

# Guidelines for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Microbiology Graduate Students

Additional information is on the website: <https://microbiology.washington.edu/program-guidelines>

## 2nd Year Students

Key dates:

- September 20 – submit thesis committee choices to GPA (microgpa@uw.edu)
- December 15 – deadline to confirm a final thesis committee
- January 31 – deadline to schedule Topic Exam
- May 15 – deadline to complete Topic Exam

Topic Exam checklist:

- Shortly after scheduling – remind your thesis advisor to appoint a chair for the exam
- 6 weeks before the exam – turn in two topics
- 4 weeks before the exam – a topic should be approved (remind the chair of this date)
- 2 weeks before the exam – work full time on the exam (subject to PI approval)
- 3 business days before the exam – turn in the written proposal

Detailed information:

- 1) Submit proposed PhD committee to the GPA (microgpa@uw.edu) one week before the start of Autumn Quarter (Sept 20). Have a confirmed committee by last day of Autumn Quarter (**Dec 15**).
  - a. Discuss options with your advisor now.
  - b. The committee consists of your PI, at least three regular members (two must be Micro graduate teaching faculty), and a GSR. It can be larger, but that creates scheduling issues.
  - c. The committee must include a core or joint member of the department. **We strongly prefer two.** If your PI is core or joint in the Dept, they count as one of the two.
  - d. The GSR can be an adjunct but cannot be a collaborator or primary, joint, or affiliate of Micro. Check that your GSR is eligible here: <https://grad.uw.edu/policies/graduate-school-representative-gsr-eligibility/>
  - e. Submit your committee choices **to the GPA on September 20**. Please also include two names of alternative faculty to fulfill the “core or joint member” requirement. The GPAC will review all committees for composition, with the criteria described above. Students will then be told that their choices are approved and can contact faculty.
  - f. If you contact all the approved faculty and still cannot assemble a complete committee, please consult your PI for additional options, contact the GPA with the names of alternates, and wait for permission from the GPAC (Graduate Program Advisory Committee) before you contact faculty to ask them to serve.
  - g. Confirm the final committee composition with the GPAC.
- 2) Schedule the Topic Exam for a date on or before **May 15**
  - a. For Autumn Quarter, begin scheduling immediately after forming the thesis committee.
  - b. For Winter Quarter exams, begin scheduling at least 3 months before the target exam date.
  - c. For all students, **scheduling must be completed by January 31**.
- 3) Shortly after the Topic Exam date is scheduled, **your thesis advisor** must appoint a temporary chair for the Topic Exam, preferably one of the members with a primary or joint appointment in Microbiology.
  - a. You will need to make sure that this happens.
  - b. The temporary chair will coordinate submission of **two Topic proposals**, which are due 6 weeks in advance of the exam. You need to submit:
    - i. A title for each topic
    - ii. A paragraph briefly outlining the subject of each proposed topic and the gap in knowledge that you propose to address
    - iii. A hypothesis statement and the methodology that you will use to test the hypothesis for each topic
    - iv. A statement asserting that neither topic proposal is based on a paper or project that is or will be the basis of a departmental journal club presentation or a proposal for a class
    - v. Two or three recent references that serve as the basis for each topic to be explored.
    - vi. A description of your thesis project in a short paragraph, so that the committee can judge

how different your proposal will be both in subject and approach from your thesis work.

- c. **You will want to be proactive here**, do the math and submit these by the deadline without the temporary chair telling you when to do so.
- 4) The temporary chair and the thesis advisor will approve a Topic  $\geq 4$  weeks in advance. When you submit the Topic proposals, you will want to **remind them of the date by which they need to give you approval**.
- 5) Only devote “full time” to this for about 2 weeks
- 6) The short (4 page) written component is due 3 **business** days prior to the exam
  - a. 1 page equivalent to the “Specific Aims” page of an NIH grant
  - b. 1 page on the state of the field – serves as preliminary data
  - c. 1-2 page Research Plan - Include a brief rationale, experimental approaches, alternative approaches, and expected outcomes. You should provide sufficient information to convey the logic behind the approach and its feasibility without going into experimental detail.
  - d. Optional 1 page of figures
  - e. References on a separate page that does not count towards the above page limits
- 7) It is Departmental Policy that the Topic Exam must be conducted in person and that quorum must be met. Quorum is the adviser, at least three additional members of the committee, and the outside expert, if required. The GSR is not required to attend though should be invited. If a member of the committee has a last minute conflict and cannot attend in person, they can attend virtually to meet quorum.
- 8) Outcomes are pass, conditional pass (repeat some or all the written component or the oral component), re-examine, or fail. You must pass the Topic Exam to qualify for the General Exam.

### 3rd Year Students

- December 16 – deadline to schedule the General Exam
  - Notify the GPA ([microgpa@uw.edu](mailto:microgpa@uw.edu)) once you have entered it into MyGrad because the exam date must be officially registered with the Graduate School and approved electronically.
- March 17 – deadline to complete General Exam
  - Written proposal is due to the committee **1 week prior to the exam**. Format is an NIH R21 proposal: 7 pages total (Specific Aims page and 6-page proposal with figures embedded in the text) plus additional pages for references.
  - Make sure your **advisor fills out the written evaluation (Appendix 4)** and discusses it with you prior to the exam.
  - It is Departmental Policy that the General Exam must be conducted in person and that quorum must be met. For the General Exam, quorum is the Chair, the Graduate School Representative (GSR), and two additional general members. If a member of the committee has a last minute conflict and cannot attend in person, they can attend virtually to meet quorum.
  - Outcomes are Pass, Fail, or Re-examine. There are no “Conditional Passes”. If an examination is unsatisfactory, a supervisory committee *may* recommend that the Dean of the Graduate School permit up to a maximum of two re-examinations after a period of additional study. Students who fail the General Exam must leave the PhD Program, generally with a non-thesis master’s degree.

### General Advice for All Students

- 1) Send your committee the guidelines before the exam. Don’t expect the faculty to know the rules.
- 2) Make sure that you are completing the IDP annually. Use a form that requires short (1-yr), medium (5-yr), and long (10-yr) range planning.
- 3) Use When2Meet or Doodle to schedule.
- 4) These exams are meant to be your work and not that of your advisor. For the Topic Exam in particular, the ideas should be yours. That said, your advisor can give you feedback on your Topic choices and should see the written draft of the General Exam.
- 5) For these meetings and for future committee meetings, it is the policy of the Department of Microbiology that students do not bring refreshments (food or drink) to committee meetings.