

Part II: Defense of Proposal

By the end of the third semester, the Ph.D. Dissertation Committee must be formed. The Dissertation Committee is chaired (in the usual case) by the research mentor (a non-voting member) and composed of at least four other members, two BMS Department faculty members from the student's program area (track), one BMS faculty member outside the program area and one member whose primary academic appointment is outside the BMS Department, and who may be from another institution. In the case where the mentor is ineligible to chair the Ph.D. Dissertation Committee, the committee may designate another member as chair, who then serves as a voting member. The composition of the Ph.D. Dissertation Committee will be reviewed by the Graduate Academic Committee for final approval.

Within one year of successfully completing Part I of the qualifying exam, the student should complete Part II, a defense of proposal. This exam will test the student's depth of knowledge in his/her chosen area of specialization as well as the student's ability to write and defend a research proposal. This examination is to be on a topic intended to serve as the basis for the student's Ph.D. dissertation research.

The student will write the proposal in the format of a mini-grant application, equivalent to a mini NRSA fellowship. The written proposal should be no longer than 10 single-spaced pages (not including references) and should consist of an abstract, background and significance, specific aims and experimental design.

Preliminary data are not required. If preliminary data have been obtained, then it should be included in the background materials and may be included in the oral presentation. The student may consult with anyone in the course of preparing the proposal, but the written document must represent the student's own work. The mentor may aid in the development of specific aims and construction of a topical outline for the dissertation proposal. The mentor also may direct the student to relevant literature and may edit an initial draft. However, the mentor should not act as co-author. The research proposal will be judged on standard criteria, including, but not limited to, the student's grasp of the field, significance of the proposed work, originality and depth of thought and the feasibility of the experimental approach.

The written proposal will be submitted to the department office **no later than April 1st of the second year**. The department office will then distribute the written proposal to all members of the dissertation committee. The oral defense must be taken **no later than June 1st of the second year**. The department office will provide the dissertation committee with course grades, laboratory rotation evaluations, and Qualifying Exam Part I results to review prior to the Qualifying Exam Part II oral defense. At the oral defense, the student will answer questions on the proposal and on related topics, focusing on (but not restricted to) the student's program area.

The Dissertation Committee will provide a grade of Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. The student must pass the exam by a majority vote of the Committee. If the student does not satisfactorily complete this part of the exam, the Dissertation Committee will make appropriate recommendations to the Graduate Academic Committee, which may include modifying the proposal and re-taking the exam, completing remedial course work, or dismissal from the program. The date and results of the exam will be communicated by the Dissertation Committee Chair to the Graduate Academic Committee and the Department Chairperson. If the student receives a Conditional Pass on the exam, the conditions must be met within three months or the student will receive a grade of Fail. If the student receives a grade of Fail, the exam may be re-taken once, and must be completed within three months.