. Permission will only be granted with the agreement of the student being examined.
12. The oral examination should be based on the written proposal/answers submitted by the student as well as related materials. The student will be asked to provide a short synopsis of the proposal/answers to start off the examination process. Normally, this is followed by two rounds of questioning (15-20 min/examiner).
13. After completion of the oral examination, the student (and observers) will leave the room. Each examiner will present their evaluation of the student's performance on both the written and oral component. Afterwards, the supporting letter from the student's Advisory Committee will be introduced and read by each examiner.
14. When the discussion is complete, each examiner will decide on a satisfactory or unsatisfactory vote based on the student's performance in the examination as well as the letter from the Advisory Committee. (The vote could be conducted either open or by secret ballot as agreed by the Examination Committee).
15. The student passes the Qualifying Examination if there is no more than one unsatisfactory vote (an abstention is considered as an unsatisfactory vote). If the student failed the examination, the Examination Committee recommends when the student should be allowed a 2nd attempt, and whether all or a portion of the written and/or oral examination should be repeated. The same Examination Committee will conduct the 2nd examination. The student will be required to withdraw from the Ph.D. program after failing the 2nd attempt.
16. Upon completion of the examination, the Chair of the Examination Committee will prepare a written report on the student's deficiencies and suggestions for improvement if the outcome is unsatisfactory. A written report is not necessary if the outcome is satisfactory unless the Examination Committee wants to communicate specific issues to the student.