

Overview – Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation

The purpose of a dissertation defense is to offer the doctoral candidate an opportunity to support the claims, procedures, and results of the dissertation. The defense is the traditional instrument that enables the candidate to explore with the committee the dissertation's substantive and methodological force. In this way, the candidate and the committee confirm the candidate's scholarly grasp of the chosen research area and original contribution to knowledge.

Dissertation defenses will not be allowed to proceed until all reader's reports have been received in the Graduate School at least two business days before the defense takes place.

Prior to the defense, committees should review departmental regulations for the conduct of the exam, the process of the exam, and voting procedures. Before the exam begins, they should inform the candidate of the process of the defense. After completion of the examination, the candidate should be asked to leave the room. Discussion of the candidate's performance should then commence, with the committee ultimately voting on whether that performance merits a passing or failing grade. On a board of three, two votes are required to pass. On a board of four, three votes are required to pass. If a department chooses to have five members, four votes are required to pass. A written report of the results of the voting is sent immediately to the Graduate School by a member of the committee, normally the adviser.

In case of failure, the department chair, on the recommendation of a majority of the examiners, may authorize a retake of the defense if this is permitted by departmental regulations. An authorization for retake must be approved by the Graduate School. A second failure results in forfeiture of degree eligibility and is recorded on the candidate's permanent record.

A candidate has the right to appeal the result of the defense to the Dean of the Graduate School *on procedural grounds only, not on its substance or on his/her performance*. If a retake is granted, an outside monitor appointed by the Graduate School must be present.