

Environmental Sciences Graduate Program
PhD Preliminary Examination Guidelines
April 28, 2017

The student working toward a doctoral degree must pass a comprehensive preliminary examination. The purpose of this exam is to determine the student's understanding of his or her major and minor fields and also to assess the student's capability for research.

(<https://catalog.oregonstate.edu/college-departments/graduate-school/#policiestext>)

Schedule

Term of Examination:

- Examinee must be enrolled in at least 3 credits.
- General rules and structure of the exam, agreed upon by the committee, will be provided to the examinee in writing.
- Oral Exams should be scheduled with the graduate school at least 2 weeks before exams. Find the form at <https://gradschool.oregonstate.edu/formlink/14646>.
- The examinee's current research proposal should be provided to committee members at least 2 weeks before exams.
- The program of study should be approved and signed by the committee and submitted to the graduate school no later than the second week of the term in which the examinations will take place.
- Committee members should advise the examinee to be prepared for specific topics or questions. Neither the committee members nor the examinee should go into the preliminary exams unprepared.
- Examinee should start studying 2-3 months before preliminary exams.

Exam Week 1:

Written Exams:

Written Exams may be administered one of the following ways:

- Five-day examination period one week prior to the scheduled oral exams. Each Committee Member submits questions to the major professor by email no later than one week ahead of the written exams. The major professor then assigns the questions to the examinee each day, one day allotted per committee member. The examinee has 24 hours to answer each question. Before midnight of each day, the examinee will deliver the questions and answers to all of his committee members by email. (**Recommended option**)
- Two-day examination period one week prior to the scheduled oral exams. A series of shorter closed book questions and the examinee has 2-4 hours to answer questions from each committee member for a total of 20 hours maximum. Questions and answers are delivered by the examinee to all committee members upon completion of each committee member section.
- The examinee writes up a research proposal that is not related to their thesis that is no longer than 20 pages including graphics. An outline and abstract of the proposal should be given to the committee for approval before writing the complete proposal. The time given for this process is expected to be at least 1 month prior to the oral exams.

Guidelines:

- A copy of questions and answers will be provided to all committee members one week before oral exams.
- The suggested elapsed time between completion of written and the scheduled oral exams is 1 week.
- The maximum elapsed time between completion of written exams and the scheduled oral exams is 1 month.

Exam Week 2:

Oral Exams:

Oral Exams may be administered one of the following ways.

- A comprehensive oral exam that is at least 2 hours in length with no more than half the time focusing on aspects of the examinees current research proposal, with all committee members. Scheduling a 4-hour block is recommended to ensure enough time is allotted and avoid schedule conflicts. (**Recommended option**)
- A series of smaller exams with individual committee members.
- The examinee gives a 30 min presentation on their thesis/current research with 30 min of questions, and another 20 min presentation is given on the proposal not related to their thesis with 40 min of questions.

Guidelines

- Must be at least 2 hours in length and no more than half the time can be spent on the examinees thesis project.

General Success Guidelines:

- If more than one negative vote is recorded at the end of exams, then the candidate has failed the exam. No more than 2 re-examinations are allowed (3 total tries).
- If more than 5 years elapse between preliminary exams and final exams, preliminary exams must be retaken.
- Each committee member should be allotted the equivalent amount of time to ask questions during the examination. The major professor is responsible for overseeing appropriate time allotment.
- The Graduate Council Representative (GCR) should receive documentation on the preliminary oral exam once the date is scheduled with the graduate school. The GCR is expected and encouraged to participate in the exam.