Syllabus for Thesis Writing (NROSCI 1962), Spring 2024
Coordinator: Susan Sesack, PhD
Email: sesack@pitt.edu
Office hours: Appointment only. Please email me with any questions or concerns about the course.

Please note: This course does not have any synchronous class times. It is designed for students to **work asynchronously** on writing their thesis in conjunction with their mentor and submitting documents according to the instructions below and on Canvas. How each student communicates with their mentor is up to the student-mentor pair (in person, email, Zoom, etc.). Documents should be submitted in a format that can be edited; MS Word is preferred. Detailed instructions and announcements will be provided in Canvas. It is the student's responsibility to check email and Canvas for information. Make sure you have access and know how to use these resources.

The goal of this course is to guide students in the process of writing a thesis paper based on original neuroscience-related research conducted under a research mentor's supervision. To be considered as a candidate for NROSCI 1962, **you must already have collected a major portion of the data to be reported in your thesis.** Typically, this means approximately 3 credits of NROSCI 1901 and 3 credits of NRSOCI 1961 (or the non-credit equivalent). **Also, you must have collected a major portion of the data yourself.** You cannot use data collected solely by other people. You may, however, include data you collected in collaboration with others, so long as you are transparent about which data was collected collaboratively and you acknowledge the work of others appropriately.

This course and **grading** reflect only the writing component of the thesis. The research itself is graded separately under NROSCI 1901 and NROSCI 1961.

The thesis writing process can be challenging, especially if you are new to writing large amounts of material in the format of a scientific paper. To help this process go more smoothly, your thesis will go through several **revisions**, based on feedback from your mentor and, near the term's end, from your Thesis Reader. Because this course fulfills one of the University's required writing courses, a primary goal of these revisions is to advance your scientific writing abilities by incorporating detailed critical feedback from those experienced in science writing.

If you would like to consult a **text**, a good resource is *Writing Papers in the Biological Sciences* by Victoria McMillan.

Thesis format

The completed thesis must:

- Be written in the format of a standard paper in the biosciences, which includes the following sections, in order: title page, abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, and references. The approach of some journals to place the methods at the end of the paper should not be followed for the thesis.
- Include 12 or more pages of text (***NOT*** including the title page, figures, figure legends, tables, or references).
- Be written at a level appropriate for publishable manuscripts in the biosciences.
- Be double-spaced in 12-point font with margins no larger than one inch.

Thesis committee requirements

The student should select a thesis committee composed of the **Thesis Mentor** and at least one other faculty member to act as the **Thesis Reader**.

- One of these two individuals *must* hold a primary, secondary, or full-time teaching faculty appointment in the Department of Neuroscience in the Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences. https://www.neuroscience.pitt.edu/people
- The Thesis Mentor may be the principal investigator (PI) of the lab, or a research faculty member / senior postdoc designated by the PI for the student to work with closely. A graduate student researcher may not serve as the Thesis Mentor.
- The Thesis Reader may not be from the same lab as the Thesis Mentor.

Thesis Mentor Responsibilities – please see page 3

Role of the Thesis Reader

The Thesis Reader will read the Thesis Reader's (third) draft and must approve it for you to successfully complete NROSCI 1962. This final draft is to be a polished version of your thesis that has gone through several revisions by you, in regular consultation with your Thesis Mentor. If your Thesis Reader considers the draft insufficiently written, revised, or polished, they may reject it, sending it back to you for further revision. Even if the Thesis Reader considers the draft acceptable, they may still suggest revisions that will need to be completed prior to submitting your final thesis for approval by the Undergraduate Advising Office. Thesis Readers will return their initial comments on your thesis within 10 working days. They will also need to approve the final version of your thesis that incorporates your revisions in response to their comments. Approval will be done by signing the title page of the final thesis version.

Thesis submission deadlines and instructions

***Please follow the detailed instructions posted on Canvas for how to submit each document.**

First submission: due by **NOON on Monday, 2/5/2024**

- Submit what you have outlined and written to date.
- Your Thesis Mentor will indicate whether they feel you are making sufficient progress on your thesis at this point in the term.

Second submission: due by **NOON on Monday, 3/4/2024**

- Submit what you have written to date.
- Your Thesis Mentor will indicate whether they feel you are making sufficient progress on your thesis at this point in the term.

Thesis Reader draft (final draft): *This draft involves three (3) steps*.

- Step 1: due by **NOON on Monday, 4/1/2024**
  - Submit a **fully edited, complete** draft of your thesis that includes all required sections and adheres to the thesis format instructions listed on the first page of the syllabus.
  - The Thesis Reader draft should **incorporate all feedback from your Thesis Mentor**.
  - This draft should be **"clean"** (i.e. no track changes or comments left from the mentor).

- Step 2: due by **NOON on Wednesday 4/3/2024**
  - Your Thesis Mentor will be required to **verify** that this final draft is ready for submission to your Thesis Reader. It is *your* responsibility to make sure your mentor has seen/approved this version and **quickly** confirms their approval through email within two (2) days. If they do not confirm their approval (i.e. they reply to your email submission with further edits) or approve late, your grade might be reduced because of late submission. If they are going to be traveling or otherwise unavailable, make sure you communicate to them what you need and submit your draft *early*. It is important to give your Thesis Reader a fully edited, complete draft and adequate time to read it and give you feedback that you can incorporate into the final thesis.
- Step 3: due by **4pm on Wednesday 4/3/2024**
  - After receiving verification/approval from your Thesis Mentor, you will forward this mentor-approved draft to your Thesis Reader. Your reader will be asked to return comments by **Wednesday 4/17/2024**.

