

Department of Biological Sciences (BS)  
Graduate Committee Policies for Ph.D. Comprehensive Exams

WRITTEN EXAMS

1. **Written exam timing.** Written comprehensive exams should be taken no later than the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of their 6<sup>th</sup> semester. This

form requires that everyone will agree upon a new planned year and semester that the student will take these exams, considering the student's situation.

1. The committee should be given a minimum of a week to discuss the proposed new date and make a decision.
  - iii. Students who complete the agreed upon semester in their extension request without taking their written comprehensive exams will be considered to be making inadequate progress, according to their agreed upon timeline, and will not be eligible for departmental funding (i.e. teaching assistantships and summer funding) until such time that the comprehensive exams are completed.
2. **Written exam format.**
    - a. No more than four committee members will provide written exams. Traditionally, the committee member from outside the BS will not contribute written exams, but this decision is determined jointly by the committee and student. The research mentor also provides written questions.
    - b. Exams may include questions on general biology, topics specific to the student's project, teaching philosophy, coursework taken by the student, interpretation of published research in their field, and various other possible topics.

- i. In preparation for each exam, students are expected to consult with their individual committee members regarding exam content.
  - ii. It is left to the discretion of committee members as to how much guidance they provide students in preparation for the exams.
- c. Each committee member will notify the student, in advance of the exam, as to whether their exam will be open- or closed-book and on-campus or take-home.
  - i. On-campus exams are often administered in the Biology conference room or in a space agreed upon by the committee, and must be scheduled by the student in four-hour time blocks (M-F, 8am-5pm).
  - ii. Take-home exam administration should be agreed upon by the student and the committee member who prepared the exam. The time allocated for each take-home exam will be a maximum of 48 hours, but the exam should be designed so m1a terha (\$100.

- iii. **Fail:** A student is considered to have failed their written comprehensive exams if 25% or less of the committee (traditionally 1 of the 4 members) agrees a student has passed.
  - 1. The committee must determine if the student is allowed a "retake" of their comprehensive exam.
    - a. If this is permitted, the retake must be completed by the end of the following semester. A retake **may not** be scheduled during the same semester that the original examination was completed.
      - i. If a student does not pass after a retake, their program will be terminated.
    - b. If a retake is NOT permitted, the student's program will be terminated.
- b. Notification of individual exam results and overall written comprehensive results
  - i. Following evaluation, exam writers will notify the research mentor of their decision for their exam (i.e. pass or fail) and may also directly notify the student, at their discretion.
  - ii. The research advisor should compile the individual exam results to determine the final decision. All members of the committee who participated in the written exams should sign the BS "*Report of Doctoral Written Comprehensive Exams*" to file with the Graduate School.
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- b. For the Graduate School to approve a request for the student to take the oral examination, the following conditions must be met:
  - i. The committee members and faculty representative must be the same as those approved by the Graduate School (and included on the *Request to Appoint a Doctoral Committee* form submitted early in the student's program);
  - ii. Passing written comprehensive examination results must have been received and recorded by the Graduate School prior to requesting to schedule the oral comprehensive examination;
  - iii. Annual progress reviews from the program are on file in the Graduate School for each year prior to student's scheduling their oral exam.
- c. The student is responsible for confirming the date and time of the examination with all of their committee members.
- d. The Graduate School will approve and publicize the examination date, time, and place. Once approved, the Graduate School will forward a fillable *Results of the Oral Comprehensive Exam* form privately to the student's Research Advisor, either via cav

- ii. **Conditional pass:** A student is considered to have conditional pass if 2 of the 4 members (or < 75% but > 25%) agrees a student has passed.
    - 1. A student will be provided with the specific conditions and timeline to complete these conditions to transition to pass. The timeline will never be more than 12 weeks.
    - 2. Specific conditions and a timeline for completion must be recorded on the *Results of the Oral Comprehensive Examination* form before turning in to the Graduate School;
    - 3. If conditions are not met by the date provided by the committee members, the student is considered to have "Failed" their oral exam.
  - iii. **Fail:** A student is considered to have failed their oral exam if 25% or less of the committee (traditionally 1 of the 4 members) agrees a student has passed. "Fail" outcomes can come with the option of "retake permitted" or "retake not permitted", which should be specified on the *Results of the Oral Comprehensive Examination* form before submitting it to the Graduate School.
    - 1. If "retake not permitted": student's degree program will be terminated
    - 2. If "retake permitted": the retake must NOT be scheduled during the same semester that the original examination was completed. Only one retake is allowed. If a student does NOT pass the retake, their program will be terminated.
- b. An electronic version of the "*Results of the Oral Comprehensive Examination*," formatted specificall