

Procedures for Examination of the Doctoral Dissertation

University of Maryland
Baltimore

The examination of the doctoral dissertation is undertaken by the doctoral examination committee. Described here are the required composition of this committee, the process for nominating members to the committee and the procedures for conducting the doctoral examination.

1. Doctoral Examination Committee

Examination of the doctoral dissertation is conducted by the candidate's doctoral examination committee. This committee comprises a minimum of five and a maximum of seven voting members, all of whom must hold the doctoral degree or its equivalent. The committee must include the candidate's dissertation advisor, two readers and one member who is external to the candidate's program, department or discipline. At least three of the members of the committee must be regular members of the graduate faculty. One member of the committee is designated by the dean of the Graduate School as his or her representative.

- **Committee Chair:** The committee chair must be a regular member of the graduate faculty and is normally the candidate's advisor. The chair is responsible for nominating the members of the committee to the dean of the Graduate School. In the event that a candidate's advisor is not a member of the graduate faculty, the candidate's program director is responsible for appointing a regular graduate faculty member from within the program to serve as the chair.
- **Readers:** In addition to the chair, two members of the committee must be identified as readers. Each of these three individuals must sign the *Certification of Completion of Doctoral Dissertation* form, which must be returned to the Graduate School two weeks before the proposed examination date (see "Documentation Required Prior to the Doctoral Examination" on page 2). The readers and chair have the responsibility for determining that the dissertation is ready to be defended. Each of these three people must receive a copy of the dissertation prior to the deadline for submitting the *Certification of Completion of Doctoral Dissertation* form. The purpose of this is to allow determination of whether the dissertation is in a defensible state; that is, whether it exists as a presentable, interpretable and complete document. By signing the form, the readers attest to the dissertation conforming to these criteria; however, at this stage the readers do not make a determination of the ultimate acceptability or approval of the dissertation. This occurs during the final examination.
- **Graduate School Representative:** One member of the committee is designated by the dean of the Graduate School as his or her representative. The Graduate School representative must be a regular member of the graduate faculty who is not the committee chair. In addition to the normal responsibilities as a member of the committee, the Graduate School representative has the responsibility of ensuring that the examination is conducted according to established procedures. Any questions or disagreement over the examination procedure are referred to the Graduate School representative for a decision. Upon designation, the Graduate School representative will receive a copy of the *Procedures for Examination of the Doctoral Dissertation*; a signed acknowledgment of receiving and understanding these procedures must be returned to the dean's office.
- **External Member of the Examination Committee:** One of the members of the committee must fulfill the criteria for being an external member. This individual must be from a separate program, department or discipline from that of the candidate. The role of the external member is to provide a broader perspective within the examination process. The external member must hold a doctoral degree. The individual may be from within the university or may be a scholar from another institution. If the external member is a member of the graduate faculty, the individual may also serve as the Graduate School representative. If the external member is not a member of the graduate faculty, a curriculum vitae must accompany the nomination.
- **Other Committee Members:** There may be up to seven members of the committee. After the above

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membership requirements have been satisfied, additional individuals may be appointed to the committee. These may be individuals within or outside the candidate's program and may include scholars from other institutions or other components of the University of Maryland. All such members must hold a doctoral degree. A curriculum vitae must accompany the nominations of any members who are not members of the graduate faculty.

2. Documentation Required Prior to the Doctoral Examination

- **Nomination of the Doctoral Examination Committee:** Nomination of the members of the committee must be made by the chair a minimum of six months before the proposed date of the final oral examination. Nomination is made on the *Nomination of Members for the Final Doctoral Examination Committee* form. The names, department affiliation and graduate faculty status of all the proposed members must be provided on this form. In addition to the chair, the two members of the committee who will serve as readers must be identified on the nomination form. The professional affiliation, credentials and an accompanying curriculum vitae must be provided for any proposed committee members who are not members of the graduate faculty. The proposed date of the examination must be stated on the form. The committee must be approved and the form signed by the candidate's program director. After receiving the completed nomination form, the dean of the Graduate School appoints the committee and designates the Graduate School representative.

- **Certification of Completion of the Doctoral Dissertation:** The chair and the two members who have been designated as readers must sign the *Certification of Completion of Doctoral Dissertation* form and return it to the Graduate School at least two weeks (or a minimum of 10 working days) before the proposed examination date. The role of the readers is described above. Signatures of the chair and the readers certify that the dissertation is ready to be defended. The signature of the candidate's program director is also required on this form. In the event that the chair or either of the two readers does(do) not consider the dissertation ready to be defended, certification of the dissertation will be delayed until the necessary modifications have been made.

- **Submission of the Doctoral Dissertation:** All members of the committee must receive a final version of the dissertation two weeks (or a minimum of 10 working days) prior to the proposed examination date. This version of the dissertation is the same as that which has been certified by the chair and the two readers as ready to be defended.

