**RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES FOR CHAIRS OF Ph.D. QUALIFYING**

**AND MASTER'S COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS**

***Note:*** This is intended only as a guide. The Chair must be acquainted with and follow the regulations of Graduate Division and those outlined in the PLBL Graduate Student Handbook.

**I. Ph.D. QUALIFYING EXAMINATION**

**A. Purpose of the Examination**

The purpose of the Qualifying Examination (QE) is to evaluate the student’s preparedness to carry out their proposed research. The exam should focus on their knowledge of their major and minor areas and their proposed research.

**B. Establishing Exam Dates and Expectations**

The Chair should remind the student to:

* set up the dates of the written and oral exams.
* meet with all committee members approximately three months prior to the exam to ensure they understand the expectations of all committee members.
* remind the committee members of the dates and location of the exam and the areas that their questions should be focused on.
* go through one or more “mock” oral examinations to help prepare.

**C. Written Examination**

The written exams are usually administered over **two consecutive days**. The Oversight member is not required to submit written questions, but may do so if desired. The chair should familiarize the Oversight member with departmental procedures for these examinations. Students pass the exam if they fail no more than one committee member’s set of questions. If a student passes but performs poorly the committee can recommend postponement of the oral exam to allow additional time to prepare. If the student fails the questions from two or more committee members, they fail but may retake the written exam once. The committee will decide which of the exams need to be retaken and when.

In advance of the exam, the Chair should:

* Remind the student that they should send their 8-10 page research proposal (see the Plant Biology Student Handbook for guidelines for the proposal) to committee members one month prior to the written exams.
* Collect questions from all members at least a few days in advance of the exam date.
* Review all the questions for clarity, fairness, overlap and duplication, and length (3 hours per exam).
* Ask the student to choose the order of the written exam questions.
* Ask the student if they prefer to answer the questions in writing by hand or using a keyboard.
* If needed the Chair should arrange for an internet-disabled computer from the Department Travel Coordinator/Admin Assistant.

During the exam, the chair should:

* Bring the student to the assigned room.
* Give the student the questions from one committee member at a time. The student should work on each set of questions without access to resources unless otherwise specified by the member of the committee who wrote the questions..
* Collect the answers at the end of each exam period.
	+ If the questions were answered on a computer, the Chair should forward the answers to the appropriate committee member. If the student uses a departmental computer, the exam should be deleted from the computer after each exam.
	+ If they were answered on paper, the Chair should make a copy of each, keep the copy, and give the original exam to the committee members for grading.
* Request that the committee members grade their questions within 24 hours and **send a copy of the graded exam to the Chair**.

After the exam, the Chair should:

* Either scan the graded answers, send the questions and answers to the Student Services Advisor, and then destroy the originals, or bring the originals to the SSA, who will scan them and then destroy the originals. The Student Services Advisor will enter them into the student’s file and forward them, along with a report of the result of the Written Exam, to Graduate Division.
* Discuss any questions and concerns with any committee member who feels there are issues that need to be addressed.
* Meet with the student to discuss the results of the written exams to the student and go over the next steps.
* Remind the student to meet with each of the committee members to discuss their performance.

**D. Oral Examination**

The oral examination should be scheduled two weeks after the written exam. Prior to the exam, the Chair should:

* remind the student to remind Committee members and Student Services Advisor of the date, time and location of the oral exam.
* make sure the student knows ***not*** to provide refreshments for the examination.

A few days before the Oral Exam, the Student Services Advisor will provide the Chair with a link to the student’s file, including the results of the Written Exams, as well as a link to the form to report the results of the Oral Exam. All Committee members must be in the exam room for the entire exam. If a committee member must depart, the exam must be paused until the complete committee reassembled. By approval of the Graduate Dean, one or more members may attend remotely.

The oral exam should not exceed three hours. Once an oral exam has started the committee must report a decision to the Graduate Division.

