

Plan B, Comprehensive Exam in Biomolecular Sciences

Introduction

Unlike most graduate programs on campus, which administer some form of written Comp Exam in their Plan B programs, the BMS Dept Comp Exam is verbal. It is a conversation between you and your Committee about topics covered in your graduate courses and independent research. It is usually an unstructured conversation that challenges your memory, your recall of basic and advanced facts and concepts, but also your intellect, how well you think and process those facts and concepts.

Here is the timeline for the steps you need to take in your final semester, the one in which you plan to graduate. This assumes that you're finishing in a Fall or Spring term; if you're finishing in the Summer, see the Notes at the end.

Almost everything described here can be done earlier in your program, and in many cases the tasks can be done in different order from that listed. This timeline is based on doing each step close to the end.

Two weeks before your last semester starts

- a. Print out a copy of your graduate transcript (accessed through Central Pipeline), including courses you've registered for in the last semester
- b. Get a copy of your (most recent) approved (ie, signed by the Grad Dean) Planned Program (PP) form. You should have your own copy, but if you don't, then get one from the Grad Studies Office or your BMS Dept advisor
- c. Compare the two documents to make sure they match. If they do not, then you must either:
 - i. Change the PP to match the transcript; contact your advisor and meet to create an updated PP, and then send it around for signatures. Alternatively, if only a minor change in the PP is needed, it may only require an e-mail from your advisor to the Grad Studies Office.
 - ii. Change the courses you're planning to take, so that they match the PP.
- b. When your transcript and PP match, fill out and send to the Grad Studies Office these two documents:
 - i. A Comp Exam Application form (http://www.ccsu.edu/uploaded/Local_PDFs/Graduate_Studies/COMPS_FORM_APP-p.pdf)
 - ii. A Graduation Application (http://www.ccsu.edu/uploaded/Local_PDFs/Graduate_Studies/GRAD_APP_FORM_Revise-d-p.pdf)

In the first three weeks of the semester

- a. Decide on three BMS faculty members who you want for your Comp Exam committee. Choose from among those you have taken grad classes from.
- b. Ask the three if they will be on your Comp Exam Committee. If one or more does not accept, then try again with a different faculty member.
- c. Once you have collected a Committee, then you have to schedule the times for the exam. The exam takes place on two days, about a week apart, for about two hours each day. In some cases, the Committee will decide, after the first date's exam, that the second date is not necessary. However, you must have that second date scheduled in case it is needed. The second of the two dates must be before the end of the twelfth week of the semester.

- d. Scheduling the exam is your job, and it can be difficult. Begin by sending your Committee a collection of suggested dates and times that fit your schedule. You should be flexible, even if you have to take time off from work or arrange other changes to your regular schedule. This is why it is very important to take care of the scheduling early, one or two months ahead. Collect the responses from your Committee and send out a second round of suggestions; after a few iterations, you and your Committee should settle on two dates/times.
- e. if your advisor is not one of your three Committee members, tell him/her the exam dates and Committee membership, and ask your advisor to help reserve a room (often Rm 204) for the exam times.

Four weeks before the exam

- a. Contact, and probably meet with, each of your Committee members to discuss the format for that third of the exam. You may have done this already, back when you were setting up your Committee; if so, you should still contact him/her to confirm, clarify, or update that conversation.
- b. Each Committee member will have specific (though not necessarily detailed) instructions for your preparation and expectations for your performance in the exam. Make sure you understand what will be expected of you. A suggestion: take notes, write up a brief summary of what you think you heard, and send that to the Committee member, asking him/her to check your understanding.

One week before the exam

- a. E-mail confirmations of the dates, times, and locations for the two exam dates to your Committee

First Exam date

- a. Show up
- b. Go ahead and be nervous, but not so much that your brain isn't working well. Yes, you should know (= remember) a lot, but you also have to think hard. Make sure you understand the questions you're asked.
- c. If the Committee wants you to come back for the second exam date, listen carefully to their advice on how to prepare for it.
- d. Spend the week preparing

Second Exam date (if needed)

- a. Show up
- b. Do a better job