GRADUATE HANDBOOK
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA, DEPARTMENT OF GEOSCIENCES

The following guidelines were approved by the Geosciences faculty on September 21, 2019 and are effective immediately.

ADMISSIONS

We encourage students with majors in geology and complementary disciplines to enter our Geosciences graduate program. We do not require incoming students to have completed an exact equivalent of our undergraduate curriculum in geosciences prior to admission. We do require students to have completed at least one year each of geosciences, calculus, physics, and chemistry prior to admission. However, at the discretion of the Graduate Admissions Committee, course deficiencies may be satisfied during the student’s first year. Such students and those with non-geosciences undergraduate degrees will meet with their prospective thesis advisor to design a suitable schedule of remedial coursework. Students receiving a teaching assistantship are required to have sufficient background in geosciences to teach assigned courses effectively.

Applicants are required to submit a standardized form listing completed coursework (Form A) and a personal statement with a clear discussion of research interests that indicates faculty with whom the student wishes to work.

Our expectations for admission include the following:
1. GPA of 3.0 or higher in geosciences and related sciences
2. GRE scores in the 70th percentile or higher
3. Strong letters of recommendation
4. Acceptance by a faculty member as a provisional advisee

The Department recognizes the variance in these measures from different colleges, various curricula, and test taking abilities. Thus, strong performance in some areas may outweigh lesser results in others.

The University is committed to providing programs that are accessible and usable by students with disabilities. Applicants and students with disabilities will be provided with reasonable modifications and accommodations. Applicants and students who seek a reasonable modification should begin the process by registering with the Office of Disability Services for Students (DSS). University policy as well as federal and state law prohibits retaliation against anybody for exercising their right to request a reasonable modification or accommodation.
FINANCIAL AID AND THESIS RESEARCH FUNDING

Several forms of financial aid are available through the Department. We support some graduate students with teaching assistantships (TAs) made available by the Graduate School. These TAs are generally awarded to incoming students based on merit and, with satisfactory performance, continued for a second year for M.S. students and, occasionally, a third year for Ph.D. students. Research assistantships, off-campus internships, or other awards in lieu of the TA will not change the total number of semesters of the initial award for students (four semesters for M.S. or six semesters for Ph.D.). All remaining semesters of TA support will be forfeited if a student resigns a TA position without first receiving written permission from the Chair to return to the TA position. Other funding opportunities, including occasional one-semester teaching assistantships, are advertised within the Department. Through their grants and contracts, faculty members may also provide research assistantships or research funds to graduate students. The number of research assistantships varies considerably from year to year; the allocation of research funds is the responsibility of the funded faculty member. Graduate support from external fellowships and scholarships is available from a large number of agencies and organizations.

GRADUATE SCHOOL POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for graduate degrees in the UM Department of Geosciences are described below. These requirements are in addition to the basic degree standards and policies for advanced degrees of the University of Montana Graduate School. UMG Graduate School standards and rules website are described in detail on their, hereafter referred to as the “Grad School Policies” website.

All requirements and policies from both the Department of Geosciences and Graduate School must be adhered to and satisfied for fulfillment of the degree program. Only Department specific policies are described here with occasional and references to some Graduate School policies and requirements; all policies of the UM Graduate School are not necessarily replicated or fully described here.

Exceptions to the Department rules may be made with unanimous consent of the faculty of the Department. Exceptions to the University rules are occasionally allowed by petition to the Graduate School. Standards and rules regarding honorable scientific conduct and plagiarism are not negotiable.
**Degree Advisors**

Interaction between graduate students and advisors is an integral part of graduate education in the Department of Geosciences. The advisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is aware of and satisfies the requirements for the graduate degree outlined below. The advisor is also responsible for supervising the graduate research, mentoring the student in the field of study, and training the student in the techniques and concepts of the area of research. The student should meet with the advisor at the start of their program to develop a curriculum of study and at the beginning of and throughout each academic year to make sure the curriculum is still appropriate. The student and advisor should also meet regularly to discuss research progress.

