

Major Preliminary Examination and Forms

The Major Preliminary Examination (“Prelims”) provides an opportunity for students to integrate their knowledge of a relatively broad area of psychology (e.g., traditionally developmental, social, clinical, cognitive, or physiological, and more recently developmental psychopathology, emotion, or cognitive neuroscience) and to demonstrate their scholastic competence in this area. Students are ready to Advance to Candidacy after the completion of the SAP and Prelims (and, for clinical students, all clinical coursework and practica).

Each student’s Major Preliminary Examination is designed and evaluated by a faculty committee comprised of three faculty members (the Major Prelim Committee). Two of the three committee members, including the chair, must be current tenure-related Psychology Department faculty. All of the committee members must be UO tenure-related faculty. For clinical students, two of the three members must be tenure-related Clinical faculty. The chair of the Major Prelim Committee must be different from the chair of the Supporting Area Committee.

The major preliminary examination must take one of three forms—a written examination, a review paper with subsequent public presentation, or a grant proposal with subsequent public presentation.

- (1) The *written examination* is designed by the Major Prelim Committee and based largely on a reading list developed by the student in consultation with the faculty committee. In developing the list and constructing the examination, the student and committee should remember that the goal of the Major Preliminary Examination is to demonstrate the student’s grasp of a broad area within psychology. (Reading lists and past exam questions are kept on file by the Graduate Secretary and should be consulted by the student and committee members.) The formal examination may be given either in one sitting or as a take-home exam, as agreed upon by the Prelim Committee. The Prelim Committee members grade the answers to the exam questions and discuss whether the exam as a whole is to be graded “pass with distinction,” “pass,” or “fail.” The Prelim Committee’s decision must be unanimous. It is common that the committee asks the student to rewrite individual exam answers if they are not satisfactory for a passing grade.

For the other two options (described below), students should consult with their advisor and/or potential Major Prelims Committee chair (often the same person), as well as other relevant faculty (other advising committee members and/or potential Major Prelims Committee members) and do the following before proposing their project: (a) review the relevant literature; (b) identify a gap in scientific knowledge; (c) discuss the point(s) at which committee members will give feedback on the proposal; and (d) determine the timing of the presentation (e.g., do the committee members need to have approved the written proposal prior to the presentation?).

- (2) The Major Prelims requirement may be satisfied by the completion of an integrative *review paper* that will critically review a focused area or sub-area of a field, ideally in a way that points to knowledge gaps that could be filled with a dissertation project. This will be followed by a presentation about the paper either at one of the departmental brownbags or at a lab meeting. An announcement must be made to the department no fewer than two weeks in advance of the presentation; at least two prelim committee members must be in attendance at the presentation; and the presentation has to be open to any department members who wish to attend. The review

paper may undergo several rounds of revisions until the Prelim Committee considers the paper to be “passing.” In the presentation, the student is expected to defend their paper and demonstrate their competence within a relatively broad area of psychology. The Prelim Exam is graded on both the paper and the presentation as “pass with distinction,” “pass,” or “fail.” The Prelim Committee’s decision must be unanimous.

- (3) The Major Preliminary Examination requirement may be satisfied by writing a grant proposal. This will be followed by a presentation about the grant proposal either at one of the departmental brownbags or at a lab meeting. An announcement must be made to the department no fewer than two weeks in advance of the presentation; at least two prelim committee members must be in attendance for the presentation; and the presentation has to be open to any department members who wish to attend. The grant proposal should be written in the actual format of an extramural granting agency that would potentially fund the proposed research and has to be a proposal for a grant that would have the potential to substantially fund the research and/or support the student during the course of the research. Only grant proposals that require the following as part of the application can be used for this prelims option: (a) background/significance for the research topic, (b) a research plan with clearly stated hypotheses, (c) sampling strategy and power analysis, (d) details about measures, paradigms, tasks, and procedures to be employed, (e) plan for data analysis, and (f) timeline for project.

NIH NRSAs are an acceptable grant proposal for this prelims options; guidance from faculty in various areas will be solicited to help decide whether other types of grant proposals are eligible. Proposal formats will be considered by the GEC chair in consultation with faculty in various areas and will be judged on a variety of criteria including the extent to which the proposal is a kind that could substantially benefit the student’s career. Students will specify which granting agency they are submitting to when they complete the department’s Preliminary Examination Proposal form.

The student is not required to actually submit the grant proposal to a granting agency as part of the prelims requirement (although submission is encouraged). The student could conceivably submit the grant proposal to a granting agency prior to submitting it to his/her prelims committee. However, regardless of the student’s decision about submitting it to the granting agency, the student will still have to go through the department’s required process for proposing to do the grant proposal option for prelims and would also still need to get his/her prelim committee to sign off on a version of the completed proposal in order to complete the prelims requirement, regardless of the status of the proposal with a granting agency. The grant proposal may undergo several rounds of revisions until the Prelim Committee considers the proposal to be complete. The Prelim Exam is graded on both the grant proposal and the presentation as “pass with distinction,” “pass,” or “fail.” The Prelim Committee’s decision must be unanimous.

