Title: “TITLE”

Please assess the project first:

_____ PASS (Project is intellectually sound and worthwhile)

_____ FAIL (Project has serious flaws or is inadequate as a thesis research project or cannot be assessed because of lack of clarity.)

If the project is given a PASS, please evaluate the proposal:

_____ PASS WITH COMMENDATION (Proposal is well written and organized)

_____ PASS (Proposal needs some revision)

_____ CONDITIONAL PASS (Proposal needs significant modification and requires a secondary review by the reviewers to be converted to a PASS or PASS WITH COMMENDATION.)

Please rate the proposal overall on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = excellent, 2 = very good, 3 = good, 4 = satisfactory, 5 = unsatisfactory. See attached document on “The Preliminary Written Examination” for details on the purpose and expectations of this exam and on this rating system.

_____ Overall rating of the paper (scale of 1 –5)

Reviewer’s Name (Please print): ________________________________ Date: ____________

Reviewer’s Signature (unless submitted electronically):_________________________________

(Please return this form and your comments to Erin Spencer (spenc320@umn.edu)

Here are some criteria for evaluation that are from the NSF guidelines for evaluating proposals:

**What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?**
How important is the proposed activity to advancing knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields? How well qualified is the proposer to conduct the project? To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative and original concepts? How well conceived and organized is the proposed activity?
THE PRELIMINARY WRITTEN EXAMINATION

The preliminary written exam is limited to about 12 pages, not including references and abstract. It is a learning process and its form stresses the importance of clearly articulating ideas and of writing grant proposals as part of an academic or professional career. Advisors are expected to give their students advice about writing proposals as well as about the specifics of the proposed research, and students are strongly encouraged to share their research proposals with their advisor and advisory committee, obtain feedback from their advisors during the proposal writing process, and discuss their ideas with other faculty as well. The advisor should aid the student in the planning and organization of the proposal. The concepts, content, and writing of the proposal must be the student's own effort, however.

Written comments are very important for communicating professional standards to the student. The reviewers must therefore provide the student with detailed written comments in addition to completing the proposal evaluation form. If the reviewer makes comments directly on the copy of the proposal, the reviewer may return the copy to the student. The student will receive the written comments of the reviewers. While the reviewers will not know the identity of the student during the reviewing process, the reviews are non-anonymous so that the student can discuss the reviews with the reviewers.

Because the preliminary written examination must be completed by the end of the fourth semester or beginning of the fifth semester in residence, students are still in the early planning stages of their thesis project and have only had limited experience with methods and have only collected limited data to describe past research and methods. They are therefore not expected to write a proposal that would be competitive in an NSF or NIH competition. The proposal should rather be viewed as a significant step in formulating the student’s research questions and developing methods for carrying out the research. The proposal should contain an introduction that puts the proposed research in a broader context and provides some background, an overview of the student’s planned research program for the thesis, and the proposed research with significance and potential barriers of the proposed research. Methods for the proposed research need only be developed as can be expected of a second year student. The proposal should not primarily consist of literature review; it needs to be well balanced with respect to review of the research area, significance of the proposed research, accomplished research, proposed research, and methods.

When reviewing the proposal, it is important to keep in mind that the criteria for passing the exam are NOT whether the proposal is competitive if submitted to a funding agency. The criteria are instead

- Did the student formulate an interesting question that can be answered within the scope of a thesis?
- Does the student have some idea about approaches (but not necessarily specific techniques)?
- Is the student aware of potential problems?
- Has the student demonstrated a reasonably good knowledge of the literature and can the student put it into a larger context?
- Does the proposal demonstrate creativity and originality?
• Is the introduction and background section clearly written?
• Is it clear from the proposal what the proposed research will accomplish?
• Does the proposal have the potential to be made into a competitive proposal with completion of some of the proposed work?

The project should be deemed failed if

• The student did not demonstrate an ability to ask a research question that can be made into a thesis project.
• The proposal has serious logical flaws.
• The research will not contribute new insights.
• The research is neither creative nor original.
• The proposal is not written with sufficient clarity that would allow the reviewer to assess the proposal.

Proposals are reviewed critically by a panel of faculty assembled for the purpose, such that each proposal is read by no fewer than three faculty. The panel is asked to vote on each proposal twice. The first vote is a pass/fail vote on whether the project is intellectually sound and worth pursuing. The second vote is on whether the proposal is adequately written. In addition, reviewers are asked to rate the proposal on a scale from 1 to 5 (see below) to inform the student of the comparative strength of the proposal (the rating does not affect whether a student passes).

**Rating System:**

1=Excellent: The proposal describes exciting and novel research questions that are extremely likely to enhance the conceptual understanding of the student’s area. The methods are likely to be successful.
2=Very good: The proposal describes novel research questions that are likely to enhance the conceptual understanding of the student’s area. The methods are likely to be successful.
3=Good: The proposal describes interesting research questions that are likely to contribute to the student’s area. The methods are likely to be successful.
4=Satisfactory: The proposal describes research questions and methods that are not sufficiently developed. The questions, however, appear to be interesting and should be pursued.
5=Unsatisfactory: The proposal describes research questions that have major shortcomings.