

Maryland Rules for Oral Defense of the Dissertation

The procedures of the oral defense must comply with those of the Graduate School, as described at http://www.gradschool.umd.edu/catalog/doctoral_degree_policies.htm . The following is a summary of the procedural guidelines.

Committee preparation

The members of the Dissertation Examining Committee must receive the complete dissertation at least ten working days before the scheduled Examination. Should the Dissertation Examining Committee deem it reasonable and appropriate, it may require submission of the dissertation more than ten working days in advance of the Examination.

Location of the Defense

Oral defenses must be held in University facilities that are readily accessible to all members of the Dissertation Examining Committee and others attending the defense. The chair of the Dissertation Examining Committee selects the time and place for the examination.

Notice of the Defense

Announcements of the date, time, and location of the defense, as well as the candidate's name and the dissertation title shall be disseminated to all faculty and graduate students within the department or graduate program in which the candidate's degree is to be awarded at least five working days prior to the defense. Mass-distribution methods such as email, a faculty/student newsletter, or individual announcements are acceptable. Merely posting a paper notice on a corridor bulletin board will not constitute a sufficient announcement.

Attendance at the Defense

Oral defenses must be attended by all members of the student's officially established Dissertation Examining Committee as approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. They are to be physically present in the examination room during the entire examination. Should a last minute change in the constitution of the Dissertation Examining Committee be required, the change must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School in consultation with the director of graduate studies of the student's graduate program and the chair of the student's Dissertation Examining Committee. The defense must be open to all members of the College Park Graduate Faculty.

The Dean's Representative

The responsibilities of the Dean's Representative include the following: to ensure that the procedures of the oral defense are in compliance with those of the Graduate School (as described in the Established Procedures of the Doctoral Dissertation Defense); and to report to the Dean of the Graduate School any unusual problems experienced in the conduct of the defense.

Identification of the Dean's Representative

The Dean's Representative must be identified at the beginning of the defense.

Emergency Substitution Procedure

The Graduate School is aware that last-minute emergencies can prevent a committee member from attending a scheduled dissertation examination. The Graduate School is prepared to work with the dissertation supervisor and/or graduate director to make last-minute substitutions in committee membership to allow the defense to take place as scheduled. Please follow these steps to assure a smooth substitution.

- a. The request must be sent in writing to the Graduate School. Fax or e-mail requests are acceptable.
- b. The proposed substitute must be a member of the Graduate Faculty consistent with the rules for committee membership. Thus, if the Dean's Representative (who must be a tenured faculty member) could not attend, the substitution of an untenured member of the Graduate Faculty would not be acceptable.
- c. Once the written request has been received, the substitution will be made, usually within the hour, provided that the revised committee meets the requirements for committee membership.
- d. When the substitution has been made, a written confirmation, in the same format as the request was received (fax or e-mail) will be sent out, along with a telephone confirmation. The substitution is not official, however, until the written confirmation has been received in the department or program.
- e. A defense that is held with one or more substitute members on the committee, but without prior written confirmation from the Graduate School that the substitution(s) have been approved, will be voided and the defense will have to be repeated.
- f. Place a copy of the written request and the written confirmation in the student's file for future reference, if needed.

Invalidation of the Defense

The Dean of the Graduate School may void any defense not carried out in accordance with the procedures and policies of the Graduate School. In addition, upon recommendation of the Dean's Representative, the Dean may rule an oral defense to be null and void.

Student Presentation

The dissertation defense shall consist of two parts. Part 1 shall be a public presentation by the candidate on the main aspects of the research reported in the dissertation. During Part 1, questions from the audience to the candidate will be permitted. For questions from persons who are not members of the Dissertation Examination Committee, the Chair of the Dissertation Examination Committee shall have discretion to decide whether such questions are germane to the topic of the dissertation and how much time shall be allotted for the answers.

Part 2 shall be a formal examination by the Dissertation Examination Committee. This part shall be open only to Dissertation Examination Committee, other members of the Graduate Faculty, and graduate students from the candidate's department/graduate program. During Part 2, only members of the Dissertation Examination Committee shall be permitted to ask questions. Departments/programs may vote to establish a policy to have Part 2 open only to members of the Dissertation Examination Committee and other members of the Graduate Faculty.

Questioning

The chair invites questions in turn from each member of the Dissertation Examining Committee. The questioning may continue as long as the Dissertation Examining Committee feels that it is necessary and reasonable for the proper examination of the student. The student must have ample opportunity to answer the questions of the Committee.

Conclusion of the Defense

After questioning has been completed, the student and any others who are not members of the Dissertation Examining Committee are asked to leave the room and the Dissertation Examining Committee discusses whether or not the dissertation (including its defense) has been satisfactory. The Committee has the following alternatives:

- a. To accept the dissertation without any recommended changes and sign the Report of the Examining Committee.

- b. To accept the dissertation with recommendations for changes and, except for the chair, sign the Report of the Examining Committee. The chair will check the dissertation and, upon his/her approval, sign the Report of the Examining Committee.
- c. To recommend revisions to the dissertation and not sign the Report of the Examining Committee until the student has made the recommended changes and resubmitted the dissertation for the Dissertation Examining Committee's approval. The Dissertation Examining Committee members sign the Report of the Examining Committee if they approve the revised dissertation.
- d. To recommend revisions and convene a second meeting of the Dissertation Examining Committee to review the dissertation and complete the student's defense.
- e. To rule the dissertation (including its defense) unsatisfactory. In that circumstance, the student fails.

Following the defense, the chair, in the presence of the Dean's Representative, must inform the student of the outcome of the defense. The chair and the Dean's Representative both sign the Oral Defense Report indicating which of the above alternatives has been adopted. A copy of this report is to be included in the student's file at the graduate program office, and a copy is to be given to the student.

Passage or Failure

The student passes if one member of the Dissertation Examining Committee refuses to sign the Report of the Examining Committee, but the other members of the Committee agree to sign, before or after the approval of the recommended changes. Two or more negative votes constitute a failure of the candidate to meet the dissertation requirement. In cases of failure, the Dissertation Examining Committee must specify in detail and in writing the nature of the deficiencies in the dissertation and/or the oral performance that led to failure. This statement is to be submitted to the program's director of graduate studies, the Dean of the Graduate School and the student. A second defense may be permitted if the student will be in good standing at the time of the proposed second defense. A second defense requires the approval of the program's director of graduate studies and the Dean of the Graduate School. If the student fails this second defense, or if a second defense is not permitted, the student's admission to the graduate program is terminated.