

Candidacy Exam Advice 2019

Candidacy Exam Advice 2019

March 25, 2019 10:00 AM CDT

Q5 - If you could give one piece of advice to students preparing for their candidacy exam, what would it be? If your advice is somehow related to your Program, please tell us which Program you belong to.

If you could give one piece of advice to students preparing for their candi...

Only applicable to Medical physics students: Prepare well for it so you walk in with confidence but understand your committee (or most committees) want you to succeed. They are there to test you, but they want you succeed.

1. Don't be intimidated. Candidacy is a learning opportunity and really can help get your dissertation project moving. 2. Practice early and ask people to ask you questions. Then use those questions to help guide your reading and preparation. Do multiple practices before your exam with Q&A.

Medical Physics. For your presentation, make sure that the overall story of the proposal is well conveyed to the examiners. Not everybody will be an expert on all the topics, tools, and analysis you will do, but everybody should be able to understand the general why and how of the proposal. Specific details on the methods may be left for follow-up questions, if necessary.

One of the hardest things to learn is when to admit you don't know something. Be honest with yourself and your committee, they can tell when you are trying to make things up to give them the answer you think they want to hear. To that end, if you don't know the exact answer to that question, learn how to let your committee know that you do know some related information and, based on that, you would deduce a possible answer. They want to know that you can think through a problem, not that you are capable of memorizing information!

I belong to the Immunology Program. Firstly, a general piece of advice I would like to give everyone is not over stress about the candidacy exam. It's a test of how well you think and how well you know your literature. In both cases, the committee always helps you as much as you they can. They are there to ensure you do well and not there to fail you. Do keep this in mind when preparing. Thus, your confidence on the day of the exam will be a very important factor. On similar lines, a second piece of advice I would like to give is choose your committee wisely. Ask your seniors for suggestions for members who have served in exam committees before and who have been friendly and helpful rather than intimidating during the exam. Give mock exams to your seniors/ post docs etc. This helps because it not only helps improve your presentation but also give your different perspectives which you wouldn't have thought of before. This will add value to your proposal. And lastly, a conditional pass is a PASS. Many are asked to change a few things or modify their proposals only so that they have improved chances to getting grants. Most of us pass (in our batch, everyone passed!). Which means, you are going to pass. So take this as a learning and try to make the most of the exam! This is a great time to read up on the literature which is only going to help you later. Good luck!

Have multiple practice exams (typically 3) with other students leading up to your real exam. Practice exams give you a chance to work out your presentation, receive feedback on improving your talk, and practice answering questions related to your proposal. Having the practices also forces you to be ready to give your presentation before the actual exam date arrives.

Write your background section as early as possible (before you start the experimental/aims sections). The weight of the background section hanging over you and wondering about how detailed to make it and how much space you need it to take up is an unnecessary stress. It will be easier to write the aims sections with a huge, editable background section ready to cut up (and it will make you feel good to already have the "length" requirement met as you get started). -Immunology

Study the general pathways/types of proteins your committee investigates! A majority of my questions arose from what my examining committee had as their personal knowledge. They continually asked questions concerning the general area that they studied.

On the day of the candidacy exam, "You are a lot prepared than you think you really are!" Treat the candidacy exam like a discussion over science than an exam and it will really help soothe your nerves. You need to take control of the discussion and direct in a direction you are comfortable in.

If you could give one piece of advice to students preparing for their candi...

More than memorizing things understand how to figure out the answer to questions you don't know the answer to right away. Finish your proposal early and take the time to go through your proposal noting down all the questions you can possibly come up with and read papers to try to answer those. Send your proposal out to others (older students, post-docs, professors) to have them send you all the questions they can come up with as well. For Cancer Biology Program, try having Dr. Bar-Eli as your chair.

If you can, write a review about your topic. It will help familiarize yourself with the literature and give you a comprehensive look at the different approaches in answering your question

Quantitative Sciences Pick your committee very wisely. Candidacy is equally about your knowledge about science and your project as it is about being able to predict how your committee members will perceive your work, and what kinds of questions they will ask. In addition to studying about your project and breadth topics, make sure you know your chosen committee members well, and that they are "nice" examiners. You will need to predict the topics they will ask about and make sure to study them, even if you feel they have nothing to do with your topic.

Don't wait until the last minute. It will take time to write the proposal, to read, and to practice for the candidacy exam. The better written the proposal is, the easier your oral exam will go. After the proposal is written and submitted, practice the oral exam with your lab every week. The more you practice, the better and the easier the real exam will go. Pay attention during the exam; It is to test our knowledge and skills but it is also helping us with our research. The feedbacks and questions asked during the exam might benefit the project greatly.

Keep it simple and know the basics of your project and work. your exam members are not going to ask you about the intricacies of the project unless they know it in and out, no one knows your project more than you. So they like to ask simple questions, and sometimes in learning all fancy things, we forget the basics. know the basics, they will be tested !!! All the best

End of Report