Breakout Session II: Exams/Exam Structure

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In this session, participants will:

- Discuss current and proposed exam structures
- Answer the questions if the present structures are aligned with the admissions criteria and do the exams test competencies necessary for a PhD

Questions to consider include:

- The report of the previous conference in 2008 included the following recommendation regarding exam structures:
  There is currently no common exam structure followed by departments. Many institutions experiment with various combinations of written, oral, preliminary or comprehensive exams as well as final exams in the core courses. This topic is intensely debated among faculty. Do exams really assess readiness for a research degree?
  Recommendations:
    - Departments should critically assess the desirability and efficacy of their comprehensive exams.
    - Professional Societies should gather information about comprehensive and preliminary exams and make common practices known.
  What is the current status? Has your Department recently reviewed the exam structure? Are there plans to change the structure?
- Following the last meeting an informal compilation of PhD requirements was assembled and is available at:
  http://www.aps.org/programs/education/graduate/conf2008/resources/upload/phdreqs080306.xls Please consider adding/updating the information for your Department
- What should be the purpose of the comprehensive exams? Do they serve this purpose in your Department?