

Guidelines for 2nd and 3rd Year Microbiology Graduate Students

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

2nd Year Students

Key dates:

- Mid-September – participate in “Teaching@UW: Strategies for TAs” (<https://teaching.washington.edu/learn/teachinguw-strategies-for-tas/>)
- September 18 (one week before the start of Fall Quarter) – submit thesis committee choices to David Campbell (microgpa@uw.edu)
- December 13 (end of Fall Quarter) – deadline to confirm a final thesis committee
- January 31 – deadline to schedule Topic Exam
- May 15 – deadline to complete Topic Exam

Topic Exam checklist:

- Schedule by January 31 and inform David Campbell (microgpa@uw.edu) of your exam date
- 6 weeks before the exam – turn in two topics to David Campbell
- 4 weeks before the exam – David Campbell will inform you which topic was approved by GPAC
- 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 and your IDP to your committee

Detailed information:

- 1) Submit proposed PhD committee to the GPAC (via David Campbell) one week before the start of Autumn Quarter (**Sept 18**). 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 David Campbell on September 18**. 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. **Do not contact faculty to serve on your committee until you receive approval to do so**.
 - f. If you contact all the approved faculty and still cannot assemble a complete committee, please consult your PI for additional options, contact the GPAC with names of alternates, and again wait for permission from the GPAC before you contact faculty to ask them to serve.
 - g. Confirm the final committee composition with David Campbell and Jason Smith (jgsmith2@uw.edu).
- 2) Schedule the Topic Exam for a date on or before **May 15**. Plan for a 2-hour window.
 - 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) The due date for your Topic proposals is dictated by your exam date (6 weeks before). David Campbell will assist GPAC in collecting **two Topic proposals**.
 - a. 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. Two or three recent references that serve as the basis for each topic to be explored.

- v. 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.
 - b. Only devote “full time” to this for about 2 weeks. See the website for what constitutes an acceptable Topic. Although the goal is for you to come up with the proposal topic yourself, seek advice from your thesis adviser and peers when vetting topics to make sure that the area is distinct from your thesis work and that what you learn is likely to be of use to your general knowledge and development as a microbiologist.
 - c. GPAC will approve one or both Topics. If neither are suitable, we will contact you for revisions or alternatives as quickly as we can. David Campbell will then inform you which Topic is approved 4 weeks before your exam.
- 4) The short (4 pages of text, 1 page of figures) written component is due 3 **business** days prior to the exam
- a. The proposal format is as follows:
 - i. 1 page equivalent to the “Specific Aims” page of an NIH grant
 - ii. 1 page on the state of the field – serves as preliminary data
 - iii. 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.
 - iv. Up to an additional 1 page of figures **with legends**
 - v. References on a separate page that does not count towards the above page limits
 - b. Also send your IDP ([Appendix 5A](#) of the Program Guidelines) and a copy of the [Topic and General Exam Rubric](#)
- 5) For the oral exam:
- a. It is Departmental Policy that the Topic Exam must be conducted in person and that quorum must be met. Quorum is the adviser, and at least three additional members of the committee. The GSR is not required to attend though should be invited. If a member of the committee has a last-minute conflict (e.g., working from home due to illness) and cannot attend in person, they can attend virtually to meet quorum.
 - b. Bring a [printed copy](#) of the *Topic and General Exam Rubric* and the *Topic Exam Report*

3rd Year Students

- December 13 (end of Fall Quarter) – deadline to schedule the General Exam. Plan for a 3-hour window. Notify David Campbell once you have entered it into MyGrad because the exam date must be officially registered with the Graduate School and approved electronically.
- March 14 (end of Winter Quarter) – 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. Also [send a copy](#) of the *Microbiology General Exam Checklist* and the *Topic and General Exam Rubric*.
 - Make sure your **advisor fills out the written evaluation** ([Appendix 4](#) of the *Program Guidelines*) 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 (e.g., working from home due to illness) and cannot attend in person, they can attend virtually to meet quorum.
 - Bring printed copies of the following to the exam:
 - i. Graduate School Committee Signature form

- ii. Microbiology General Exam Checklist
- iii. Topic and General Exam Rubric
- o 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
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- 1) Send your committee the guidelines and rubrics before the exams. Don’t expect the faculty to know the rules.
- 2) Make sure that you are completing the IDP annually. Use the short form ([Appendix 5A](#) of the *Program Guidelines*) for the Topic Exam and the longer form ([Appendix 5B](#)) starting in year 3 and thereafter.
- 3) Use When2Meet or Doodle to schedule.
- 4) These exams are meant to be your work and not that of your advisor. Review the rubric to see what we are looking for in these proposals. For the Topic Exam in particular, the ideas should be yours. We encourage your advisors to talk to you about best practices in grant writing. They are welcome to provide you with an example of what a grant application looks like, although you must adhere to the length and formatting limitations of each exam. If your advisor reads a draft, maybe once during the process, they can comment on areas that are unclear or in an illogical order but not how to fix them. They should not point out gaps in logic or missing elements.
- 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.