

Protocol 1026 Qualifying Assessment

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Protocol

Within the first two years of their thesis research (by the end of the spring term of their third year in the program), predoctoral researchers undergo a Qualifying Assessment, which consists of a written thesis proposal and an oral presentation. The primary aim of the Qualifying Assessment is to provide the predoctoral researcher with an invaluable opportunity to receive constructive feedback in order to strengthen their proposal. Predoctoral researchers will be evaluated with the Scientific Writing and Scientific Presentation Scoring Templates.

The written proposal may be conceived with the assistance of a research advisor, but should represent the predoctoral researcher's own plan. The written proposal contains the specific aims of the research, detailed background, preliminary data, and planned experimental approaches for the thesis project being pursued or a closely related project (as determined in consultation with the predoctoral researcher's research advisor). An additional part of the proposal is a brief summary (two to three pages, double spaced) of the objectives for the meeting, similar to what is prepared for any Supervisory Committee meeting. The written proposal will be evaluated by the Supervisory Committee using the Scientific Writing Scoring Template.

The oral component of the Qualifying Assessment includes the discussion of the project with the Supervisory Committee. The research advisor should be present for the discussion of the project but may not be present when the Supervisory Committee votes on a grade of Pass or Fail. The oral component will be evaluated by the Supervisory Committee using the Scientific Presentation Scoring Template.

Preparing for the Qualifying Assessment:

Predocctoral researchers are expected to fully prepare for the Qualifying Assessment, and failure to adequately do so will require a second assessment within six months of the first attempt. Failure to adequately prepare for a second assessment is grounds for dismissal from the program as determined by the Academic Progression and Assessment Committee.

To schedule the Qualifying Assessment, the predoctoral researcher works with the Graduate School's Administrative Coordinator to find a date and time when all Supervisory Committee members are able to attend. Three hours should be allowed for the Qualifying Assessment, and the Administrative Coordinator will arrange a conference room and appropriate catering for the meeting. The Graduate School will arrange travel for the outside committee member and coordinate preparations with the lab's administrative assistant. Outside committee members may be present via virtual formats for the Qualifying Assessment.

The predoctoral researcher sends the written proposal and brief summary to the Supervisory Committee and the Associate Dean for Administration at least two weeks prior to the Qualifying

Assessment so the committee has time to read all of it. If the Supervisory Committee needs more than two weeks to read the proposal and summary, they need to let the predoctoral researcher know well in advance.

The written portion is 5-10 pages long, single space. It is written like an NIH proposal with Introduction, Specific Aims, Background and Significance, Preliminary Data, and Planned Experimental Approaches to address each Aim. Examples to review can be found at: <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/sample-applications>. The written portion should contain clearly labeled figures and be carefully checked for spelling and grammatical errors. Some amount of time and effort needs to be applied to make an optimal proposal. It should be written by the predoctoral researcher, but can be revised with the aid of the research advisor and other members of the lab. An additional part of the proposal is a brief summary (two to three pages, double spaced) of the objectives for the meeting, similar to what is prepared for any Supervisory Committee meeting.

The Qualifying Assessment:

The Qualifying Assessment is scheduled for three hours. The oral presentation component of the Qualifying Assessment is 30-45 minutes long and followed by extensive discussion. The presentation is less general than a Friday Science Club talk, but less specific than a lab meeting. It should be revised and practiced with the research advisor and other lab members.

The predoctoral researcher takes to the meeting a blank copy of the Qualifying Assessment Report document. At the beginning of the meeting, one committee member (not the advisor) is appointed as chair of the meeting to complete the Qualifying Assessment Report. After the oral presentation, all committee members sign one copy of the Qualifying Assessment Report, and the chair sends that in interoffice mail to the Associate Dean for Administration.

Within one week of the Qualifying Assessment, the predoctoral researcher completes a summary report of the meeting. The predoctoral researcher should include the feedback provided by the committee members at the end of the meeting including next steps. The predoctoral researcher then sends the report to the chair to finalize. Within three days of receiving the report from the predoctoral researcher, the chair completes the Qualifying Assessment Report documents and emails the completed report with scoring templates to the Associate Dean for Administration and copies all committee members.

Ph.D. Candidate Status:

Candidacy is defined as that period in a predoctoral researcher studies when they are deemed ready to undertake independent and original research resulting in a completed thesis. Predoctoral researchers who have achieved candidacy status are deemed to have acquired the necessary advanced knowledge of the subject by completing the course requirements, developed the needed technical skills for work in the subject, and demonstrated the ability to do the research necessary to begin work on a thesis. A predoctoral researcher must do the following before achieving candidate status:

1. Complete all module courses and laboratory rotation courses.
2. Complete the written thesis proposal that is approved by the Supervisory Committee.
3. Successfully complete the Qualifying Assessment.