

Interfaculty Studies Doctoral Program in Quantitative Life Sciences Thesis Proposal and Comprehensive Exam Meeting

Guidelines for examiners of Comprehensive exams

Comprehensive examinations in QLS:

- QLS is an interdisciplinary program where every thesis spans at least one quantitative element and one life sciences element. Nevertheless, PhD students cannot sacrifice depth of knowledge for breadth, and ensuring good depth is very important for continued success of the QLS Program.
- This is a combined Comprehensive exam and thesis proposal defense. Therefore, your questions should address both general background knowledge (built on the reading list that should be provided to you by the student) and specific knowledge around the thesis proposal itself.
- Students take their comprehensive exam at the end of year 2 or the beginning of year 3 in the Program. However, they will have spent their first year in rotations. Their background knowledge can be expected to differ from students in the examiner home departments, and this should be considered as you evaluate their answers.
- The thesis proposal should contain (i) clear objectives, (ii) proposals for how to achieve these objectives, (iii) a way of assessing/measuring whether the objectives have been achieved, and (iv) discussion of limitations or anticipated challenges and ways to alleviate them.

Format of examination:

- A 20-minute presentation followed by 2 rounds of questions by external examiners and non-supervisor members of the thesis advisory committee.
- The student does not leave the room prior to the exam, but will leave the room after the exam for discussion among the examiners, supervisor(s) and Chair.

Suggestions for questions:

- Question deeply to find the boundaries of the knowledge of the student
- Try to ensure that the first round of questioning includes some background knowledge questions, and leave some of the proposal-specific questions for round 2.

If you have serious concerns about the proposal prior to the exam, please let the QLS Coordinator or Director know in advance.