

Immunology Doctoral Candidacy Exam

1. Program students must submit their candidacy exam documents (abstract, GSBS form) to the GSBS Academic Standards Committee (ASC) before the end of their second year. Once the abstract has been accepted by the ASC, the student is given a timeline for preparation of their full written proposal and a timeframe for the oral defense administered by the candidacy exam committee, which is selected by the student and advisor.

2. Immunology Program students must complete the Scientific Writing requirement before taking the candidacy exam. If the grant-writing course is used to fulfill the requirement, the subject of the course proposal is expected to be different from the subject of the student's candidacy examination.

3. The examining committee should be comprised of five faculty members as detailed by the GSBS guidelines for the Examining Committee. The examining committee must include a minimum of two Immunology Program Faculty and cannot include the primary mentor or co-mentor. Immunology Program students should consult with Program Directors prior to forming the examining committee.

4. The candidacy exam can be off-topic or on-topic as described below.

a. On-topic exams must comply with General GSBS requirements and the following Program-specific requirements:

i. Proposal

A written on-topic proposal will follow the NIH NRSA F award format per GSBS guidelines. Students are required to write one page of specific aims and 6 pages of research proposal, which includes Significance, Innovation and Approach; these page limits do not include the bibliography. The topic of the research proposal will be related to the students' research project and the advisors should not supply the student with their own grant proposals. The proposal should contain original material developed by the student and written independently by the student.

ii. Depth of Knowledge

The Examining Committee is expected to question the student about the background knowledge, general concepts and methods related to the proposal. The student's understanding of the proposed research strategy, approach and techniques will be assessed during the oral examination, along with the student's ability to interpret the results and develop a hypothesis and alternative approaches.

iii. Breadth of Knowledge

The Examining Committee members will meet/communicate to identify three breadth areas that are not directly related to the student's proposal within 10 days of committee formation. The Committee Chair will provide students with bullet-point subtopics and sample questions to help the student to prepare for the breadth questions at least 4 weeks in advance of the exam. Students are responsible for communicating with the Committee Chair regarding this timeline to ensure that sufficient time is allotted to the student for preparation in advance of the examination. The student's breadth of knowledge will be assessed during the last third of the candidacy exam based on the student's response to questions in all three areas.

b. Off-topic exams must comply with General GSBS requirements and the following Program-specific requirements:

i. Approval for Advancement

At the last Advisory Committee meeting, the student should request permission to proceed to the candidacy examination. If granted permission, the student then needs to provide each member of the Advisory Committee with two off-topic abstracts within two weeks of their meeting; this can be done via e-mail after the meeting. Each abstract should be no more than one page and provide the background, significance and hypothesis of the proposal. Once the Advisory Committee agrees that both topics are appropriate, the student needs to obtain the signatures of the Advisory Committee members indicating that the student has approval to petition for candidacy with the chosen topics. If the Advisory Committee does not feel that either proposal topic will generate a good proposal or the subject matter is truly off-topic, the Advisory Committee can request the student to provide two more alternative or revised abstracts.

ii. Selection of Exam Topic

The Advisory Committee members will recommend which of the two topics they believe will provide a stronger proposal; however, the student will ultimately choose the proposal topic. The student should use the Advisory Committee to receive feedback on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each proposal topic. These suggestions can then be used to formulate a better proposal. Once the recommendations are received by the student, the student will choose the proposal topic.