Second-Year Exam Memo

The M&MG graduate program requires graduate students to undergo a second-year examination. This will allow us to better evaluate students early in their careers, determine their potential to succeed in the program, and better prepare them to advance by the end of their third year.

All incoming second-year graduate students will now be required to convene an advisement committee meeting at the end of their second year to present their research progress (students now beginning their 3rd year are exempt but must Advance by the end of this year). The committee should consist of the PI and the two other Advisement Committee members. The PI's role at the meeting should be that of a "silent participant" (i.e., s/he will not ask questions or offer explanations or comments during the examination). Prior to the meeting, the student's advisor is requested to write a confidential bullet-point assessment summarizing the student's potential to succeed in the PhD program and/or pointing out perceived concerns and significant areas for improvement (see attached form). This assessment will be shared with the advisement committee and the A&N graduate advisor prior to the exam.

Additional guidelines for the 2nd Year Examination are:

1) The committee including the PI will discuss the performance of the student in private and decide on three assessment options, a) pass, b) pass with concerns, c) retake within 6 months.

While option a) does not require much feedback to the student (although they all appreciate it), options b) and c) require specific feedback by the committee to the student, outlining the deficiencies/concerns that were driving the overall evaluation. These comments should also be recorded on the exam report sheet.

2) A retake within 6 months will only result in a) pass or b) fail. If a student fails the retake, he/she should be given the Masters option to be completed by the end of the academic year.
Here are some suggested guidelines regarding the evaluation of a student's performance/progress in no particular order:

-Establishment of a research project that has the potential to constitute a PhD thesis work
-Amount and quality of experimental data in support of the project
-Ability to communicate project goals, short term, long term
-Ability to provide a rationale for the project
-Intellectual potential
-Indication of project ownership/step towards independence
-Basic knowledge of neuroscience principles
-Theoretical command of techniques discussed