

Document of Expectations Between Committee Members and Graduate Student on the format of the comprehensive exam for a student in the Plant Biology Graduate Program at MSU

As a graduate student in Plant Biology, you are working towards developing a dissertation that advances knowledge in foundational research, nurturing understanding of plant biology from molecules to ecosystems. To do this is a tremendous undertaking and so you are supported in this endeavor by a rigorous program that will require a high level of dedication and hard work. Comprehensive exams are designed to assess progress in the program and the development of dissertation research. To help ensure success and promote equitable experiences within the graduate program, graduate students and committee members will agree to the following document of expectations:

As a committee member, I agree to:

1. Follow the guidelines of the University and the Plant Biology Graduate Program
2. Read the dissertation proposal prior to the day of the exam.
3. Provide constructive, written feedback on the proposal document itself, and return it to the student after the exam (no more than 24 hours after the exam has ended) [Handbook Section V.C.2].
4. Attentively attend the presentation of the proposed dissertation research.
5. **Chairperson of the committee only:** introduce the student at the seminar and moderate the public question and answer period (no more than 15 minutes).
6. Hold all of my own questions until the closed question and answer period.
7. Adhere to the protocol for oral questioning as described in the handbook of the year the graduate student started the program (see here for the full [2022-2023](#) protocol on page 22, section V). The summarized protocol in the 2022-2023 handbook is as follows:
 - a. At the start of the closed questioning, the student is excused from the room and the committee reviews the questioning process as explained in c and d that follows. The chair of the committee also asks whether there are any concerns about the written proposal or oral seminar.
 - b. The student is called back into the room and is told how the exam will proceed.
 - c. Questioning proceeds in a round table format, with all members of the committee given equal opportunity to ask questions. Questions should relate to the broad area of research covered in the proposal and seminar and may follow up from prior questions asked by audience members or committee members. Questions can deviate from immediate subject matter but remain reasonably applicable to the topic of the student's proposal. If necessary, during a student's response, the chair may clarify the question for the student if this process is agreed upon by the committee. Questioning by each committee member, including interjections, lasts for 15 – 20 minutes each round. There are two or three rounds of questioning from each committee member.
 - d. At the end of questioning, the student is excused from the room and the committee discusses the student's performance. The committee votes on performance in the exam, each member submitting a Pass or Fail outcome.

8. Come to a pass/conditional pass/fail decision by the end of the exam.
9. Provide specific recommendations and timeline to the student if they conditionally pass or fail and participate in a repeat exam within six months.
10. Hold other members of the committee accountable to the terms of this set of expectations.

As a graduate student, I agree to:

1. Follow the guidelines and policies of the University and the Plant Biology Graduate Program.
2. Discuss the format of the proposal with my committee, agree upon a format, **discuss this document of expectations and return it signed to the Academic Program Coordinator.**
3. Register for a minimum of one credit during the semester in which the exam is administered.
4. Create a written dissertation proposal that includes all elements described in the appropriate PLB [handbook](#).
5. Submit my completed written proposal to my committee at least one month prior to the day of the exam [PLB handbook section V.B].
6. Schedule the dissertation proposal public presentation with my committee and the PLB Academic Program Coordinator at least two weeks in advance of the date [PLB handbook section V.B].
7. Present proposed dissertation research with a 35-45 minute research style seminar.
8. Answer questions during a public question and answer period.
9. Complete the oral defense following the protocol in the appropriate PLB handbook.
10. Incorporate exam feedback into the dissertation research as appropriate and retake the exam within 6 months if the exam is failed.
11. Complete the [comprehensive exam paperwork](#) and return it to the Academic Program Coordinator.

All parties agree to:

1. Discuss any deviations from the above expectations and come to an agreement about expectations. This may include agreement of which committee members can provide feedback on the proposal before the exam date.
 - a. In the space below, please write notes of any deviation from the above guidelines and maintain for later reference:
2. Discuss the method of questioning for the oral exam prior to the exam time.
3. Address any concerns or issues that arise in a timely and respectful manner.
4. Re-visit this form to discuss the format prior to an exam retake.

Printed Name Date

Signature
Committee Chairperson

Printed Name Date

Signature
Committee Member

Printed Name Date

Signature
Committee Member

Printed Name Date

Signature
Graduate Student

Printed Name Date

Signature
Committee Member

Printed Name Date

Signature
Committee Member