



Pre-prospectus and Prospectus Examination Guidelines

Pre-prospectus and Prospectus Exam: The Pre-prospectus and Prospectus are described in this booklet. An outline of the process is as follows:

- ✓ Choose Prospectus Committee (*Summer before or 1st semester of second year*)
- ✓ Select a Prospectus Chair from your committee (cannot be your PhD advisor)
- ✓ Schedule and hold Pre-prospectus meeting with your committee. Receive comments and suggestions. (*Preferably in the first semester or early spring of second year. See more info below*)
- ✓ Schedule Your “RIP” presentation through Barbara (Note, this does not have to align with your Pre-prospectus meeting. If it does, great, but if not, please proceed with your Pre-prospectus and Prospectus meetings to avoid delays).
- ✓ Study for Prospectus Exam and complete written Prospectus (typically takes about 8 weeks)
- ✓ **Provide your committee with your written paper at least one week in advance**
- ✓ Have Prospectus Exam completed: *before the end of the second year – May 31.*
- ✓ Your prospectus chair (not your Ph.D. advisor) writes a letter to the DGS (Carla Rothlin, cc'd to Barbara) describing the outcome of your exam; this is also cc'd to the rest of the committee.

Pre-prospectus:

In advance of the Pre-prospectus meeting, meet with your advisor to discuss your ideas. Prepare a short (one page maximum) description of your proposed project with Specific Aims and distribute it, in advance, to your committee members. Be in contact with your committee, during the process, keep them informed and certainly keep an open dialogue with your advisor.

The pre-prospectus should begin with a 20-30 minute presentation describing your current research and goals, and your committee members will provide guidance and suggestions on the proposed research. You and your advisor should come prepared with 4-5 suggested “Reading Topics” that you will need to master for your prospectus exam. You and your committee will discuss the possible topics and you then formulate a preliminary reading list for each of these Reading Topics for examination.

Preparing for the prospectus:

You should plan on meeting individually with your committee members to expand the reading lists so that the reading provides you with a thorough and broad understanding of the subject area. Reading lists are only a means of providing you with a starting point to investigate the literature and are not meant to be all-inclusive. You are expected to explore the literature broadly. You may wish to schedule one or more additional meetings with individual committee members to discuss questions and issues that arise during the reading.

Prospectus Meeting:

The Prospectus is normally held within 2 months of the Pre-prospectus meeting and for BBS students, you must complete your Prospectus by May 31st of the second year. However, we strongly encourage students to start the process in the fall semester of the second year as the intellectual growth gained by the process is typically extremely



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valuable for students and helps them become more engaged in their thesis project. For MD/PhD students, you should complete your Prospectus by the end of your first full year in the program.

The written prospectus should be sent to all committee members at least a week in advance of the Prospectus Exam date. Students may seek advice in crystallizing their ideas, addressing general technical questions, and in preparing for the exam. **The writing of the proposal, however, must be entirely by the student.** Students may show drafts of their proposal to anyone they wish (including faculty and the student's PI). Feedback should be given verbally concerning broad scientific aspects of the proposal (such as "this won't work," "unclear," or "flesh this out"). The student remains fully responsible for the actual writing, including grammar, spelling, sentence structure, etc. Be sure that you put quotation marks around any text you take from anyone else's work, whether from an online source or a formal publication. Failure to do so may result in charges of plagiarism, a very serious offense. Please speak with the DGS or another faculty member if you are unclear on the meaning of plagiarism. The oral Immunobiology Prospectus Exam tests a student's understanding of two general areas: the proposed thesis research and the specific subjects covered in the readings (typically 4-5 areas of biology/immunology).

Yale has a wonderful graduate school writing center. Take a look at this website: <http://ctl.yale.edu/graduate-professional-students> -- they offer many workshops, and several are geared for the writing of the prospectus.

The exam begins with a presentation by you on your thesis research project. The presentation is strictly limited to 30 minutes, including questions. You should provide a focused description of the proposed thesis research that emphasizes experimental design, data interpretation, and anticipated problems and potential solutions, and which touches on background very briefly (the committee should already be familiar with the background from the Pre-prospectus process). The chair of your prospectus committee (who must not be your PI) shall enforce the time limit. During this 30 minute period, your PI remains silent, asks no questions and provides no answers or information related to questions asked by other committee members.

2. The remainder of the time is devoted to questions relating to the reading and to some extent to the thesis project. Questions test your ability to synthesize your knowledge of the relevant areas of biology/immunology (particularly as relates to the reading), to address questions through the design new experiments, to formulate testable hypotheses, and to interpret possible outcomes of experiments. In the course of this, it will become clear whether or not you have mastered relevant basic information derived from course work and the reading.

Your faculty will each have prepared two questions in advance of the exam, which are discussed by the exam committee during a short pre-meeting that takes place in your absence and before you begin presenting. This has two important functions. First, it forces faculty to give thought to their questions in advance and second, it allows the committee to screen out and/or modify questions that are deemed inappropriate (e.g., too difficult, too easy or off target).



Department of Immunobiology
Ph.D. Program

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THE WRITTEN PROSPECTUS: is to be in the format of an NIH F31 grant proposal and should not exceed 10-12 pages in length, including figures. (Single spaced, font 11 point Arial, 1 inch margins on all sides; references can go on additional pages). The written Prospectus should have the following sections:

Title

Abstract (1 paragraph- no more than 30 lines in length)

Specific aims (1 page limit)

Premise and Significance of work (typically 1 page)

Innovation (typically 1 paragraph)

Background and Preliminary data/experimental plan of each Aim (typically 6-8 pages)

References

Figures (figures should be embedded in the text and accompanied by clear legends)

The four possible outcomes are:

Pass: the student's presentation and paper is approved, has passed the prospectus exam unconditionally and, now, can receive graduate school certification on his/her transcript.

Fail: the student is not approved and can be asked to leave the Immunobiology Graduate Program

Conditional Pass: the student is conditionally approved for prospectus certification provided that specified additional work is completed satisfactorily. Such additional work could be, a research paper on one of the topics that the student was felt to be weak in, revisions of the written prospectus, or other requirements to be determined by the committee.

Re-examine: the student's performance was judged to be substantially unsatisfactory, but the committee feels that extenuating circumstances exist that dictate that the student should be re-examined, perhaps using a different format (e.g., a written exam).

Prospectus Certification: Congratulations! You have passed your first major academic challenge in the Immunobiology Department and are on your way to your Ph.D. research!



Remember to provide Barbara with a copy of your prospectus paper and a copy of your prospectus advisor's note so that she can file the necessary paperwork with the Graduate School for you to receive credit on your transcript.