

## NGG CANDIDACY EXAM WORKSHOP 2025-26: BRB 253, Tuesdays 12-2pm

Instructors: Amelia Eisch, Shinjae Chung, Marc Fuccillo

TA: Taylor Phillips-Jones

This workshop series prepares second-year NGG students to write NRSA-style research proposals for the Candidacy Exam (CE). The course emphasizes strategic grant writing: understanding reviewer psychology, developing compelling scientific narratives, and iterative refinement through peer and faculty critique.

Read before the first session: NGG Handbook section 4 <https://www.med.upenn.edu/ngg/handbook.html>.

Bookmark: NIH Fellowship Application Guide <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm>

Link for uploading drafts: (TBA)

Date	Topic	Before Class	In Class
Tues 12/9/25	<b>Overview:</b> What Reviewers Want & Project Genesis	<b>Complete</b> required reading; <b>Schedule</b> PI meeting this week	NIH review criteria and common failure modes; strategic framework for aims development; winter break work plan
Dec 10 - Jan 12	End of Semester & Winter Break	<b>Meet</b> with PI; <b>Develop</b> pilot data; <b>Write</b> multiple drafts; <b>Get feedback</b> from labmates, peers, and course faculty	Optional: Upload v0.0 by Dec 23 or v0.5 by Jan 6 for faculty feedback Optional: Request structured workbook from instructors
Tues 1/13/26	<b>Specific Aims I:</b> Peer Critique	<b>Upload</b> Aims v1.0 by Mon 1/12; <b>Review</b> assigned peer drafts	Structured peer critique in rotating groups
Tues 1/20/26	No Class	<b>Revise</b> to v1.5; upload by Mon 1/26	Optional: Upload draft 1/20 for faculty feedback
Tues 1/27/26	<b>Specific Aims II:</b> Refinement	<b>Upload</b> Aims v1.5 by Mon 1/26; <b>Review</b> assigned peer drafts	Structured peer critique in rotating groups
Mon 2/2/26	<b>PROPOSAL LETTER DUE TO ARC</b>	<b>Email to <a href="mailto:fuccillo@pennmedicine.upenn.edu">fuccillo@pennmedicine.upenn.edu</a> and <a href="mailto:minghong@pennmedicine.upenn.edu">minghong@pennmedicine.upenn.edu</a> with: name, advisor, tentative thesis title, Specific Aims (1 page Aims + references), 5-7 potential CE members/Chairs</b>	
Tues 2/3/26	<b>Specific Aims III:</b> Final Polish	<b>Upload</b> Aims v2.0 by Sun 2/2 <b>Review</b> assigned peer drafts	Peer feedback on v2.0; language precision workshop; preparing for Mock Study Section
Tues 2/10/26	<b>Mock Study Section</b>	<b>Review</b> 2-3 assigned peer proposals; prepare written critiques; <b>Watch</b> NIH mock study section video	Faculty-moderated study section simulation; scoring and discussion; debrief
Tues 2/17/26	<b>Research Strategy &amp; Figures</b>	<b>Review</b> assigned funded grants; <b>Analyze</b> Significance and Research Strategy sections	Strategic approaches to Significance and Approach; figure design principles
Mon 2/24/26	No Class	<b>Draft</b> Significance section (1-2 pages); create 2-3 figures; outline Approach for each aim	
Tues 3/3/26	<b>Research Strategy:</b> Integration	<b>Upload</b> Research Strategy draft by Sat 2/28 (3 days before class)	Peer feedback on Strategy drafts; integration check (Aims-Strategy alignment); timeline/feasibility review; individual consultations

### CE KEY DATES

Mon Jan 12 - Aims v1.0 due

Mon Jan 26 - Aims v1.5 due

Mon Feb 2 - PROPOSAL LETTER DUE TO ARC: a checkpoint to establish CE committee, NOT a final CE document

Mon Feb 2 - Aims v2.0 due

Mid-Feb (~Feb 16-20) - Feedback from ARC member

Fri Feb 28 - Research Strategy draft due

Feb 28 - Committee finalized, exam date set (NGG requirement)

3 weeks before exam - Complete document to Committee

10 days after complete document shared to Committee - Committee feedback received

4 days before exam - Final document to Committee Chair

May 1 to June 15 - All candidacy exams will be completed during this time

## COURSE GRADING (Pass or Incomplete)

### Requirements:

- Attend all sessions (maximum 1 absence with advance notice)
- Submit all drafts by deadlines (v1.0, v1.5, v2.0, Research Strategy)
- Submit Proposal Letter to ARC by February 2
- Participate in peer review
- Demonstrate substantive progress between sessions

## COURSE RESOURCES

### Required:

- NGG Handbook section 4 <https://www.med.upenn.edu/ngg/handbook.html>
- NIH Fellowship Application Guide <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm>
- NIH F31 (PhD) parent announcement, found <https://grants.nih.gov/funding/activity-codes/F31>
- NIH F30 (MD-PhD) parent announcement, found <https://grants.nih.gov/funding/activity-codes/F30>

### Recommended:

- Northwestern CLIMB Aims Page Guide:  
<https://www.northwestern.edu/climb/resources/written-communication/aims-pages>
- NIH Sample Applications: <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/sample-applications>
- NIH RePORTER: <https://reporter.nih.gov/>

### Available from instructors:

- Additional funded NRSA Aims pages and research plans from recent alumni
- Optional from AJE: Structured workbook for winter break

## COURSE POLICIES

Deadlines: Firm unless documented extenuating circumstances. Contact instructors early if issues arise.

Collaboration: Peer feedback is required. Writing must be your own. Properly attribute borrowed figures or concepts.

AI Tools: May be used for editing and brainstorming. Final prose must be substantially your own.

PI Involvement: Your PI must review drafts before submission. PI approval required before ARC submission on 2/2. This course provides writing strategy; your PI provides scientific direction.

### Note:

NRSA Submission: All eligible students must submit NRSA within 6-9 months of passing candidacy.

NIH deadlines: April 8, August 8, December 8

Penn internal deadline: 7 business days prior.

Contact BGS office for PennERA system support.

## COURSE CONTACT INFORMATION

### Instructors:

- Amelia Eisch: [eischa@chop.edu](mailto:eischa@chop.edu), text anytime, 972-821-6904
- Shinjae Chung: [shinjaec@pennmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:shinjaec@pennmedicine.upenn.edu)
- Marc Fuccillo: [fuccillo@pennmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:fuccillo@pennmedicine.upenn.edu)

TA: Taylor Phillips-Jones [taylor.phillips-jones@pennmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:taylor.phillips-jones@pennmedicine.upenn.edu)

### NGG Program Directors:

- Minghong Ma (NGG Chair): [minghong@pennmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:minghong@pennmedicine.upenn.edu)
- Marc Fuccillo (ARC Chair): [fuccillo@pennmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:fuccillo@pennmedicine.upenn.edu)

Syllabus subject to minor modifications. Changes will be announced in class and via email.