Part of the graduate admissions process entails the selection of an advisor; graduate students will not be admitted without a sponsoring faculty advisor. This advisor should have expertise in the candidate’s field of study. Departmental faculty are not obligated to advise any particular graduate candidate; rather, the faculty selects candidates for admission based on scientific interest, capabilities, and funding opportunities. A formal process for terminating the student-advisor relationship exists and is initiated by contacting the Department Chair, but a student must secure a new advisor prior to termination of a previous arrangement or leave the program.

The advisor is responsible for ensuring that the student is aware of the degree requirements.

**Enrollment**

Enrollment policies are dictated by the Graduate School and there are no additional departmental requirements. These are described in more detail on [Grad School Policies](#) website.

Graduate students must register for credits each Autumn and Spring semester to maintain continuous enrollment. In other words, summer credits are not necessarily required if a student is enrolled in Spring and will be enrolled again the following Autumn semester. However, some summer funding opportunities may require summer credits. If graduating during the summer (and therefore not intending to enroll during Autumn semester) the student must enroll for at least 1 credit during the summer.

Full-time student status requires at least 9 credits during the regular session and 4 credits during a summer half-session. Full-time Teaching Assistants must carry at least 9 credits per semester, unless a waiver is obtained from the Graduate School. A student must register for at least 6 credits to receive a contract to work as a Research Assistant, unless a waiver is obtained from the Graduate School. These credits may include GEO 599 (Thesis Research) or GEO 699 (Dissertation Research). Undergraduate credits do not apply to graduate degree requirements unless designated UG in the catalog. Specific course requirements for the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees are given below.
Students must petition for a leave-of-absence if they are not continuously registered. Continuous registration requires completing at least 3 credits per semester. Students who step out of their graduate programs without an approved leave-of-absence for more than two consecutive semester terms will be dropped from their program's roster and will need to petition the Geosciences Department and the Graduate School for readmission. The petition for readmission will require an evaluation of the student’s progress and plan for completing the degree. Not all students will be readmitted.

Students can be granted one semester to ‘wrap up’ work after defense and graduation pending approval. See the Grad School Policies website for details.

Transfer Credits
Graduate credits for Geosciences courses may be transferred only from a school that has a graduate program in Geosciences or Geology. Thesis or dissertation credits and credits for courses with grades of C or lower are not transferable. A request for transfer of credits is initiated by petitioning the Chair of the Department.

MS degree – After satisfactory performance in graduate courses at the University of Montana and upon recommendation of the student’s graduate advisor and department chair, up to 9 course credits (not thesis) may be transferred from another school and applied to a Master’s degree after one semester of residence at the University of Montana.

PhD. degree – On the recommendation of the Department and approval of the Graduate Dean, credits may be transferred (including an entire Master’s Degree and/or credits from a Master's Degree program) from other institutions after a semester in residence.

All transfer credits must also satisfy additional stipulations of the Graduate School described on the Grad School Policies website.

Grades
A grade point average of 3.0 or better must be maintained throughout the graduate program. Immediate dismissal will occur for failure to achieve this minimum grade point average. Courses with grades of C+ or lower cannot be applied to the requirements for the degree program but are included in the calculation of grade point average. Grades of N (continuing) and CR/NCR (Credit/No Credit) are given for credits in Thesis Research (GEO 599) and Dissertation Research (GEO 699). Many courses numbered GEO 500 or above are graded on a CR/NCR basis. If an
instructor offers such a course for a letter grade then it must be taken for a letter grade to apply toward a degree program.

**MASTER’S DEGREE IN GEOSCIENCES**

A recommended checklist and timetable for the Master’s degree are provided in Appendix A. However, the exact requirements for the degree are determined by the policies of the Graduate School of the University of Montana and the candidate’s advisor and committee within Graduate School policies.