A “Major Preliminary Examination Proposal” must be submitted to the GEC *before* work on the project has begun – failure to submit a proposal may mean that the student’s efforts on the project are wasted if it is later determined that the project does not meet the goals of the Major Preliminary Exam requirement. The proposal is based on discussions between the student and the Major Prelim Committee (in consultation with the GEC, if needed), and it specifies the scope and format of the requirement the student has chosen and includes a preliminary reading list.

All preliminary exams must be based on a reading list approved by the student's Major Prelim Committee. From this reading list are derived either (a) written exam questions, (b) the review paper topic or (c) the core questions for a grant proposal. Completion of the Major Prelim requirement is documented on the "Completion of Major Preliminary Examination" form, which records date, title, and format of the exam, date of presentation (if review paper or grant proposal option was taken), the grade ("pass with distinction," "pass," or "fail") and includes the reading list and either exam questions or a summary of questions asked at the presentation (in the case of a review paper or grant proposal).

Failure of Prelims: If a PhD student fails his or her preliminary exam (where failure constitutes the prelim committee informing the graduate secretary via the preliminary exam form that the student has failed), the student must form a new preliminary exam committee and complete a new prelims proposal. The members may be the same as the members of the first prelims committee and the reading list and format may be the same, but if the student chooses to take an exam for the second attempt, the questions must differ from those on the first attempt. If the student initially wrote a paper or grant proposal for prelims and the paper or proposal is deemed failing, then the student's second attempt must be an exam.

Failure to pass the prelims on two attempts is automatic cause for a student to be recommended for termination from the graduate program. What constitutes passing or failure of the prelims is left up to the prelims committee.

Deadlines:

To stay on track with the requirements, students should start planning for their Prelims as soon as they complete their FYP in the Fall of their second year. The student should also discuss these plans with their advising committee during their second year spring advising meeting.

Students may choose whether they wish to propose and complete their SAP or their Prelims first, although it is expected that students will usually be working on both requirements in parallel. Some students may want to complete their Prelims first because, for example, they have a clear idea for follow up studies for their FYP that they want to write up for a fellowship grant application. Other students may want to learn a new method not common in their primary lab, completing the SAP first with the goal to then use that method in their future work.

If the student wishes to focus on the Prelims first, they must be proposed by the end of the spring term of the student's second year, and completed by the end of the spring term of their third year. For students completing their SAP first, the Prelims proposal is due by the fall term of the student's third year, with completion of the project by Oct. 15 of the fourth year.

For clinical students, the Prelims must be completed before applying for internship. Clinical faculty will not recommend a student for internship if this requirement has not been fulfilled. Upon completion, the student must submit a completion form, signed by the committee and the GEC chair, to the graduate secretary.

Major Preliminary Examination Proposal

Name:	Has met with his/her Major Preliminary Examination Committee and together they propose the following:
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Topic of student's Preliminary Examination:
Student's main area of study:

The student's preliminary reading list has been approved by the Committee:

_____ Yes (*Please attach copy of reading list.*)

Format of Exam: _____ Written Exam
 _____ Review Paper and Presentation
 _____ Grant Proposal and Presentation

This proposal fulfills the goal of the major preliminary examination to demonstrate the student's scholastic competence in a relatively broad area of psychology (for details, see Doctoral Student Handbook).

Prelim Committee Members

Print Faculty Names	Faculty Signatures	Date
Chair,		

GEC Approval _____ Date _____

Completion of Major Preliminary Examination

Name:	Has completed the Major Preliminary Examination.
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If Written Exam:	1) Date(s) of Exam*:
	2) Date final revisions made (if any)*:
	3) Exam Topic:
If Grant Proposal	1) Name of granting agency:
	2) Grant proposal was given to committee on*:
	3) Presentation Date and Location (i.e., brownbag, seminar, lab meeting)*:
If Paper Presentation	1) Final draft of the paper given to committee on*:
	2) Paper Topic:
	3) Presentation Date and Location (i.e., brownbag, seminar, lab meeting)*:

The overall grade is: (please check one)

- Pass with distinction
- Pass
- Fail

Committee Members (Signatures required):

Chair, _____ Date* _____

*Dates must fall within a term (or terms) in which student is enrolled.

Please attach a copy of the reading list and either (a) the questions from the written exam or (b) a copy of the review paper/grant proposal and discussion questions from the presentation.

GEC Approval _____ Date _____