

## **THE DISSERTATION (DOCTORAL THESIS)**

The doctoral dissertation should (1) establish the student's ability to analyze, interpret, and synthesize information; (2) demonstrate the student's knowledge of the literature relating to the project or at least acknowledge prior scholarship on which the dissertation is built; (3) describe the methods and procedures used; (4) present results in a sequential and logical manner; (5) display the student's ability to discuss fully and coherently the meaning of the results. If an experimental problem, the work must be described in sufficient detail to permit an independent investigator to replicate the results; and (6) be original work.

In its most general sense, 'original' work describes research that has not been done previously or that creates new knowledge. Although a dissertation should not duplicate another researcher's or scholar's work, the topic, project, or approach taken need not be solely that of the graduate student. Students are encouraged to explore a particular topic or project with the idea that she or he will independently develop the 'thesis' of the dissertation. The student should be able to demonstrate what portion of the research or scholarship represents his or her own thinking.

The dissertation is the beginning of one's scholarly work, not its culmination. Dissertation research should provide students with hands-on directed experience in the primary research methods of the discipline, and should prepare students for the type of research/scholarship that will be expected of them after they receive the Ph.D. degree. Scholarly activity and research is encouraged from the outset of a student's graduate program.

(Adapted from *The Role and Nature of the Doctoral Dissertation*. Council of Graduate Schools Task Force, 1990)

### **Forming the Dissertation Committee**

It is important to note that the Graduate College approves the Preliminary Examination Committee and the Final Examination Defense Committee, but not the Dissertation Committee. The Graduate College has specific rules about the composition and duration of Examination Committees. Please refer to the Graduate College Handbook for more information about these distinctions: <http://www.grad.illinois.edu/gradhandbook/chaptervi/section04>. The Dissertation Committee may or may not include members of either Examination Committee.

The HDFS policy described below specifically refers to the **Dissertation Committee**.

In preparing for the dissertation (or 'doctoral thesis'), the student (in consultation with his or her advisor) should identify faculty members who would serve on the Ph.D. Dissertation Committee. A Dissertation Committee is required for each student submitting a dissertation and it is expected that the student's adviser serve as the primary "Director of Dissertation Research". It is acceptable to have Co-Directors. The specific roles that other committee members play in directing the dissertation will vary and should be explicitly negotiated and documented in writing. Although appointment to an Examination Committee has strict time limits, there is no time limit on a Dissertation Committee other than the length of time that the student is allowed to complete their degree.

Because HDFS expects that membership on Examination Committees will typically be the same as membership on a student's Dissertation Committee, the HDFS rules for forming a Dissertation Committee are consistent with Graduate College Examination Committee rules:

1. The Dissertation Committee should include at least 3 members of the HDFS faculty who represent the breadth of departmental expertise, as well as at least 1 member from outside the department. Faculty with zero time appointments in HDFS may be considered as either inside or outside faculty.
2. In accordance with Graduate College Requirements, at least 3 of the committee must be members of the Graduate Faculty, and at least 2 must be tenured or have tenure status at the Urbana-Champaign campus of the University of Illinois. The Graduate College's list of graduate faculty is now accessible at: [http://www.grad.illinois.edu/grad\\_faculty/](http://www.grad.illinois.edu/grad_faculty/)
3. It is possible to have a Dissertation Committee member who is not on the UIUC Graduate Faculty. However, the Dean of the Graduate College must approve, in advance, individuals who are not members of the Graduate Faculty who will serve as voting members of the committee. To request the approval of a non-Graduate Faculty member to vote, a curriculum vitae for the individual and a justification from the Chair of the committee must accompany the request for appointment of the doctoral committee, and the individual must have an earned terminal degree in their field of study.
4. There is no "Chair" of the Dissertation Committee – that role specifically refers to Examination Committees where the Chair is responsible for convening the committee, conducting the examination, and submitting the Preliminary and Final Exam Result forms to the HDFS Graduate Secretary. The Chair of an Examination Committee must be a member of the Graduate Faculty and it is recommended that the committee chair and/or research advisor should be a department member. If appointed, a co-chair must meet all the requirements that apply to the chair. The Chair may or may not also be the student's Director of Research.
5. A faculty member who resigns or retires is terminated from membership on the Graduate Faculty unless the department requests that the faculty member continue for a specified period of time. Those retired or resigned faculty members who continue on the Graduate Faculty without current appointments may serve as a voting member and chair a doctoral examination committee. Those who do not continue on the graduate faculty list must be replaced by a current member of the Graduate Faculty.
6. Once the committee has been agreed upon by student and advisor, the advisor should send a memo to the Graduate Secretary identifying the members of the committee for review and approval by the Department Head. A formal request for their participation by submission of the Request for Appointment of a Doctoral Examination Committee to the Graduate College does not have to be made until the preliminary exams are scheduled.

Although the committee provides guidance on the dissertation, it is the student's responsibility to

be aware of all deadlines and requirements for completing the degree.

**The Preliminary Examination (aka “defense of the dissertation proposal”)**

The preliminary exam consists of an oral defense of the dissertation proposal. This defense typically should be completed within the semester following the qualifying exams.

As per Graduate College policy, the student must be registered for the entire academic term in which the preliminary exam occurs.

The student must ask the Graduate Secretary to prepare and submit a *Request for Appointment of Doctoral Preliminary Examination Committee* form at least 3 weeks before the date of the exam. The Examination must occur within 180 days of the appointment date.

The student is responsible for working with the Graduate Secretary to reserve a room and equipment.

The complete thesis proposal should be submitted to all Preliminary Examination Committee members at least 2 weeks prior to the oral defense.

