

## **MSP QUALIFYING EXAMINATION PART I AND II ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES**

### **Part I: Written Exam**

The Written Exam is designed to test the students' general knowledge, and their abilities to analyze and critique scientific data. It is given after the end of the Spring Semester of the second year and administered over several days. The exam consists of essay questions based on material studied over the first two years of the program, including coursework, journal clubs, seminars and recommended readings.

**Organization:** The Qualifying Exam Committee Chair will organize and chair a committee to administer the qualifying exam. The committee should consist of faculty who teach in graduate courses and reflect the breadth of the program, and at least one student who has advanced to Candidacy.

**Notification.** The Qualifying Exam Committee Chair will meet with those students who are to take the qualifying exam early (late January/early February) of the Spring Semester of the second year to go over the format of the exam and set the dates of the exam. After the meeting, the chair will send a written summary of the meeting to the students and their advisors. The summary will describe the procedures to be followed, and the required performance standards. The summary will also include tentative dates for the oral exam.

**Written Exam.** The committee will solicit essay questions from faculty. Questions should be accompanied by an outline of an adequate answer, which will be distributed to faculty graders. The committee should ensure that questions are based on material to which the students were exposed during the first two years. Relevant course syllabi will be available for determining the suitability of questions.

**Grading of the Written Exam.** Written exams will be coded so that graders will not know the identity of the students. At least two graders for each question will be recruited by the committee; a question's author will be one of its two graders, when possible. Each question will receive a numerical score based on a continuous scale from 0 to 4.0, with 4.0 being the highest possible score. The final grade for each question will be determined by averaging the scores from each grader. Students will receive written notification of their average grade on each question as well as their final grade. **The minimum passing grade is 3.0.**

## **Part II: Oral Exam**

The Oral Exam consists of an oral defense of a written proposal for an original research project. It is given during the summer (Late July – August) between the second and third year.

**Notification.** The Qualifying Exam Committee Chair will meet with the students who passed the written exam. During the meeting the chair will go over the format and ask the students to begin the process of scheduling the exams.

**Oral Exam format:** The oral exam will consist of an oral defense of a written proposal. Generally, the defense will cover the proposal developed by the student during the IBS 537 grant-writing course. Under some circumstances, the students will be allowed to use a different proposal for their exam. Prior approval from the Qualifying Exam Committee Chair and research advisor will be required to use the different proposal. A summary of the proposal (i.e. Specific Aims page) will be submitted to the Qualifying Exam Committee Chair approximately two weeks following the meeting.

**Oral Exam Committee:** The exam committee will consist of 4 members – two members of the MSP Executive Committee and two MSP faculty members (ad hoc) that are not Executive Committee members. The student in consultation with their advisors will choose the two ad hoc members. The Qualifying Exam Committee Chair will choose the two Executive Committee members.

**Timeline:** The students will send their full proposal to all members of their committee at least two weeks prior to the exam. Additionally, the students will submit copies of any failed questions from the written exam.

**Exam Day:** The exam will last about 1 hour and consists of an oral presentation (10 minutes) from the student followed by questions from the faculty. The student's advisor must be present at the exam, but is not allowed to speak during the exam.

**Grading of the Oral Exam:** Each examiner will provide a numerical score based on a continuous scale from 0 to 4.0, with 4.0 being the highest possible score. A student must receive an average of 3.0 to pass.

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