Completed Thesis: due by **NOON on Wednesday 4/24/2024**

- Submit the completed version of your thesis, revised according to comments from your Thesis Reader, in consultation with your Thesis Mentor.
- Include with the completed thesis the title page signed by you, your Thesis Mentor, and your Thesis Reader. A title page template is available on Canvas.

***** Failure to meet these deadlines will result in incremental grade reductions for each missed deadline. For example, if your writing earns an A but you miss one deadline, you will receive an A- for the course. If you miss two deadlines, you will receive a B+ for the course. *****

PLEASE NOTE: It is critical that your completed thesis, including signatures from your Thesis Mentor and Thesis Reader, be received by the **final deadline of 4/24/2024**. **Failure to meet this deadline will result in either an incomplete 'G' grade or course failure**. If you are taking this course to fulfill one of the writing courses required for graduation, a 'G' or failing grade **could mean you will not graduate on time**.

Thesis Mentor responsibilities

This course fulfills one of two writing courses students need to graduate. As such, there is an expectation that Thesis Mentors will give students feedback on multiple thesis drafts throughout the term, as outlined below, to help them learn the skills needed to write well in the style expected professionally in the biosciences.

Timeline/planning with your student

Early in the semester, discuss with your student the content and structure of their thesis, including the format requirements listed on the first page of the syllabus. **Agree on a timeline** with your student for completing the thesis. **Especially plan for your student to submit a fully edited and complete draft of their thesis for the Thesis Reader**, which is due at noon on **Monday, 4/1/2024**, with your written approval to be given within two (2) days, i.e. noon on **Wednesday 4/3/2024**. *If you know you will be traveling or unavailable for any deadline, please communicate ahead with your student so the document can be submitted early. Also, let the instructor for this course know as soon as possible if an extension is needed because of issues involving you.*

1. Thesis submission deadlines

There are two ***intermediate submission deadlines*** during the term. These are **Monday, 2/5/2024**, and **Monday, 3/4/2024**. On these dates, the student will submit the components of the thesis they have been working on so far. There are no requirements for the specific material submitted; it is understood that part or all of it will be a work in progress. For each deadline, however, you will be asked to verify in an email that your student is making adequate progress on their thesis and is on track to submit a full draft for the Thesis Reader by noon on **Monday, 4/1/2024**. Should that not be the case, you will need to discuss with your student some strategies for improving their efforts and time commitment.

2. Thesis Reader's Draft

Your student will submit the Thesis Reader's Draft by **Monday, 4/1/2024** that already incorporates all your feedback. You will then be asked to **quickly verify** your approval in an email within two (2) days so it can be submitted to the Thesis Reader by noon on **Wednesday 4/3/2024**. ***Your approval is to ensure the draft received by the Thesis Reader is complete, fully edited (i.e. addresses and incorporates all your feedback to the student), "clean" (i.e. no track changes are left in the document), and written at a level acceptable for a journal article draft ready for outside review.*** The expectation is that the quality of the scientific writing is appropriate for publishable manuscripts in the biosciences. It is understood that the content may not be of a publishable nature at this point, but the quality of writing shown by the student should be at this level. Additionally, your approval of this draft indicates that it meets the thesis format requirements indicated on the first page of the syllabus.

3. Completed thesis

If the Thesis Reader has comments or suggestions for editing, the student may want to discuss these with you before addressing them in the final version of the thesis. You will then be asked to indicate your approval of your student's completed thesis by signing the title page. The completed thesis, including the signed title page, is due by noon on **Wednesday 4/24/2024**.

4. Grading of the final thesis

Grading is to be done in consultation with the Thesis Reader. Thesis Readers who are faculty in the Department of Neuroscience have broad experience evaluating senior theses for writing credit. If they believe the student should receive a different grade from the one you suggest, they likely have valid reasons for this. Once the completed thesis is submitted, you will be asked to suggest to the Thesis Reader the grade you wish to assign. The Thesis Reader will then indicate whether this is acceptable. In most cases, consensus can be reached with a brief discussion. Should consensus not be reached, the grade will be assigned by the course coordinator, in consultation with one or more members of the Department of Neuroscience. The final consensus grade is due by 4pm on **Friday 4/26/2024**.

Failure to submit a grade may mean your student receives a 'G' grade, which can delay graduation. *Reminder: This course and grading reflect the writing component of the thesis. The research itself is graded separately under research credits (NROSCI 1901 and 1961).*

Academic policies

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of materials related to the course of any individual suspected of violating University Policy.
To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the Academic Integrity Guide for an overview of the topic. For hands-on practice, complete the Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial.

Disability Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Accessibility

The Canvas LMS platform was built using the most modern HTML and CSS technologies, and is committed to W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative and Section 508 guidelines. Specific details regarding individual feature compliance are documented and updated regularly.

Copyright Notice

These materials may be protected by copyright. United States copyright law, 17 USC section 101, et seq., in addition to University policy and procedures, prohibit unauthorized duplication or retransmission of course materials. See Library of Congress Copyright Office and the University Copyright Policy.

Statement and Resources on Mental Health

Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep, and taking time to relax. Using your time to take care of yourself will help you achieve your academic goals more than spending too much time studying. All of us benefit from support and guidance during times of struggle. There are many helpful resources available at Pitt. An important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Take the time to learn about what is available and take advantage of it. Ask for support sooner rather than later – this always helps. If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or difficult feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty, or family member you trust for assistance connecting to support that can help.

The University Counseling Center is available for you: call 412-648-7930 and visit their website.

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, call someone immediately, day or night:
University Counseling Center (UCC): 412 648-7930
University Counseling Center Mental Health Crisis Response: 412-648-7930 x1
Resolve Crisis Network: 888-796-8226 (888-7-YOU-CAN)

If the situation is life threatening, call the Police:
On-campus: Pitt Police: 412-624-2121
Off-campus: 911