**The Checklist for Preliminary Exam (8/17/2015 by GC):**

1. By the end of the fourth semester, students should have a preliminary exam committee consisting of at least five members of the graduate faculty, including at least three members from the department (or program) and at least one external member. This committee must be approved by the department Graduate Committee before the exam takes place.
2. Before October 15th for Fall admits and March 15th for Spring admits of their 5th semester, students will hold their Preliminary Exam.
3. Students will complete a Self-Evaluation, an application to take their Preliminary Exam and a research proposal. These documents must be submitted **no later than two weeks** as follows:

Application and Self-evaluation to the graduate coordinator

Proposal and Self-evaluation to all committee members

1. The Proposal should use the following standard format:
   1. The text portion is no more than 15 single-spaced typewritten pages with one-inch margins on all sides and 12pt font. This 15-page limit is for the project description and does not include title page, project summary, figure legends, figures, and references.
   2. The proposal must include the following sections:
      1. **Title Page**-stating project title, name of student, exam date, time and place, and the names of the committee members and chair
      2. **Project Summary** (200-400 words)
      3. **Project Description\***-stating objectives, background, significance, hypothesis/research questions, preliminary data if available, research plan, conclusion/summary
      4. **References**-with names of all authors and full titles of articles.

**\*** The proposal may be written on a student’s actual research topic, as agreed by the student and her/his Advisory Committee, or it may be on a different topic. The **objectives** should include a precise statement of the research problem and a list of specific aims. The **background** should include a review of current status of the research area and how the proposed investigations relate to other work. The **significance** should show how this research would contribute to the understanding of the biological problem area. **Hypotheses/research questions** should be clearly identified. The **research** **plan** should address the specific strategies and methodologies to be used in addressing the questions being asked and rationales behind the proposed experiments. This section should also include a discussion of potential results as well as any perceived pitfalls and possible alternatives. The research plan section should use about half of the total 15 pages.

1. What to expect during the exam: The preliminary document serves as a starting point for a thorough test of general knowledge in the scientific area and in the specific research area. It also serves as an example of the student’s ability to think about science (including the ability to think independently and critically). The student should prepare a PowerPoint presentation based on the preliminary document and present it to the examining committee. During the presentation, committee members will ask questions germane to the document. They may also ask about allied issues that come up in the document and/or during the discussion. Students should try their best to answer these questions. If the student cannot answer the question, (s)he should state so. In this case the committee should move on to related questions or other topics. The oral exam usually takes about two hours. At the end of the exam, the committee will meet in private and will vote to decide if the student passes, passes with condition, or fails. The student will be informed immediately of the decision.
2. A student who has passed the exam should have a follow-up committee meeting within six months to discuss progress toward research goals.
3. A student who has failed the exam may be allowed to retake the exam once within the next six months. If failed again, he/she cannot continue in the Ph.D. program.