

# Oral Qualifying Exam

## Neuroscience Graduate Program

Last modified July 12, 2012

### Timetable for 2<sup>nd</sup> Year NGP Students:

Exam committee chosen	February 1
Written proposal submitted	March 1
Written proposal evaluation returned	Two weeks later
Oral examination	By end of April

**Pre-exam process:** The student will identify at least four NGP faculty members who would be willing to serve on the exam committee. The NGP Director will choose at least two faculty from this list and appoints a third member (not necessarily on the student's list) as chair. The lab mentor also serves on the exam committee, for a total of four faculty members.

**Content of written proposal:** The written component, which underlies the oral exam, should follow the new NRSA guidelines (see below). The topic is likely to be on the student's anticipated thesis work, although it does not have to be. Because of the early due date relative to the student's time in the lab, significant preliminary data are not required for the proposal. Indeed, the student is encouraged to instead incorporate summary figures that clarify the experimental approaches and describe possible outcomes for the proposed research.

**Oral exam:** The exam itself consists of (i) a 15-20 minute presentation describing the proposal, and (ii) a question period, typically consisting of ~15 minutes of questioning from each committee member. This is not a general exam. Questions from the examining committee should focus on literature and methods relevant to the proposal, preferably of relevance to the student's chosen field.

**Committee responsibilities:** All committee members are responsible for reading the written proposal and writing a short evaluation of its content. In addition, the committee members are responsible for questioning the student during the oral exam. Exam committee members may subsequently join the student's thesis committee, but there is no requirement or expectation that this be the case.

The chair of the exam committee is responsible for:

- (1) examining the student's transcript and ensuring that required core courses have been passed, including Ethics (CON 650),
- (2) obtaining other committee members' evaluations of the written proposal,
- (3) contacting the PI to obtain an evaluation of the student's progress in the lab, and
- (4) discussing with the NGP Director the action to be taken on the basis of the student's written proposal.

**Written proposal guidelines:** NIH guidelines for preparing the NRSA research proposal can be located at the link below. Note that the new guidelines have reduced the research plan from 10 pages to 6 pages. The program strongly encourages students to submit their proposals to the NIH as NRSA fellowship applications. <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm#inst>