Instructions for the oral preliminary exam

The oral preliminary examination, which is to be taken after successful completion of the written prelim, consists of the defense of a written research proposal. The format of the research proposal is based on the applicable sections of an NIH F31 predoctoral grant application. The proposal should include a Title or cover Page, a Project Summary (abstract) followed by a description of the Specific Aims and the Research Strategy, which will consist of 3 subsections. These subsections are Background and Significance, Preliminary Data, and Research Design and Methods. The proposal should include a Bibliography of applicable references.

Project Summary is meant to serve as a succinct and accurate description of the proposed work when separated from the proposal. Limit to no more than 30 lines of text.

Specific Aims – limit to 1 page

Research Strategy – limit to a total of 6 pages, single-spaced inclusive of all figures

Bibliography - no page limit

The candidate schedules the oral preliminary examination and distributes copies of the written research proposal to each member of the candidate's advisory committee and deposits a copy with the Biophysics Program office. The advisory committee members should receive their copies of the report at least three working days before the scheduled date for the examination. The Biophysics Office will send the Warrant for Preliminary Exam to the candidate and the oral prelim rating forms (one for each committee member) to the committee chair prior to the examination.

At the examination, the student first presents an uninterrupted 20-minute survey of the research project with the understanding that the committee members have read the written report. Then each advisory committee member is free to ask the candidate questions pertinent to the research topic and related areas. After the question period, the advisory committee meets in closed session to grade the candidate's performance. An NIH-style rating system is used: scores are recorded on a form in integers from 1 (best) to 5 (worst). An average score of 2.5 is a pass; a score over 2.5 is a fail. The student is called back and told the results of the examination.

The chairman of the prelim committee returns the signed rating sheets and warrant to the Biophysics office. The program coordinator obtains the program chair signature and forwards the signed warrant to the Graduate School.

Students are given one opportunity to retake the written or oral part of the preliminary examination in the event of a failed grade.