

## FINAL ORAL EXAMINATION INSTRUCTIONS (Dissertations/Report/Thesis)

The oral defense of a dissertation/report/ thesis is a tradition dating back to the first universities in medieval times. Individual traditions vary among academic cultures, but we offer the following suggestions to imbue this important event in a scholar's life with appropriate solemnity and dignity. Successfully defending one's dissertation/report/thesis is one of those great personal moments that define us. We hope these suggestions help to shape the event in ways that will mark it as an enduring memory for the candidate, their family and the academic community that surrounds them.

1. The committee and candidate should both dress appropriately for the event. Some level of formality, as determined by the program's traditions, should be followed.
2. The tone of questions and debate during the defense should always be professional and collegial.
3. The oral defense may include a public portion where the candidate presents a summary of the research conducted to a general audience followed by a brief question and answer session. After the public portion has concluded the audience will be dismissed and the defense committee will convene with the candidate for a private defense of the research conclusions and dissertation/report/thesis document.
  - a) PhD candidates should not be congratulated or called "Doctor" until the committee has voted (in a closed door session) to award the candidate the degree.<sup>1</sup>
4. The committee should ensure that the focus during the defense is on the candidate's work. The committee should limit debates among themselves and instead concentrate on engaging with the candidate.
5. Post-defense celebrations involving champagne or other alcohol must be held off campus and should not be held in the room where the defense was conducted.
6. **All committee members must participate for the entire oral examination.** If a committee member is participating remotely, that member needs to be able to communicate with the candidate and other Committee members during the entire defense. **Call 621-5128 if an emergency arises, including any change to the final committee.**
7. **The Chair should review the procedures with the Committee before the candidate enters the room.** Procedures and customs differ from department to department; normally the candidate presents the research prior to any questioning by the committee. The presentation is open to the public and lasts no more than an hour.
  - a) Specify time allotment for the examination (no minimum: maximum is 3 hours).
  - b) Clarify that the audience leaves after the candidate's presentation.
  - c) Specify that the examination continues with only the Committee and the candidate present.
  - d) Remind examiners that this is primarily an oral defense of the dissertation/report/thesis, not a general examination. However, the examination may include general questioning related to the fields of study encompassed.

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1. Note that while calling a doctoral candidate who has successfully completed their defense by the honorific "Doctor" is by convention acceptable, the actual degree is not awarded to the candidate until they have filed the document with the Graduate College and the degree has been posted with the registrar. So, candidates should be careful not to misrepresent themselves on CVs, job applications, or other official documents as having the degree until such time as they have filed and the degree has been posted.

## 8. The Examination

- a) Request a recess to discuss or redirect the process if needed and ask the candidate to momentarily leave the room.
- b) Conclude within the 3-hour time period.
- c) Ask the candidate to leave the room for the final discussion and voting.
- d) Evaluate the candidate's performance. The Committee will evaluate the candidate's overall performance. Review the three Options with the committee.
  - i) **Option 1. Pass with no revisions**
  - ii) **Option 2. Pass with Revisions.**

The Chair indicates date by which revisions must be made. **The committee decides whether oversight of the revisions will be the sole responsibility of the Chair, or whether the dissertation/report/thesis revisions will be approved by each individual Committee member.** The Chair will summarize the revisions required by the Committee that are needed for Final approval of the dissertation/report/thesis. Once the candidate completes all revisions to the satisfaction of the Committee, the Chair must that final approval has been granted notify the Graduate College degree counselor and BE Academic Program Manager by e-mail.
  - iii) **Option 3. Fail**

The Committee votes whether or not to recommend a repeat examination.
- e) **The Committee performs a secret vote** (individual vote options: Pass, Fail, or Abstain). The outcome of that vote determines whether or not the student has passed; if result is a Pass, the committee must decide on which option to select for the student (Pass or Pass with Revisions). If there are 3 committee members then all three members must pass the student in order for that student to pass the final defense. If there are more than 3 committee members then there may be only one negative vote (Fail or Abstain) for the student to pass.
- f) **Committee Informs the candidate of the results of the examination**, but do not report the actual votes, only whether a Pass or Fail and which option.
- g) **The Chair reports the outcome on behalf of the entire committee:**
  - i) **PHD results** are entered in GradPath
    - For PHD only: The Chair enters the vote count and outcome of final defense on the Results of Final Oral Defense form in GradPath and submits it electronically to Graduate Degree Certification for approval. The Chair shares the Outcomes with the Academic Program Manager. If revisions are required, the Graduate Coordinator (Academic Program Manager) must notify (by email) Graduate Student Academic Services after receiving confirmation from the Chair that the revisions have been completed.
  - ii) **MS results** are sent via email to the Graduate College Degree Counselor and the BE Academic Program Manager.
- h) The Chair may return the attached Grade Change form(s) for 920/910/910 units to the Graduate Student Academic Services office, or the Chair may withhold that grade until the student completes revisions. Chairs should confirm that all 920/920/909 grades are posted in UAccess for all terms. Degrees will not be confirmed until Incomplete grades are satisfied.

**REVISIONS  
REQUIREMENTS**

The University of Arizona  
**Graduate College**

Candidate \_\_\_\_\_ ID # \_\_\_\_\_

Major \_\_\_\_\_ Minor \_\_\_\_\_

Defense Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Approval of Revisions**

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ The approval of the dissertation/report/thesis will be by the Committee Chair.
- B. \_\_\_\_\_ The approval of the dissertation/report/thesis will be made by the entire Committee.
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

The revisions will be submitted by (date: \_\_\_\_\_). Revisions must be approved no later than one year after the date of the examination.

**List revisions to be completed.**

I have reviewed and understand that the list of revisions stated above are conditions for Final approval of the dissertation/report/thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Candidate's signature

Revisions completed on \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**BE Department rev: 04/15/22**

Note: ORIGINAL TO CANDIDATE, SIGN AND MAKE A COPY FOR THE CHAIR.

Revised 07/01/2021