At the exam:

* At the start, the Chair should ask the student to briefly leave the room so that the committee can discuss the candidate's record and performance on the written exam.
* Ask the student to choose the order of examiners. The Chair is last.
* Ask the student to give their 20-minute presentation. For information on the presentation guidelines, consult the PLBL Graduate Student Handbook.
* Request that committee members hold their questions until their allocated time after the presentation, unless they feel a point in the presentation requires clarification.
* Ask each committee member, after the presentation,to question the student, allocating 20 minutes per committee member.
* Offer the candidate a ten-minute break after the second or third questioner.
* After all committee members have questioned the candidate, offer each committee member an additional 5 to 10 min for further questions..
* When all committee members have finished, ask the student to leave the room for the final discussion.
* Invite the student back in and explain the committee’s decision. If there is no more than one “fail” vote, the student passes. If there are two or more “fail” votes, the student does not pass. They may retake the exam at least three months after the first attempt.
* Inform the Student Services Advisor and Graduate Division of the results of the examinations.

If the student or a member of the committee wishes to appeal the outcome of the exam, the Chair should consult the PLBL Graduate Student Handbook for a detailed explanation of the procedures to follow.

**II. M.S. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION)**

***NOTE:*** Please read the guidelines for the PhD Qualifying Exam.The section below pertains only to MS students on Plan II, the Comprehensive Exam plan.

**A. Establishing Exam Dates and Expectations**

The Master's Committee is composed of three members. The Chair of the MS Comprehensive Exam Committee should:

* Recommend that the student read the PLBL Graduate Student Handbook for their responsibilities for the Comprehensive Exam.
* Inform the student that their research or literature review report should be distributed to the committee members four weeks before the written exam.
* Inform the committee members that they must provide feedback on the report within one week to allow the student to revise it before the exam.
* Remind the student to set up the dates of the written and oral exams. The written exams usually take place in one day and the oral exam usually occurs one to two weeks after the written exam.
* Recommend that the student speak to all committee members approximately three months prior to the exam to assure that they understand the expectations of all committee members.
* Remind committee members of the areas that their questions should be focused on (ie., major and minor emphases) and inform them that written exams should take no longer than 1 ½ hours.
* Refer to section B of the instructions for Chairs of PhD Qualifying Exam Committees.

**C. The Comprehensive Examination Report**

The student must revise the report to the satisfaction of the Committee *prior* to the oral examination. The report can not be used as part of a Ph.D. dissertation in Plant Biology at UCR.

**Guidelines for the MS Plan II Comprehensive Examination Reports**

Reports should follow the format of a research or review article, respectively, of a journal appropriate to the subject matter. Guidelines for the student are in the Handbook. The text (not including the literature cited, tables, or figures) should be a minimum length of 15 double-spaced pages for a research report and 20 double-spaced pages for a literature review.

**D. Written Examination**

Prior to the Written Exam the Chair should collect questions from all three Committee members and review them for clarity, duplication of content, and length.

The Chair should:

* administer the exam
* collect the answers (written or typed); see section C, ”Written Examination” above in the PhD guidelines.
* distribute the answers for grading
* collect the resulting comments as described under the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam (section I C). **The exam must not leave the presence of the committee chair or member and the exam must not be copied for or by the student.**

The student passes the written exam if no more than one person indicates a failing grade on their portion. The written exam may not be taken more than twice.

**E. Oral Examination**

A few days before the Oral Exam, the Student Services Advisor will provide the Chair with a link to the student’s file, including the results of the Written Exams, as well as a link to the form to report the results of the Oral Exam. The MS oral exam usually takes two hours.

At the exam:

* At the start, the Chair should ask the student to briefly leave the room so that the committee can discuss the candidate's record and performance on the written exam.
* Ask the student to choose the order of examiners. The Chair examines last.
* Ask the student to give their 20-minute presentation. For information on the presentation guidelines, consult the PLBL Graduate Student Handbook.
* Request that committee members hold their questions until their allocated time after the presentation, unless they feel a point in the presentation requires clarification.
* Ask each committee member, after the presentation, to question the student, allocating 20 minutes per committee member.
* When all committee members have finished, ask the student to leave the room for the final discussion.
* Invite the student back in and explain the committee’s decision. If there is no more than one “fail” vote, the student passes. If there are two or more “fail” votes, the student does not pass. They may retake the exam at least three months after the first attempt.
* Inform the Student Services Advisor and Graduate Division of the results of the examinations.

If the student or a member of the committee wishes to appeal the outcome of the exam, the Chair should consult the PLBL Graduate Student Handbook for a detailed explanation of the procedures to follow.

Revised 12/2011 and 5/2023