**MS Committees**
A MS thesis committee must include the major advisor, and at least two additional members of the UM faculty: one more from Geosciences (active or emeritus), and one from a Department other than Geosciences. Optional members beyond the latter three may be added from UM or other institutions provided their credentials are approved by the graduate school. This committee is responsible for evaluating the student’s research and for providing supplemental instruction in their respective research specialties to complement the primary training of the student. Members of the committee should be selected by the pertinence of their expertise in the intended course of study. Master’s degree seeking students who fail to establish and maintain a committee after one year will be dismissed.

**MS Coursework**
The Master’s degree requires 30 credits of courses designated for graduate credit in the university catalog (those labeled “G” or “UG”). The committee, however, may require additional coursework beyond the minimum of 30 credits as needed for the students’ program. A minimum of 24 credits of formal coursework and 6 thesis credits must be completed. The following additional constraints apply:

a) At least 14 of the formal course credits must be Geosciences courses (i.e., up to 14 credits from other departments can be applied, if committee approved);
b) At least half (i.e., 12) of the formal course credits must be at the 500 or 600 level;
c) No more than 6 credits of Advanced Problems (GEO 597) may be applied toward the total of 30 credits required for the degree;
d) Seminars (GEO 58X) may be taken more than once with the consent of the instructor.
e) All courses used to meet graduation requirements must be at the graduate level (see section C1.000-Credit Requirements on the Grad School Policies website).

Cognate science courses taken outside the Geosciences Department may be required, depending
on the field of study, advisor, or research area. Cognate science courses are generally taken in Math, Physics, Chemistry, Biology or Computer Science. Some courses in other units may be suitable for some fields of study. The nature of the cognate coursework will be decided in consultation with the research committee. All Master’s students are also required to take GEO 508, Fundamentals of Academic Research, during their first fall term in residence. All degree requirements for the Master’s degree, including the use of transfer and nondegree credits, must be completed within five years. To apply courses taken outside of this time limit, course content must be recertified for currency of knowledge.

**MS Thesis**
The Master’s thesis must present the results of original scientific research in the field of specialization in an appropriate scientific style and format. Length and content requirements are subject to the requirements of the advisor and the committee. However, an advanced degree in the physical sciences requires a demonstration of competence in scientific method, as well as familiarity with the current state of knowledge in a specialty.

**MS Thesis Proposal**
A thesis research proposal must be fully approved by the end of the second semester of the M.S. degree. The proposal must include a concise description of the scientific problem to be addressed, a summary of current research relevant to that problem, the importance of the problem, and a description of the experimental design or methodology to be used. This content should demonstrate basic scientific literacy as well as familiarity with the specialty chosen. An acceptable thesis may consist of one or more papers submitted or ready for submission to peer-reviewed scientific journals or a single longer document presenting the thesis research.

The first step of the proposal process is for the thesis committee to approve and sign the proposal draft. The committee-approved draft is then submitted by April 15 to undergo review by all faculty of the department. All proposals are discussed at a departmental faculty meeting within 7-10 days after April 15. The faculty will either approve as written, approve with changes, or not approve, each proposal. If a proposal is not approved, a plan of action will be stated by the faculty which may include resubmission for approval after revision. Missing the deadline can result in dismissal from the program; requests for extensions or alternations to the time-line must be submitted to the department Chair. If more than half the faculty do not approve a second (revised) submission to the faculty, the student will be dismissed from the program.

**MS Thesis Defense**
The completed research and thesis must be defended to the committee and approved by all members. In case of failure, one repeat examination is permitted. Defense of the written thesis
also consists of a public oral presentation to students, faculty, and other interested members of the public, and an oral examination conducted by the faculty. The presentation typically includes 40 minutes allotted to the presentation and several minutes for questions from the audience for a total time limit of 50 minutes. The final exam follows the public talk. The exam includes the defense of the thesis as well as questions designed to test competence in the course of study. The exam is conducted by the committee, and chaired by the advisor, but the exam is open to interested members of the university faculty as well. The defense should be held during the period of a regular Autumn or Spring semester and must be completed at least 15 days before graduation. However, the defense can be held during the Summer with the approval of the research committee if normal semester deadlines cannot be met.