- **Announcement of the Doctoral Examination:** The dean of the Graduate School has the responsibility of notifying all members of the graduate faculty of each impending doctoral examination at least two weeks before the examination date. The time and place of the examination is established by the chair.

3. Conduct of the Doctoral Examination

The doctoral examination normally comprises two components: an open presentation by the doctoral candidate and a formal examination by members of the committee.

- **Open Presentation by the Doctoral Candidate:** Each candidate is expected to give a presentation of his or her dissertation work in an open seminar forum. The open presentation should be as close as possible to the time scheduled for the doctoral examination. In many cases the open presentation will immediately precede the doctoral examination; however, the exact timing and advertising of the presentation will be in keeping with the usual policy of the candidate's program. As determined by the committee and/or the policy of the candidate's program, the open presentation may fulfill the candidate's presentation requirement for the doctoral examination. In this case, all members of the committee must be present at the open presentation. Unless otherwise specified by the committee and/or the policy of the candidate's program, this presentation is open to anyone. If a discussion period is included, anyone attending the open presentation has the opportunity to ask questions of the candidate, but a reasonable time limit must be set in keeping with the usual policy of the candidate's program.

If there are compelling reasons why the candidate is unable to give an open presentation of his or her dissertation work, the candidate's program director must submit a written request to the dean of the Graduate School for permission to be exempt. This request must be submitted with the form for nomination of members of the committee at least six months prior to the proposed examination date.

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• **Formal Doctoral Examination Procedures:** The formal doctoral examination is open only to members of the candidate's committee and other members of the graduate faculty who wish to be present. In the examination, only committee members may ask questions of the candidate; other members of the graduate faculty present during the examination are not permitted, verbally or otherwise, to enter into the proceedings of the examination. If the open presentation serves as the doctoral examination presentation, then at its conclusion, everyone other than members of the graduate faculty is asked to leave. The doctoral examination convenes under the chair. There are three components:

(i) An initial private discussion among only the members of the committee (the candidate and other graduate faculty members are asked to leave). This discussion should determine whether the document is presentable as a dissertation and hence is defensible. If a majority of the committee agrees that the dissertation is not defensible, the examination is canceled. Otherwise, the examination proceeds. The committee must agree on procedures for the examination, including whether a presentation by the candidate is required, the length of time for the presentation and whether the presentation may be interrupted by questions or should be completed prior to questioning. It is usual that the committee will have had prior discussion with the candidate regarding these choices in the procedures for the presentation.

(ii) A presentation by the candidate (if required) is followed by questions from the committee members (other graduate faculty members may be present but are not permitted to ask questions). If the open presentation serves as the doctoral examination presentation, no formal presentation from the candidate may be required and committee members may enter directly into questions of the candidate. No time limit is set for this period, but it is unreasonable that the period exceed three hours.

(iii) At the end of the examination, the candidate withdraws and the committee alone deliberates in private on the acceptability of the dissertation and performance of the candidate. The chair asks each member for opinions, and following these deliberations, the members vote on whether the candidate has passed or failed. The members sign the report of the committee and register their vote. The affirmative votes of a majority plus one of the committee constitute a successful defense of the dissertation; this means that the required number of affirmative votes is either *four* from a five-member committee or *five* from a six- or seven-member committee. The *Report of the Examination Committee* form signed by the committee is returned by the Graduate School representative to the Graduate School office no later than one working day following the examination. The candidate's program director must also be provided with a copy of the report.

4. Outcome of the Examination

If the candidate fails to receive the required affirmative votes, the committee must at the time of the examination agree on the necessary action. The candidate may be failed on the acceptability of the written dissertation, on the candidate's presentation, or both. The committee may find that, in spite of a decision that the dissertation document was defensible, it has defects that prevent it from being accepted. If these defects are minor in nature, the committee may vote to accept the dissertation pending remedial modifications. If the defects are more serious, the committee may decide to fail the dissertation and require a new examination. Alternatively, the dissertation document may be determined to be sound but the candidate's defense inadequate. In this case the committee must decide on a time for a new examination.

The candidate should be informed of the decision as soon as possible. In the event that the candidate fails the examination, the Graduate School representative must report in writing, within two working days, to the dean of the Graduate School that the candidate has failed, the reasons for the failure, the decisions concerning necessary remedial action and approximately when a new examination is to be held. The Graduate School representative must return the signed report of the committee with the letter. Copies of the letter must be provided to the candidate and the chair. The new examination must be within one year from the date of the defense of the first examination. The chair must notify the Graduate School of the date of the second examination so that the necessary paperwork may be sent to the Graduate School representative. The candidate's program director must be informed of all decisions and arrangements regarding the outcome of the examination. The candidate may present himself or herself for the doctoral examination a total of two times.