Guidelines for the Chair of the Qualifying Examination Committee

A. Upon receipt of the written proposal, the Chair will check that it is an acceptable document; 2 or 3 Specific Aims must be included in the proposal, one of which is an independent Aim of the student. Aims may be interdependent, but not entirely dependent upon each other.

B. Day of the Examination
Four Committee members must be present at the examination. If a member is absent, the Committee Chair will attempt to find a suitable replacement. However, if more that one member is absent, the examination must be rescheduled for the earliest possible date.

C. Conduct of the Examination
• At the start of the exam, the student will be asked to leave the room and the Exam Committee members will discuss:
  o The background of the student, including courses taken
  o The written proposal—any issues that Committee members have found that should be addressed during the exam
  o The process of the exam—i.e. the student presents the proposal without interruption for a maximum of 15 minutes, followed by oral questions.

• The student then returns to the room to give the presentation and begin the oral exam.

• Following the oral presentation, the Committee can begin with questions based on the proposal, and then expand into more general knowledge questions. The student should be able to demonstrate sufficient basic knowledge outside his/her particular microdomain to ensure that the student can develop new ideas and design experiments with appropriate controls to test a hypothesis.

• During the exam, the Qualifying Exam Committee Chair should make notes on the Exam Committee guide sheet.

Note: Audio and/or video recording of the oral examination is prohibited.

D. At the end of the exam, the student leaves the room
• A preliminary, nonbinding secret vote is taken
  o HONORS (indicating an outstanding performance, i.e. in the top 10%)
  o PASS
  o POSTPONED DECISION (requiring revision of the written document within one month)
  o FAIL
• The vote is followed by open discussion to ensure that the various perspectives of the Committee members are heard and understood
• A final vote is taken
Note: The Chair should summarize the key points of the discussion on the Chair’s Summary Sheet, which will be provided to the student and the mentor, and also forwarded to the Academic Affairs Committee.

E. Committee Decision:
   - A majority vote of 3-1 is needed for HONORS
   - A majority vote of 3-1 is needed for PASS
   - If a 2-2 vote occurs, with 2 Committee members voting FAIL, then the grade for the exam will be FAIL
   - If a 2-2 vote occurs, with 2 Committee members voting POSTPONED DECISION, then the grade for the exam will be POSTPONED DECISION
   - If a 2-2 vote occurs, with 2 Committee members voting HONORS, then further discussion is warranted. If the vote remains 2-2, then the grade for the exam will be PASS

Note: Postponed Decision is for revision of the written proposal only, when the oral examination is satisfactory. After Form 4 has been returned to the Graduate Office, with a “Postponed Decision” indicated as the grade, Form 4a will be forwarded to the Chair of the Committee.

In the event of a “Postponed Decision,” the revised proposal is due one month after the date of the oral examination. The revised proposal will be reviewed by the Chair of the student’s Qualifying Exam Committee and any of the members of the Committee who specifically requested changes. The Chair of the Committee then has seven calendar days to submit a Form 4a, with the final grade, to the Graduate Office.

If the oral examination is deemed to be not satisfactory, even if the written document is acceptable, the grade will be FAIL.

F. The student is brought back into the room and informed of the Committee’s decision.

G. Appeal of Examining Committee Decision: If a student wishes to appeal the decision of the Qualifying Exam Committee, the matter will be considered by the Parent Qualifying Exam Steering Committee. This request must be made in writing to the Director of the Graduate Division who will schedule a meeting of the Committee. The appeal will either be denied or the student will be allowed to repeat the examination with a new Exam Committee.

H. For students who previously failed the Qualifying Exam, the “retake” examination should not be treated as a “rebuttal” of the previous exam that they failed, but rather, be considered a completely new exam independent of the outcome of the previous exam.

Academic Affairs Committee Review. A comprehensive and objective review of each student’s progress takes place in the summer following the second year (third year for MSTP) by the Academic Affairs Committee, taking into account grades received for coursework, the Qualifying Examination, and laboratory productivity as indicated by the mentor. Students who fail the Qualifying Examination may at this time receive approval to retake the exam the following Spring.

All information regarding the Qualifying Exam can be found on the Graduate Division website at http://www.einstein.yu.edu/phd/index.asp?qualifying-exam