There are three possible outcomes of the exam:
   a. Pass with thesis accepted as it stands.
   b. Pass with minor revisions required on thesis.
   c. Fail or major revision required on thesis.

After a failure, a second defense is allowed after 2 weeks, but not more than 6 weeks, excluding semester breaks. Only one repeat exam is permitted. A second failure results in the student being dismissed from the program.

**MS Time Limit**
The Graduate School requires that the Master's degree be completed within five years of beginning coursework at The University of Montana. A leave of absence does not waive these time limits except when the leave is granted prior to commencing coursework. A leave of absence or delayed admission requires a "Request for Leave of Absence from the M.S. Program" form from the Graduate School. Such a leave of absence may be granted for a maximum of one calendar year. The Graduate School, upon receipt of a written request and with agreement from the Geosciences Department, may grant a 12-month extension to a leave of absence.

**Intellectual Property**
The preservation of samples and data collected during thesis research and the publication of research findings is of the highest priority. Therefore, raw data and samples generated as part of research projects supported by faculty grants and/or support from the Department of Geosciences will reside in the Department. The student must develop a plan for the archiving and transferring of data and samples with his/her advisor prior to finishing research and writing the thesis. The advisor has the responsibility to explain to the student any restrictions or dispensations on intellectual property rights of the data/information generated during the student's research. The advisor and student should consult to determine content, authorship and
acknowledgements before papers are submitted for publication.

**Application for Graduation**

At least one semester before the Master's degree is to be awarded, the student must submit three copies of the Application for Graduation form to the Graduate School and pay a graduation fee. See the Calendar of Deadlines for the exact dates to file paperwork. The Graduate School will conduct a degree audit and send two copies of this form back to the Geosciences Department (one departmental copy and one student copy) early in the semester of graduation. The faculty advisor and student should note any problems and rectify them at least two weeks prior to the end of the final semester by using a Graduation Amendment Form. If the student fails to meet the original graduation date as requested on the form then the student may request the application be reactivated for the following semester by notifying the Graduate School one semester prior to the revised completion date.

After the defense, the successful candidate must follow the [Graduate School rules for submitting the thesis](#). Formatting guidelines for the thesis are available at the same site. In addition, the student must complete the following tasks:

1. Prepare one hard copy of the thesis for each research committee member if requested. The copy should be bound according to the requirements of the thesis advisor. Some committee members may prefer only an electronic copy.
2. Where appropriate, the advisor may require a representative collection of samples, specimens, thin sections or other materials, as well as copies of field and laboratory notes, for the departmental collections and for documentation of funded research.
3. Clean up all lab and office space and return any departmental equipment and keys (remember to claim key deposits!).
4. Return any books or other items borrowed from the faculty.
5. Provide forwarding contact information to the department secretary.
DOCTORAL DEGREE IN GEOSCIENCES

The Department offers two courses of study for the doctoral degree: Ph.D. in Geosciences and Ph.D. in Applied Geosciences. The fundamental requirement for the Ph.D. is demonstration of outstanding scholarship and research ability in a field of Geoscience. Admission to the graduate program does not automatically entail admission to the Doctoral program, which requires satisfaction of an additional set of requirements described below. A checklist and timetable of all Doctoral degree requirements is provided in Appendix B.

PhD Committees
A Ph.D. committee must have at least five qualifying members. The committee must include the major advisor, at least one more faculty from Geosciences, and at least one member of the UM faculty from outside the Department of Geosciences. Additional members beyond the latter three may be added from Geosciences, other departments at UM, or from other institutions provided their credentials are approved by the graduate school. Not more than one member may be emeritus or research faculty of the Department. This committee is responsible for evaluating the student’s research, for providing supplemental instruction in their research specialties to complement the primary training of the student, for administering the comprehensive exam, and for assessing the dissertation. Committee members should therefore be selected by the pertinence of their expertise in the intended course of study. Ph.D. degree seeking students who fail to establish and maintain a committee after two years will be dismissed.

