

**Plant and Microbial Biology Graduate Program  
Ph.D. Preliminary Written Exam Evaluation Form**

(Updated January 2023)

**DATE:** MM/DD/YYYY

**EVALUATION DUE TO (CHAIR'S NAME AND EMAIL) BY MARCH 1.**

**STUDENT INFORMATION**

Name:	
Email:	
Proposal title:	
Advisor(s):	

**EVALUATOR**

Name:	
Email:	

**EVALUATOR'S VOTE**

See page 4 for evaluation guidelines.

The student's written preliminary exam is:	
	Acceptable
	Acceptable in principle, needs revision
	Unacceptable

**COMMENTS:**

--

**COMMENTS CONTINUED:**

[Empty rectangular box for comments]

## WRITTEN EXAM TIMELINE

- > Student submits preliminary exam to committee chair and PMB program coordinator by February 15.
- > Committee provides evaluation and vote to committee chair by March 1
- > Student receives exam result and comments by March 7.

If revisions are needed:

- > Student submits revisions by April 7.
- > Committee provides evaluation and vote to committee chair by April 21.
- > Student receives final result by April 30.

## REVIEW CRITERIA

The preliminary written exam is written as a research proposal and is limited to 15 pages, not including references and abstract. When reviewing the proposal, it is important to keep in mind that the **criteria for passing the exam** are NOT whether the proposal is competitive if submitted to a funding agency such as NSF. The criteria are instead:

- Scholarship:
  - Did the student formulate an interesting question that can be answered within the scope of a thesis?
  - Has the student demonstrated sufficient knowledge of the literature, placed the research question into a larger context, and articulated the significance of the proposed work?
  - Does the proposal demonstrate creativity and originality?
  - Is the introduction and background section clearly written?
  - Does the proposal have clearly formulated, testable hypotheses?
- Approaches & outcomes:
  - Does the student have a clear idea about how to approach the research question (including specific techniques and analyses)?
  - Is the student aware of potential problems?
  - Is it clear what the proposed research will accomplish?
  - Does the proposal articulate how the research will achieve broader impacts?
- Overall assessment:
  - Does the proposal have the potential to become competitive for external funding with moderate revision or completion of some of the proposed work?

Written comments are very important for communicating professional standards to the student. The reviewers must therefore provide the student with detailed written comments, in addition to completing the proposal evaluation form. If the reviewer makes comments directly on a copy of the proposal, the reviewer may return the copy to the student directly or through the committee chair. The reviews are non-anonymous, and the student is encouraged to discuss comments with the reviewers. In addition, the committee chair will provide the student with a summary of comments and the exam outcome

## EVALUATION GUIDELINES

Preliminary written examinations are evaluated as acceptable; acceptable in principle but needing revision; or unacceptable.

1. **Acceptable:** If the majority of voting committee members find the proposal acceptable, the student passes the written examination.
2. **Acceptable in principle, revision required:** If the majority of voting committee members find the proposal acceptable in principle but deficient in some respect(s), then revision and reevaluation of the proposal is required, and the student passes with reservations. The examining committee chair will provide the student with written comments from the committee members and guidelines for revising the proposal. The student should plan to meet with the committee, including their advisor, to discuss this outcome and expectations for revision. At the discretion of the committee, the student may exceed the 15-page limit in the revised proposal. The student must submit their revised proposal within one month from the date when they receive the original evaluation. For an extension of this timeline, the committee chair must request it, and the DGS must approve it. If the majority of committee members find the revised proposal acceptable, then the student passes the examination. If the majority finds the revised proposal unacceptable, then the student fails the exam. If the student fails the exam, they do not continue in the Ph.D. program; although at the discretion of their advisor and committee they may pursue an M.S. degree.
3. **Unacceptable:** If the majority of voting committee members find the proposal unacceptable—that is, it contains fundamental flaws that cannot be remedied by revision—then the student fails the exam and does not continue in the Ph.D. program. However, if they, their advisor, their committee, and the DGS agree, they may pursue an M.S. degree.

The written exam should be deemed **unacceptable** if:

- The student did not demonstrate an ability to pose a research question that can be made into a thesis project.
- The proposal has serious logical flaws.
- The research will not contribute new insights.
- The research is neither creative nor original.
- The proposal is not written with sufficient clarity that would allow the reviewer to assess it.