

The Prospectus Examination

The prospectus examination is designed to determine if you are an independent scholar who is prepared to make an original contribution to knowledge in the biological sciences. Your research objectives will help to define the subjects in which you will be expected to display expertise. Your faculty committee will help you to identify these subjects at your preprospectus meeting.

The prospectus examination is **not** an assessment of your research achievements. Indeed, emphasis placed upon gathering data is likely to distract you from a scholarly review of your chosen discipline. Tidbits of information, no matter how abundant, will not substitute for the demonstration of the sound scientific judgment that will be expected by your prospectus committee.

Preprospectus Meeting

By the winter of your second year, you should have selected the area in which you wish to conduct research. You will then schedule a meeting during the spring term with a committee consisting of your thesis advisor plus other faculty members. The committee should include at least three MCDB Department faculty, at least two of whom should have their primary appointment in the Department of MCDB. You will present a brief written and oral description of the proposed research. Together with the committee, you will identify the subject areas in which you will be expected to exhibit mastery during the prospectus examination.

The Written Prospectus

The written prospectus should be given to members of your committee at least a week before your examination. The document should be no longer than 15 pages (double spaced) and it should address the following questions.

1. What do you intend to do? State a biological question and explain how you will answer it.
2. Why is the work important? Describe novel insights that may emerge from your observations.
3. What has already been done? How has the work of others helped to define your biological question?
4. How are you going to do the work? What techniques will you apply and what measurements will you make?

The Format of the Examination

You will schedule the examination to take place by the end of your second year. The faculty committee will ask for a brief (no more than 20 minutes) verbal presentation of the research objectives outlined in your prospectus. After your presentation, the faculty will ask questions that will allow you to demonstrate your ability to think critically about knowledge relevant to your field of inquiry.