PhD Coursework
A minimum of 60 graduate credits beyond the Bachelor’s degree is required for the Ph.D. degree at the University of Montana. The committee will often require additional coursework beyond the minimum of 60 credits. A minimum of 40 credits of formal coursework and 20 thesis credits (GEO 699, Dissertation Research) must be completed. The following additional constraints apply:

a) At least half (i.e., 20) of the coursework credits must be at the 500 or 600 level;
b) At least 14 of the 40 formal course credits must be Geosciences courses;
c) No more than 6 credits of Advanced Problems (GEO 597) may be applied;
d) A minimum of 6 graduate credits of coursework must be taken outside of the Geosciences Department in cognate science areas;
e) Transfer credits from a MS degree may be used to satisfy any of the above formal coursework requirements with committee approval. Thesis credits cannot be transferred.

This coursework must comprise a coherent program relevant to the dissertation research and/or professional goals. Cognate courses are generally in Biology, Math, Physics, Chemistry, or
Computer Science. Some courses in other units may be suitable for some fields of study.

All requirements for the doctorate must be completed within seven years of commencing graduate course work at The University of Montana. Courses that fall outside this time limit must be recertified for currency of knowledge.

**PhD Comprehensive Exam and Dissertation Proposal**

By the end of fourth semester of study, the student will complete written and oral comprehensive examinations covering the major discipline. Successful completion of the comprehensive examinations is required for a student to be advanced to candidacy in the Doctoral program. See Appendix C for a suggested description of the exam process; however, the structure and process of the comprehensive exam are at the discretion of the advisor and research committee.

**Dissertation**

Completion of the Ph.D. degree requires submission and defense of a doctoral dissertation. This document may consist of two or more papers submitted or ready for submission to peer-reviewed scientific publications or of a single long document containing original scientific research, although the journal paper format is strongly encouraged. Length and content requirements are subject to the advisor and the committee. In the case of the journal paper format, additional chapters or appendices including data, detailed methods, or other unifying material may be required. However, an advanced degree in the physical sciences requires a demonstration of competence in scientific method, as well as familiarity with the current state of knowledge in a specialty and a substantive new contribution either to the body of methodology or the body of theory applicable in the field of expertise. All graduates of the program must also demonstrate a thorough understanding of the principles in their specialization, current techniques and methods in that field, a thorough understanding of scientific data and error analysis, and competence in scientific writing.

The oral defense of the dissertation may be scheduled only after the research committee has approved the draft dissertation. A copy of the accepted and corrected committee draft of the dissertation must be placed in the department office at least one week before the defense for inspection by any university faculty member. The defense should be held during the period of a regular Autumn or Spring semester and must be completed at least 15 days before graduation. However, the defense can be held during the Summer with the approval of the research committee if normal semester deadlines cannot be met.
The dissertation defense has two parts: a public oral presentation and the examination conducted by the faculty. The public presentation is open to all students and faculty of the Department and any other interested people.

The final defense before the research committee and members of the university faculty follows the public presentation. The purpose of this defense is to test general comprehension of the dissertation project and related material. Following a period of questioning, the committee will meet in closed session to vote. Possible outcomes are:

a. Unanimous pass without revision.
b. Unanimous pass with minor revisions to the dissertation.
c. Failure of defense that, in most cases, will lead to major revisions of the dissertation. If one or more failing votes are cast, the candidate must make the changes required by the committee and must defend within 30 days. A second failure is final and the student will be dismissed from the program.

PhD Time Limit
All requirements for the degree must be completed within seven years of commencing graduate coursework at The University of Montana. Candidates are not excused from program time limitations by virtue of a leave of absence except when the leave is granted prior to commencing coursework.

