

**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION GUIDELINES FOR EXAMINERS**  
**Department of Microbiology and Immunology**  
**McGill University**

As a member of the comprehensive examination committee, you have to assess the student on 3 different aspects:

- A written research proposal not exceeding 10 pages (excluding figures and references) and including appropriate background, the goal of the research project, preliminary experimental results and future directions. The research proposal is submitted to the members of the committee 2 weeks prior to the exam.
- An oral presentation of the research project, the experimental progress to date and future directions.
- A period of questioning aimed at evaluating in depth the student's understanding of the research area and relevant areas related to the research project.

The comprehensive exam lasts approximately 3 hours and proceeds as follows:

- 1) In the absence of the candidate, the supervisor gives the student's background and comments on the student's progress on the research project.

The chair of the examining committee determines the order in which the members will question the student. Usually, the questioning period starts with the member external to the department followed by the departmental member, the member of the graduate program committee (or its representative) and the supervisor/co-supervisor.

The chair of the examining committee also informs the members about the conduct of the examination and the evaluation.

- 2) The oral presentation should not exceed 20 minutes and should provide an overview of the research project, including general significance, key experimental data, conclusion and future directions.
- 3) Each member has two periods of 15 minutes for questioning the student. Typically, the first round of questions is related more specifically to the research project and the second round is meant to test the boundaries of the student's knowledge (general knowledge relevant to the areas of the research project). The questioning period should not exceed 120 minutes unless a member feels

that additional questions are required to provide a fair evaluation of the candidate.

- 4) The student is then invited to leave the room.
- 5) Based on the student's overall performance in the written proposal, the oral presentation and the questioning period, the voting members of the committee decide whether the student passes or fails by consensus or, if a disagreement occurs, by majority vote. Note that the supervisor and co-supervisor are non-voting members.

If the student passes, voting members of the committee individually assign a mark on their marking sheet for each aspect of the comprehensive examination (the written proposal, the oral presentation and the questioning period).

The chair of the examining committee calculates the average of the marks for each aspect and the final mark.

The proportional value of each aspect to the final mark is:

50% for the questioning period

25% for the oral presentation

25% for the written research proposal

The chair invites the members to share their comments on the student's performance; both the strengths and weaknesses should be discussed.

- 6) The student is informed whether he/she passes or fails.

If the student passes, the chair provides the average mark for each aspect of the examination and the final grade. The chair also summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the student's performance.

If the student fails, the chair provides a written report that summarizes the deliberations of the committee. The report should clearly explain the reasons for failure. The report is distributed to the student, the members of the committee, the course coordinator (Dr. Cousineau) and the Student Affairs Coordinator. In case of a fail, the student receives a grade of "incomplete" (HH) and is required to repeat the comprehensive examination within 6 months. If the student fails the second attempt, a grade of fail (F) is assigned and the student is required to withdraw from the program.

- 7) The signed grading sheets (individual and summary of evaluation) must be submitted to the course coordinator (Dr. Cousineau).