

Guidelines for the Final Oral Examination for the Doctoral Degree

Scheduling and Announcement

The final oral examination over the general field of the dissertation is required of all candidates for doctoral degrees, with the exception of the Doctoral of Musical Arts degree. The doctoral defense should be scheduled *at least four months after* the student has been admitted to candidacy and a suitable time *after the dissertation has been read* by the student's advisory committee. The student should NOT be allowed to defend research without a finished dissertation; it is the dissertation document that is being defended by the student, NOT the research itself. The examination is a formal public affair; **therefore, it should be held during weekday business hours when classes are in session and not during break periods.** A defense may begin as late as 4:30 p.m. in the afternoon. The examination should be held in a University room conducive to attendance by faculty members and students or with facilities conducive for electronic participation if necessary.

At least **three weeks before the date of the examination**, the candidate should submit the signed notification form to the Dissertation Supervisor via the Graduate School's SharePoint site. Only forms submitted electronically via SharePoint will be accepted; paper forms will be shredded. The Dissertation Supervisor and the Dean's representative should be notified as soon as possible when it becomes necessary for a doctoral examination to be postponed.

Graduate Dean's Representative

The student and the committee recommend a Graduate Dean's representative to the Graduate School, and the Graduate School reserves the right to approve or disapprove of the student's choice of representative. The Dean's representative is a member of the Graduate Faculty whose responsibility is to observe the conduct of the final examination. The representative shall have access to the dissertation and may participate in questioning the candidate. Representatives must be chosen from *departments outside the student's program and department*. The Thesis-Dissertation Oral Defense Approval Form has a line for the representative to sign signifying their approval of the conduct of the final exam. A Deans Representative's Report Form is available should a representative feel the need to comment on the examination.

Conduct of the Examination

The chairperson of the advisory committee should convene the examination by introducing the candidate, giving his or her background, and indicating the general format of the proceedings to follow, although there may be variations from department to department. Initially, the candidate should give an overview of his or her study for the benefit of those in attendance who have not read the dissertation (15 to 30 minutes). After this, under the guidance of the chairperson, the candidate may be questioned by members of his or her committee, the representative, and other audience members. As indicated earlier, the examination is a public affair and the candidate should be prepared to defend her or his work before anyone who may question it. A copy of the dissertation (not necessarily in final form) should be available for reference during the examination.

When ample opportunity has been given for this discussion, those not on the doctoral committee should be excused while the committee and the Dean's representative ask further, possibly more detailed, questions regarding both the dissertation and its research procedures. The candidate should then be dismissed from the room while the committee comes to a decision concerning the results of the examination. When the decision is made, the chairperson should inform the candidate of the outcome and electronically submit the Thesis-Dissertation Oral Defense Approval form to the Graduate School via SharePoint.

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Committee Approval

All members of the dissertation committee must approve of the document before it is submitted to the Graduate School via the Texas Tech University Library's Vireo server for the approval of the Graduate Dean.

The options for handling a situation in which a majority of the members of a student's examining committee vote to pass the student's examination, but there is a dissenting vote include the following.

1. The members may all agree on appropriate changes in the final form of the dissertation that resolve the objections of the dissenting member.
2. The dissenting member may accept the majority vote as a committee decision and agree to sign the dissertation.
3. A member voting against approval, and refusing to sign the dissertation as a matter of principle, may resign from the committee, in which case another member may be appointed as a replacement (if needed to make the minimum of three), and the dissertation may be approved. The chairperson must notify the Graduate Dean by letter of the replacement member, who must be approved by the Dean.
4. A member voting against approval may refuse to sign the dissertation and may not be willing to resign from the committee. In such a case, the matter should be referred to the Graduate School for review and assistance in solving the problem.

It is stressed that occasions when committee members vote against approval rarely occur when all of the committee members work closely with the student throughout the preparation of his or her dissertation.

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