Application for Graduation
At least one semester before the Ph.D. degree is to be awarded, the student must submit three copies of the Application for Graduation form to the Graduate School and pay a graduation fee. See the Calendar of Deadlines for the exact dates to file paperwork. The Graduate School will conduct a degree audit and send two copies of this form back (one departmental copy and one student copy) early in the graduating semester. The department and student should note any problems and rectify them at least two weeks prior to the end of the final semester by using a Graduation Amendment Form. If the student fails to meet the original graduation date as requested on the form, the student may request the application be reactivated for the following semester by notifying the Graduate School one semester prior to the revised completion date.

After the defense, the successful candidate must follow the Graduate School rules for submitting the dissertation. In addition, the student must complete the following tasks:

1. Prepare one hard copy of the thesis for each research committee member. The copy should be bound according to the requirements of the thesis advisor. Some committee members may prefer only an electronic copy.
2. Where appropriate, the advisor may require a representative collection of samples,
specimens, thin sections or other materials, as well as a copy of all field and laboratory notes, for the departmental collections.

3. Clean up all lab and office space and return any departmental equipment and keys (remember to claim key deposits!).

4. Return any books or other items borrowed from the faculty.

5. Provide forwarding contact information to the department secretary.

**Intellectual Property Rights**

The preservation and publication of samples and data collected during thesis research is of the highest priority. Therefore, raw data and samples generated as part of research projects supported by faculty grants and/or support from the Department of Geosciences will reside in the Department. The student must develop a plan for the archiving and transferring of data and samples with his/her advisor prior to finishing research and writing the dissertation. The advisor has the responsibility to explain to the student any restrictions or dispensations on intellectual property rights of the data/information generated during the student’s research. The advisor and student should consult to determine content, authorship and acknowledgements before papers are submitted for publication.

**PUBLICATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS**

The Department of Geosciences strongly encourages graduate students to submit their scientific work for publication in peer-reviewed journals and for presentation at national and regional meetings. Presentation of findings should be undertaken with the supervision of the advisor or members of the committee.

The Department and the Graduate School may help defray the expense of presenting a paper at a professional meeting. Notice of accepted publications, awards, and presentations must be provided to the committee and to the department secretary, and should also be added to a CV, which may also be held by the department secretary.
**APPENDIX A: suggested Master’s degree checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application to UM geosciences program</td>
<td>3 months before starting term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance by advisor</td>
<td>2 months before starting term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with advisor to develop curriculum</td>
<td>1 week before starting term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with committee to review curriculum</td>
<td>At beginning of each semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of thesis proposal</td>
<td>End of second term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of thesis draft</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (min.) – 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (max.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of 30 graduate credits</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (min.)-10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (max.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis defense</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (min.)-10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (max.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPENDIX B: suggested Ph.D. checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application to UM geosciences program</td>
<td>3 months before starting term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance by advisor</td>
<td>2 months before starting term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with advisor to develop curriculum</td>
<td>1 week before starting term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with committee to review curriculum</td>
<td>At beginning of each semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of dissertation draft</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (min.) – 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (max.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of 60 graduate credits</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (min.)-14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (max.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation defense</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (min.)-14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; term (max.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: Ph.D. Exam Procedure

Schedule
The advisor works with the student to develop a schedule that will accommodate the exams before the end of the required semester. The following are suggested components, but the specific comprehensive exam structure is set by the advisor and research committee.

Step 1: Proposal
Preparation of a comprehensive research proposal for the exam committee is the first step of the Ph.D. exams. The student writes the proposal independently of the advisor, although it is acknowledged and expected that the proposal will arise from and reflect substantial intellectual exchange with the advisor leading up to the writing of the proposal. The proposal must include a concise description of the scientific problem to be addressed, a summary of current research relevant to that problem, the importance of the problem, and a description of the experimental design or methodology to be used. This content should demonstrate scientific literacy as well as knowledge of the specialty chosen consistent with the degree objective. The proposal should be limited in length (e.g., 15 pages of text, not including figures and references) to facilitate rapid reading by the exam committee. Once the proposal is complete, the student submits it to the advisor who then distributes it to the committee.

