Guidelines and Procedures for the Applied Plant Sciences (APS) Written Preliminary Examination

1. Purpose and Guiding Principles

The written preliminary examination in the APS graduate program aims to measure a Ph.D. student’s ability to interpret, analyze and make appropriate interconnections with available pieces of scientific information in the applied plant sciences. The examination is designed to assess the student's ability to understand scientific principles and to integrate scientific knowledge into well-organized, cohesive answers based on logical solutions.

2. Administration

2.1. The Ph.D. written preliminary examination will be prepared and administered by a student’s Oral Preliminary Examination Committee. The members of the committee will be determined jointly by the student and the advisor, approved by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and reported to the Graduate School using the Graduate School Web portal (http://www.grad.umn.edu/current-students-graduate-services-progress-doctoral/assign-prelim-committee). The committee has at least four faculty members, three from APS and one from the student’s minor field or supporting program. If the student has co-advisors, the committee will have at least five members with one member from the minor field or supporting program. The preliminary examination committee must have at least three tenured or tenure-track University faculty, with at least one being tenured. The APS graduate faculty holding appointments in more than one graduate program can serve as minor or supporting program members of the committee. The chair of the committee must be a member of the APS graduate faculty. The advisor can serve as chair of the committee.

2.2 The committee shall meet with the student to mutually determine the best timing for the written examination and student’s readiness based on coursework, research progress, and other pertinent factors. The chair of the committee is then responsible for convening the committee to determine how the examination shall be administered, the timeline for its completion, and the roles of committee members in preparing and grading the tests that constitute the examination.

2.3. The examination will consist of three written tests. Each test will be prepared and graded by a committee member who is not the student’s advisor or co-advisor. Other committee members may be consulted regarding preparation and grading of test questions.

2.4. The written tests will not have a fixed format but should adhere to the guiding principles described above. The committee member preparing a specific written test will specify the amount of time allotted for taking the test and whether the student can avail of notes, journals, books, or Web resources while taking the test.

2.5. Ph.D. students will take the written preliminary examination after they have completed most of their coursework (per Graduate School guidelines), but not later than their fifth semester of enrollment.

2.6. To help prepare for the written preliminary examination, the student should meet with individual committee members prior to the taking the tests. Communication between the student and examiner is encouraged as needed during each test.
3. Grading and Reporting

3.1. The committee member who prepared each test will assign a grade of pass or fail for that test.

3.2. If the student fails one of the three tests, the student passes the written preliminary examination with reservations. The faculty member who prepared the test that the student failed, after consultation with the examining committee, will then specify in writing what must be done to convert the pass with reservations to a pass without reservations. A copy of this statement shall also be provided to other committee members and the DGS. The faculty member will notify the committee and DGS when the reservation should be removed.

3.3. If the student fails two or three of the written tests, he or she needs to take a new preliminary written examination consisting of three new written tests prepared and administered by the committee not earlier than the next semester or summer term, in the same manner as described above. The student then needs to pass at least two out of the three tests. A student can retake the written preliminary examination only once: if a student retakes the examination and still fails two or three of the tests, this result shall be forwarded to the DGS as described in section 3.4 and the DGS will excuse the student from the APS program.

3.4. Within two weeks after the student has completed the last written test, the committee chair will report the results of the examination to the DGS. This report will include copies of the tests and the graded test responses of the student, the names of the professors who administered the tests, the dates the tests were completed, the outcome (pass or fail) of each test, and any comments regarding the student’s test performance. This report will be part of the student’s permanent record in APS but will not be forwarded to the Graduate School. If the student passes the written preliminary examination, the Program Coordinator and DGS will report the result to the Graduate School via the Web portal.