

Guidelines for Mentors during the writing and creation of the Written proposal of the Qualifying Exam.

As students of the IDP and Neuroscience programs enter their second year they are required to write an NIH style qualifying or 'mock' proposal as a portion of their final qualifying exam. The exam itself is split into three phases i) the generation of a written document, ii) a platform presentation during which the student describes the proposed research, and iii) a question and answer session during which the student defends the proposal and displays knowledge of the 1st year curriculum. The assessment of the student is determined by their performance during the oral presentation and question and answer session. While it is mandatory that the student passes the written proposal a strong performance in the written is not sufficient to merit a pass in the whole exam. The reason for this is that the predominant function of the written proposal is as a training tool used to educate the student in grantsmanship and the writing of the qualifying proposal is considered a collaborative exercise between the thesis mentor and the student. While the student is expected to take the lead in generating and writing the proposal it is recognized that they have limited skills and experience in this area. The role of the mentor is primarily to provide scientific guidance, to make sure that the student is working within a logical and scholarly framework, and that the student's hypothesis is reasonable and testable. The primary mentor is not expected to oversee the writing, grammar, or presentation of the proposal, nor is expected to have to coach the student for their oral exam. The thesis mentor is also expected to use their experience to provide input into proper experimental design, ensure that the student understands the need to include adequate controls, appropriate and quantitative analysis of results, discuss caveats and alternative approaches. The mentor should also ensure that scientific advice is given upon request and that students are guided toward appropriate scientific literature. Obviously, this mentoring position is a significant commitment in time and effort and it is important that the mentors consider their availability before accepting a student into their lab. In addition, the thesis mentor is usually expected to help the student prepare for the oral defense of the proposal.