Step 2: Written Exam
Each committee member will read the proposal and generate written questions based on this proposal. There are five people on the committee, so each member will produce questions intended to be worked on for about one day of a five-day exam period. The committee member may include an expected time allotment for each question. The exam is generally completely 'open book' and the student will submit his/her answers electronically. However, the final format is determined by committee consensus approval.

The questions are to be 'based on the proposal', but interpretation of this is very loose. For example, the committee members could ask specific questions related to methods, errors, etc., or they could ask general questions related to the student’s research discipline. Committee members can ask many short questions or one longer question, but the questions must be able to be answered within the time given for the exam, i.e., one day per each of the five committee members. Questions can be intended as ‘gating’ (i.e., aimed at determining whether the student “has what it takes to be a PhD level scientist”) or ‘guiding’ (i.e., forcing him/her to consider specific issues so that this research can be successful). If two or more committee members submit questions that are too similar, the advisor will work with those members to adjust or combine the questions.

The advisor will compile the questions and distribute to the student on the agreed schedule. He/she will work on the exam, M-F of the scheduled week and submit answers to the advisor when complete.

Each committee member will receive the entire exam results on the same date. Each committee member will be required to grade only the questions he/she submitted, but should at least look through the entire exam. Committee members are free to pass judgment on any part of the exam but they must grade their own questions. The grading is pass/fail with one of the following outcomes: (1) Pass, (2) Provisional pass, with specified provisions, (3) Fail.
Each committee member will send their grades to the advisor and the advisor will determine whether there is consensus to pass or fail. The student must receive at least four passing grades to pass the exam. If a student passes, but there is not a consensus outcome (pass or conditional pass) among the committee, the advisor will call a committee meeting to discuss the exam. If there are provisions to the pass, the committee will determine what precisely is required of the student before the advisor informs the student of the outcome of the exam. Once grading and consultation is complete, the student will receive a grade report from the advisor and a determination of whether he/she will be proceeding to the oral exam. If the written exam is not passed the student will have one more opportunity to take and pass the exam. The student must retake the exam with the same committee as soon as reasonably possible, but no more than one semester from the original exam date. If the student does not pass the second attempt of the exam, then he/she will be dropped from the program after notification of the Graduate School.

Step 3. Oral Exam (If the written exam is passed).

The oral exam must take place between 3 and 14 days after the written portion of the exam is passed. The oral exam will take place with all the committee members in attendance (in person or electronically) or some subset approved by the Chair of the Department if a committee member cannot attend due to health/professional obligations.

The student will make an initial oral presentation of her/his proposal. The committee will be free to interrupt the student at any time with questions. This is a chance to ask questions as follow-up to the written exam, or to ask new questions based on the oral presentation and the ensuing discussion. As with the written exam, committee members may exercise considerable leeway in evaluating both the breadth and depth of the student’s knowledge of their discipline.

To pass the exam, the candidate must demonstrate clear understanding of the scientific background and methods associated with their research, and the ability to articulate and defend their research and scientific ideas through written and oral communication. After the oral exam, the committee will attempt to reach consensus regarding pass/fail or provisional pass. The committee, voting privately, may pass the student with one failing vote. If the student does not pass, they will have one more chance to take and pass the exam within one semester from the original exam date. If the student does not pass the second attempt of the exam, or fails to re-take the exam within the specified time, he/she will be dismissed from the program. The committee may also require revisions of the proposal before final approval.

Step 4. Distribution to All Faculty

Following completion of the oral exam, the committee-approved draft is to be submitted by April 15 to the entire faculty of the department. The proposal will be discussed in a departmental faculty meeting held 7-10 days after the April 15 deadline. This step is informative only, and there will be no voting or required revisions set by the department faculty as a whole. This is the final step in the Ph.D. comprehensive exam process.