

## PhD Examinations – updates approved by faculty vote, August 2016

E. Preliminary Examinations. The Department of Fisheries & Wildlife requires that each Ph.D. candidate take and pass a written preliminary examination in addition to meeting the Graduate School requirement of an oral preliminary examination. The purpose of the written examination is twofold: (1) it allows the committee to ask a greater diversity of questions or more in-depth questions, and (2) it provides students who have some difficulty in oral presentation an opportunity to express themselves in writing and to provide an additional basis for their evaluation.

The intent of the Preliminary examinations is to evaluate the ability of the student to think critically, synthesize information and concepts from their chosen field, and express their thoughts in written and oral formats. The examinations also are used to identify gaps in the student's knowledge and other potential academic deficiencies. As such, the examination should be conducted when most of the coursework is completed but with sufficient time in the student's program to complete additional study (e.g., classwork, outside readings) to address deficiencies identified during the examination. Thus, students working toward doctoral degrees are encouraged, but not required, to complete their oral examination at least three terms before the date of their final oral examination.

Students should meet with their advisor and committee to determine a timeline for exam preparation and scheduling. Two to three months is a typical length of time allotted to studying for the exams, but this can vary. A meeting with each committee member to identify subject matter and readings for exam preparation is strongly recommended.

The Written Exam: The written test will precede the oral preliminary examination, will consist of questions submitted by each committee member, and will be graded before the oral. Administration of the written examination is at the discretion of the student's graduate committee in consultation with the student. Each regular committee member will provide questions for the student's exam. The Graduate Council Representative may also provide exam questions at his/her option. Questions should be general in scope and require creative thought, but if appropriate may also require specific information. There is no restriction on the number of questions each committee member may ask, but **it should be possible for the committee member submitting the questions to answer all of his or her own questions in approximately 2 hours.** However, **each student should be given ample time beyond 2 hours and up to 8 hours, if needed, to answer each committee member's questions.**

The location of the exam should be agreed upon by the student and advisor in advance. Answers should be typed, unless problem sets or other stipulations require hand written answers. Committee members have the options to ask either closed or open- book questions, whether the student should have access to the internet, or to allow students to make choices on which questions to answer (e.g. answer two of three questions, etc.). These expectations should be clear prior to the start of the exam. Students are expected to complete the written examination over a 1-week (5-day) period, typically with one day dedicated to each committee member's questions. If there are more than 5 committee members submitting questions, the major advisor and committee should determine how to shorten the exam so it fits in a 5 day

period (for example, having a question from each of 2 committee members on a particular day, or suggesting that the GCR save his or her question for the oral exam). The student should not see a particular committee member's questions until the day they plan to take that portion of the examination, and questions should be sent to the student each day by the major professor unless other arrangements are necessary.

It is the major professor's responsibility to ensure that each committee member understands this guidance and work with committee members to assure these guidelines are followed. The major professor is also responsible for reviewing questions from all committee members in advance of the exam to determine if they are appropriate and avoid repetition. The final format of the exam (number of days, time allowances, etc.) should be given to the student by the major professor at least 1 week prior to the first day of the written exam.

If the student or major professor wish to depart from the above guidelines, they must request the approval of any changes in writing to both the student's graduate committee and the Departmental Graduate Committee. Only after formal approval by both groups will departures from the above guidelines be permitted.

Following the student's submission of his or her responses, each committee member will be asked to evaluate the entire examination and recommend to the major professor Pass or Fail regarding their individual questions. Evaluations should be received by the major professor within 3 days to allow a timely review and discussion of all results by the committee. Students who fail one portion (one committee member's questions) of the examination may be allowed to proceed to orals, or may be required to retake that section or the exam. This determination should be made by the student's entire graduate committee. If the committee cannot reach consensus, the committee member who authored the question makes the final decision. Failure on more than one section ( $\geq 2$  committee member's questions) will necessitate retaking of those portions of the examination. The specific questions asked during the reexamination are at the discretion of the committee member(s) who failed the student in consultation with the major professor. After the second examination, the Committee will determine the student's readiness to proceed to the oral examination. The oral exam does not occur until the committee agrees that the student has passed the written portion and is ready to proceed. However, the oral exam can be scheduled in advance of passing the written exam to facilitate planning.

**The Oral Exam.** **The student should contact the Graduate School at least two weeks before the preliminary oral examination exam** to announce the time and place of the examination. The Events Scheduling form can be filled in and submitted at the Graduate School website (<http://gradschool.oregonstate.edu/forms#event>). The oral examination should be scheduled to last for 3 hours, allowing for about 2 hours of examination followed by discussion amongst committee members, first without and subsequently with the student present. Committee members should be made aware that the oral exam will require three hours of time.

The written exam must be passed before the oral exam takes place. Thus, a minimum of two weeks should be scheduled between the two exams, to provide the committee time for evaluation and discussion. If additional work is required to pass the written exam, the oral exam may need to be postponed, so three weeks between exams may be prudent. It is often difficult to

schedule the oral exam, particularly for students with large committees, so scheduling and notification of the Graduate School can take place before the written exam is passed, with the understanding that postponement may be necessary.

Students are reminded that the objective of the oral preliminary examination is to determine the ability to integrate material over a wide range of fields; thus, questioning may not follow specific coursework. Committee members are encouraged to ask questions that include relevant topics not included in the written portion of the exam. Moreover, if a committee member feels the student did not answer a question well on the written portion, they can ask the student to refine their answer during the oral exam.

*At the completion of the oral exam, each committee member votes to pass or fail the student. A student passes with zero or one dissenting vote. If two or more committee members vote “no” the candidate will have failed the oral examination. The committee may, by majority vote, recommend reexamination. If reexamination is recommended, the Committee must file with the Graduate School a statement describing any conditions imposed, including deficiencies to be made up and the time interval between examinations. Only one reexamination will be allowed.*

Following successful completion of the written and oral examinations, the student is notified of advancement to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree.