

From Mary Bryk April 26, 2018

Information to help you prepare for the Pre Proposal Committee Meeting

Summary

The Pre Proposal (PreP, pronounced preppy) is a committee meeting that will be held during the summer of 2018 for first-year Biochemistry graduate students. Preparing for the PreP provides students with an opportunity to develop research and professional skills while focusing on their thesis research. To prepare for the PreP, students write a proposal and create a slideshow describing their research project and their future plans. The student may use all available resources when drafting and finalizing the pre-proposal document and presentation. There is an expectation that the thesis advisor will help the student prepare for the PreP through discussions and by providing feedback on drafts of pre-proposal document and presentation. However, the pre-proposal document must be original work written by the student. Lastly, the PreP is not an exam.

Brief Schedule for 2018 (more details are provided on the following pages)

1. **April 9, 2018** - Student proposes a thesis advisory committee by sending the list of proposed members to the Biochemistry Graduate Program Office on or before noon on **April 9th**.
2. The Graduate Program Committee (GPC) approves thesis advisory committee or suggests modifications. This process is expected to be completed by mid-April.
3. **May 14, 2018** - Student schedules the PreP meeting for the summer of the first year (your meeting to be held in June or July is scheduled by **May 14th**). A substitute committee member is OK, if needed (see Scheduling section, below). *After you schedule your meeting, the GPC will inform you of the GPC member who will serve on your PreP committee.*
4. **Spring and early summer 2018** - Student prepares a pre-proposal document in a format similar to an NIH F31 Fellowship research plan. The pre-proposal document will contain: 1 cover page with honor statement; 1 page Abstract & Aims; 1-2 pages Background & Significance; 2-3 pages Approach; 1 page Student's contribution to the research project and description of the student's long-term goals/career goals.
5. **Summer 2018 – Two weeks prior to the scheduled PreP meeting** - Student submits the pre-proposal document, CV, Annual Student Self-Evaluation form and draft degree plan to the Biochemistry Graduate Program Office, the thesis advisor, committee members and a GPC member (PreP meeting chair, appointed by the GPC).
6. **At the PreP meeting**, the student makes an oral presentation about their research project. The thesis advisor, committee members, and GPC member evaluate the student. They may not answer questions posed to the student (unless absolutely needed to get the discussion back on track or for clarification). The GPC member acts as a scribe summarizing the comments of committee members in order to provide written feedback to the student.
7. **About two weeks after the PreP meeting**, written feedback will be available to the student in the Biochemistry Graduate Program Office.

The following pages describe the guidelines and expectations for approval of a PhD advisory committee, preparing the pre-proposal document and for the PreP meeting in greater detail. Also, a draft degree plan and the PreP meeting evaluation forms that will be completed by the thesis committee members and the GPC member are attached.

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PreP Guidelines

Advisory Committee:

1. 1st year student submits a list of proposed committee members to the Graduate Programs Office by April 9, 2018. The GPC will consider the proposed committee within 2 weeks.
2. PreP meeting requires a GPC member be in attendance as chair. A GPC member who will serve on the committee for the PreP will be appointed by the GPC. A thesis advisory committee member who is also a GPC member can fulfill this role. The advisor, regardless of membership on GPC, cannot fulfill this role. The GPC member will also act as a scribe creating feedback for the student (full committee input expected).

Scheduling:

1. The PreP meeting should be scheduled by May 14th and should be completed by the end of the July. Student are encouraged to use [Doodle \(http://www.doodle.com\)](http://www.doodle.com) to schedule the PreP meeting. If scheduling the summer meeting with the normal thesis advisory committee is not possible, then a willing Bio/Bio faculty member selected by the student and advisor may serve as a substitute committee member for the PreP meeting.
2. After the PreP meeting is scheduled, a GPC member will be assigned to act as Chair for the PreP meeting. The name of the GPC member name will be sent to the student.
3. A student has the option of having a committee meeting prior to the PreP meeting.
4. Registration will be blocked if the PreP meeting is not completed by the end of July.

Expectations and Format:

The first committee meeting (PreP) and the pre-proposal document are expected to give the advisory committee and the GPC a good idea of a student's progress during the first year in the graduate program. The pre-proposal document should reflect a student's understanding of his/her research project, and therefore it must be written by the student. The first committee meeting should also help the committee and the student identify strong skills and those that need to be developed. The student will be given written feedback on the pre-proposal document, oral presentation and other issues discussed in the meeting. The point is to provide opportunities for growth. Since starting the PreP, several students have transformed the pre-proposal document into a graduate fellowship proposal for submission to NIH. If you are interested in doing this, speak with your advisor and Dr. Bryk, who can provide some guidance.

Samples of full F31 fellowship applications can be found at the following link:

<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/sample-applications-f31>

The written proposal must be the student's own work (no copy/pasting of advisor's or other's proposals). The advisor and others may comment, discuss, etc., but the writing should be original and by the student.

Required Materials:

Items 1-5 (below) should be submitted in electronic format to the Biochemistry Graduate Program Office, the thesis advisor, committee members and the GPC member two weeks before the PreP meeting. Items 6 and 7 are required for the PreP meeting.

1. Cover page/Honor statement - Title of Pre Proposal, student's name, lab, date, honor statement* verifying with signature that the written pre-proposal document is the student's own work.

*Example of an Honor Statement for the pre-proposal document: *I verify that I wrote this document in my own words. I have not copied sentences or phrases from other sources. My advisor and others may have provided comments, but the writing is my own. In the case that there are images and/or data from others in my preproposal, I have given credit to the individual(s) who did the work.*

2. Written Pre Proposal - format based on NIH F31 graduate fellowship; up to 6 pages, single-spaced (the page limit does not include the reference section). The written pre proposal must be the student's own work (no pasting of advisor's grant proposals). Below are guidelines to help you stay within the page limit.

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- i. 1 page Abstract/Aims – this should be a typical Aims page. Scroll through the sample F31 applications (link above) to find examples of Aims pages.
- ii. 1-2 pages Background and Significance – write a succinct background section to introduce the committee to the research area and research questions; this is the place to explain why the research is important.
- iii. 2-3 pages Approach – discuss rationale, methods, proposed experiments, and preliminary data) - students may write about all of their aims or may choose to write about a subset of the aims, perhaps those being worked on at this time. This decision should be made in consultation with your advisor. Providing detail on the experiments being performed now may give the committee an opportunity to see how the student designs experiments with controls and analyzes/interprets data. Regardless of how the Approach section is designed, the student should be prepared to answer questions about each of the proposed aims. If part(s) of the student's project relies on data or reagents from others, then the student may outline what he/she will contribute and what others will contribute in the Approach section.
- iv. 1 page Student contribution to plan; Discussion of long-term goals/career goals. The contribution section is where the student describes to committee in direct language what was contributed by the student during the development of the pre-proposal document. Items can include:

Student contribution

- **Description of the process used to develop the research plan.** Did the student come up with the aims and research plan independently? Did the student and advisor come up with the aims and research plan together? Or, did the student come up with the aims/plan and then revise after discussions with the advisor and/or others?
- **Description of preparation prior to writing the pre-proposal document.** Did the student perform a literature review on his/her own to prepare the background section? Did the advisor and others tell the student what papers to read? Or, did the student get a few papers from the advisor and then perform an independent literature review?
- **Description of how the pre-proposal document was written.** The pre-proposal document must be written in the student's own words. When sentences are copied from someone else's grant application, it is plagiarism. Plagiarism is not acceptable. Did the student use an existing proposal as a guide to develop the preproposal? Did the student start with a blank sheet? Students are encouraged to go through multiple rounds of commenting and revising with the advisor (and others, if desired) while drafting and finalizing the pre-proposal document.
- **If diagrams and/or experimental data are presented in the pre-proposal document, then the student should acknowledge who created the diagrams and generated the data.** If a student is presenting his/her own diagrams and preliminary data, then this should be indicated in this section. If someone else generated diagrams and/or data presented in the pre-proposal document, then the student should acknowledge the individual(s) who contributed material in the figure legend and in this section.

Long-term goals/career goals

An individual development plan (IDP) can help you think about your long-term goals/career goals and what training you need to reach your goals. To develop an IDP, visit the myIDP site:

<http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>

In addition, an IDP can be a written agreement between the student and advisor (and advisory committee) that outlines how the student will acquire the skills and knowledge required to achieve programmatic goals and the student's professional development goals. An IDP supports a culture of responsibility and accountability among the advisor, trainee, advisory committee, and program. The Biochemistry GPC encourages graduate students to develop an IDP to define the steps to their career goals.

3. Curriculum Vitae – the GPC requires that each student establishes a [myNCBI](#) account and uses the [SciENcv](#) builder to prepare a CV

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4. Annual Graduate Student Self-Evaluation form
5. Draft Degree Plan with grades (the advisory committee should have access to rotation grades and rotation evaluation forms, as well)

Items 1-5 (above) should be submitted in electronic format to the Biochemistry Graduate Program Office, advisor and PreP committee two weeks before the PreP meeting.

6. Lab notebooks – the student's lab notebooks (physical or electronic) should be brought to the meeting as a resource for the student to use during the question period
7. Slideshow – Student will give a 20-minute presentation. The student should expect to be interrupted with questions during the slide presentation but practice talks without interruptions should be no longer than 20 minutes. Guideline: One slide/minute.

The PreP meeting and evaluation:

At the PreP meeting, the student will make an oral presentation with slides. Questions will be posed by PreP committee members. It is expected that the oral presentation with slides and questions on completed research, proposal, methodology, and student's contributions should require ~ 50 minutes.

Additional questions to student (~10 minutes) may include discussion of:

- a. career goals
- b. plans for professional development
- c. draft degree plan
- d. further clarification of the research plan
- e. the written pre-proposal document

Each committee member will be given an evaluation form to complete during the meeting. The GPC member will act as the scribe to summarize the comments of committee members in order to provide written feedback to the student. The thesis advisor, committee members, and GPC member are not to answer questions posed to the student (unless absolutely needed to get discussion back on track or for clarification). *The purpose of this guideline is to encourage the student to be responsible for the scientific content of the presentation. This format will allow the PreP committee members to evaluate the student's knowledge and understanding, and to determine what areas need improvement.*

After the student completes the presentation, the student will leave the room; the GPC member and committee members will prepare a brief formative assessment of the student's progress in the program. The student will return to the room for a verbal summary of the committee's evaluation.

Post-PreP Feedback:

Approximately two weeks after the PreP meeting, a written summary of performance (prepared by the GPC member, and reviewed by the thesis advisor and thesis advisory committee members) will be available to the student in the Biochemistry Graduate Program Office.

On the next pages there are a draft degree plan and evaluation forms that will be completed by committee members during the PreP meeting. Students should enter grades into the draft degree plan prior to the PreP meeting and use the draft degree to facilitate a discussion about journal clubs and elective coursework with the advisory committee during the PreP meeting. Specific journal clubs and elective courses are selected to help the student gain relevant knowledge and skills to complete PhD training successfully.

Draft Biochemistry Doctoral Degree Plan

Course	Course Title	Credit Hours	Grade
BICH 603	Principles of Biochemistry & Biophysics	3	
BICH 608	Critical Analysis of Biochemical Literature	2	
BICH 681	Presentation Seminar	1	
BICH 685	Directed Studies	2	
BICH 689	Principles of Molecular Genetics	3	
BICH 689	Application of Scientific Values	1	
BICH 689	Biomedical Big Data	1	
BICH 689	Biological NMR	1	
BICH 689	Cryo-EM	1	
BICH 689	Protein Interactions	1	
BICH 689	Metabolism	1	
BICH 689	Graduate Student Seminar	1	
BICH 690	Theory of Biochemical Research	12	
BICH 691	Research	54	
BICH 697	Practice of Teaching	2	
BICH 6XX	Journal Club	1	
BICH 6XX	Journal Club	1	
BICH 6XX	Journal Club	1	
BICH 6XX	Journal Club	1	
Elective		3	
Elective		3	
	Total Hours	96	

Note: The hour requirements reflected in the degree plan represent the **minimum** departmental requirements. Students may elect to take more courses and/or the student's committee or chair may require more hours than what is listed on these degree plans.

Pre-Proposal Meeting Report – Committee member
 Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics, Texas A&M University

Student Name _____ Date entered PhD Program _____

Meeting Date _____

Chair _____ Co-Chair _____

GPC member (scribe) _____

Name of Reporting Committee Member (please print legibly) _____

How well does the student meet your expectations in the following areas?					
Note: Expectations should represent a common level of proficiency demanded of all students in this program	Above Expectations	Meets Expectations	Needs Improvement	Not Acceptable	Not enough information
1. Progress toward degree?					
2. Exhibits understanding of discipline-specific knowledge?					
3. Applies knowledge to justify decisions?					
4. Considers a variety of sources and alternative views when critically evaluating ideas and information?					
5. Develops clear, data-supported research plans?					
6. Uses appropriate technologies to solve problems?					
7. Designs/performs experiments with appropriate controls?					
8. Quality/reproducibility of experimental work?					
9. Proficiency in analysis of data?					
10. Communicates effectively in written English?					
11. Communicates effectively in spoken English?					

Summarize any additional recommendations to student

****All forms must be completed and returned into the Graduate Programs Office, Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics, Room 103C.****

Pre-Proposal Meeting Report – GPC member
 Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics, Texas A&M University

Student Name _____ Date entered PhD Program _____

Meeting Date _____

Chair _____ Co-Chair _____

GPC member (scribe) _____

Name of Reporting Committee Member (please print legibly) _____

How well does the student meet your expectations in the following areas?					
Note: Expectations should represent a common level of proficiency demanded of all students in this program	Above Expectations	Meets Expectations	Needs Improvement	Not Acceptable	Not enough information
1. Progress toward degree?					
2. Exhibits understanding of discipline-specific knowledge?					
3. Applies knowledge to justify decisions?					
4. Considers a variety of sources and alternative views when critically evaluating ideas and information?					
5. Develops clear, data-supported research plans?					
6. Uses appropriate technologies to solve problems?					
7. Designs/performs experiments with appropriate controls?					
8. Quality/reproducibility of experimental work?					
9. Proficiency in analysis of data?					
10. Communicates effectively in written English?					
11. Communicates effectively in spoken English?					

Did the student explain how the research fits into the bigger picture? If not, what steps will be taken by the committee to help the student understand the impact of the research?

After obtaining a PhD, what are the student’s goals? What long-term career(s) is being considered? **this should be addressed explicitly in the pre-proposal document*

In addition to teaching for two semesters, what specific activities should the student engage in during graduate school to support achievement of his/her long-term goals?

Is the student reaching out to others for help with research, techniques, and/or development of skills? If yes, list names. (*Reaching out to committee members is a good start*). If the student is not networking, how will the committee help the student develop relationships with the appropriate people? Who should the student be reaching out to for help in research and other activities?

Will the student submit a pre-doctoral fellowship application to a funding agency? If yes, indicate when and where.

Additional Comments: