

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	Overview: What Reviewers Want & Project Genesis	Complete required reading; Schedule 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	Meet with PI; Develop pilot data; Write multiple drafts; Get feedback 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	Specific Aims I: Peer Critique	Upload Aims v1.0 by Mon 1/12; Review assigned peer drafts	Structured peer critique in rotating groups
Tues 1/20/26	No Class	Revise to v1.5; upload by Mon 1/26	Optional: Upload draft 1/20 for faculty feedback
Tues 1/27/26	Specific Aims II: Refinement	Upload Aims v1.5 by Mon 1/26; Review assigned peer drafts	Structured peer critique in rotating groups
Mon 2/2/26	PROPOSAL LETTER DUE TO ARC	Email to fuccillo@pennmedicine.upenn.edu and minghong@pennmedicine.upenn.edu with: name, advisor, tentative thesis title, Specific Aims (1 page Aims + references), 5-7 potential CE members/Chairs	
Tues 2/3/26	Specific Aims III: Final Polish	Upload Aims v2.0 by Sun 2/2 Review assigned peer drafts	Peer feedback on v2.0; language precision workshop; preparing for Mock Study Section
Tues 2/10/26	Mock Study Section	Review 2-3 assigned peer proposals; prepare written critiques; Watch NIH mock study section video	Faculty-moderated study section simulation; scoring and discussion; debrief
Tues 2/17/26	Research Strategy & Figures	Review assigned funded grants; Analyze Significance and Research Strategy sections	Strategic approaches to Significance and Approach; figure design principles
Mon 2/24/26	No Class	Draft Significance section (1-2 pages); create 2-3 figures; outline Approach for each aim	
Tues 3/3/26	Research Strategy: Integration	Upload 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, text anytime, 972-821-6904
- Shinjae Chung: shinjaec@pennmedicine.upenn.edu
- Marc Fuccillo: fuccillo@pennmedicine.upenn.edu

TA: Taylor Phillips-Jones taylor.phillips-jones@pennmedicine.upenn.edu

NGG Program Directors:

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

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