The student, committee chair, and at least one additional voting member of the committee must be physically present for all oral components of the examination (i.e., presence by video or teleconference is not acceptable). If the committee has more than one chair, all chairs must be physically present; in these cases, no additional voting member is required to be physically present. If the minimum required committee is not present, the exam must be re-scheduled.

Following the exam, the committee should sign the *Certificate of Result of Preliminary Examination for the Doctoral Degree* and return it to the Graduate Secretary. Students should never be in possession of this paperwork; it should always be handed from faculty member to secretary and back again.

Three outcomes are possible from the exam:

Pass	The student may proceed with their proposed research.
Fail	HDFS may, but is not required to, grant the student another opportunity to take the examination after completing additional course work, independent study, or research, as recommended by the committee. However, if a second attempt is given, a new committee must be appointed by the Graduate College. The new committee may, but does not have to, consist of the same members as the original committee.
Decision Deferred	The committee is in temporary adjournment until some later date (which must be within 180 days). The same-committee must re-examine the student and the outcome of the second exam must be pass or fail.

<b>Paperwork Needed for The Preliminary Exam</b>		
<b>When</b>	<b>Forms Needed</b>	<b>Instructions</b>
3 weeks before preliminary exam	<i>Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee</i> (green form)	Advisor completes form and returns it to the Graduate Secretary
At the preliminary exam	<i>Certificate of Result of Preliminary Examination for the Doctoral Degree</i>	Committee signs form indicating result of the exam; Chair returns it to the Graduate Secretary

### **The Final Examination (aka “dissertation defense”)**

An oral final defense of the thesis is required. The Graduate College requires that all doctoral candidates be registered for the entire academic term during which they take the preliminary examination and the term during which they take the final examination, regardless of when the dissertation will be deposited or when the degree will be conferred. For this purpose only, "academic term" is defined as extending to and including the day before the first day of the following academic term. If enough thesis credits have been accumulated, registration for zero hours is acceptable.

The final examination should only be held if the Director of Research (student’s adviser) believes that the student’s dissertation is defensible. To arrange the final exam, the student should meet with their Director of Research to determine whether and when the final examination should be held. Once the exam is approved by the Director of Research, the student will be responsible for arranging a date and time when all committee members can participate in the exam (members can participate using appropriate technology if it is not possible to be physically present). Once the date and time is finalized, the student should inform the Graduate Secretary, who will assist in scheduling an appropriate room for the exam, and requesting the correct forms from the Graduate College.

The defense of the dissertation is oral and open to the public. It also must be held on the UIUC campus. The student is responsible for notifying the HDFS Graduate Secretary at least 3 weeks in advance of the defense so that an announcement of the time, place, and topic of the proposal or dissertation can be distributed to the department.

The committee chair, defending student, and at least one additional voting member of the committee must be physically present for the entire duration of the final examination. If the committee has more than one chair then all chairs must be physically present; in these cases, no additional voting member is required to be physically present.

All voting members of the committee must be present in person or participate via teleconference or other electronic communication media for the entire duration of the final examination, and the

deliberation and determination of the result.

Decisions of the committee for final examinations must be unanimous and are recorded on the Final Exam Result form. The committee may make one of three decisions:

Pass	Pass the candidate with no revisions required. In this case, the committee may sign the Thesis/Dissertation Approval form after the completion of the examination and give it to the student.
Pass with revisions	Pass the candidate pending revision of the dissertation; the candidate will receive the signed Thesis/Dissertation Approval form when the prescribed revisions have been completed.
Fail	<p>HDFS may, but is not required to, grant the student another opportunity to take the examination after completing additional research or writing, as recommended by the committee. However, a new committee must be appointed by the Graduate College. The new committee may, but does not have to, consist of the same members as the original committee.</p> <p>After a fail result a student will only be allowed to take the final examination one additional time while working toward the completion of any one program of study.</p>

<b>Paperwork Needed for Final Oral Defense of the Dissertation</b>		
When	Forms Needed	Instructions
Early in the term that student intends to graduate (check Grad College deadline)	<i>Application for Degree</i>  (Student should consult their Director of Research and the Graduate Programs Secretary before submitting form)	Indicate intentions using U of I Integrate, or turn in form to Graduate Secretary
Once approval is given to schedule a final exam		Student should contact committee members to schedule a date and time for the exam.
Once a date for the exam is scheduled (but at least 3 weeks before the exam)	No standard form: Student must provide in writing:  - date, time of exam - title of dissertation - short abstract of dissertation	Student must provide information to the Graduate Secretary, who will schedule a room for the defense, prepare the required forms, and send out a notice of the event to the department
At least 3 weeks	<i>Request for Appointment of</i>	Advisor should request form and

<b>Paperwork Needed for Final Oral Defense of the Dissertation</b>		
<b>When</b>	<b>Forms Needed</b>	<b>Instructions</b>
before oral exam	<i>Doctoral Examination Committee</i> (green form)	return it to the Graduate Secretary
At the final oral exam	<i>Preliminary Examination Result/Final Examination Result Form (PER/FER)</i>	Committee signs form indicating result of the exam and the status of the dissertation; Chair returns it to the Graduate Secretary
At the final oral exam (or whenever revisions have been completed and approved)	<i>Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form (TDA)</i>  <i>Department Approval Form</i>  Departmental copy of dissertation	Committee signs form and gives to the Graduate Secretary. The student is responsible for submitting a copy of their completed dissertation to the Graduate Secretary to submit to the Department Head for approval at least 3 weeks before the Graduate College deposit deadline.

### **The Dissertation Format**

The dissertation must be written in accordance with Graduate College formatting requirements that are described here: <https://www.grad.illinois.edu:444/graduate-college-thesis-requirements>.

In addition to these formatting requirements, HDFS students should use current APA or ASA style guideline for their in-text citations and reference list.

It is the responsibility of the student and the thesis committee chair to ensure that the dissertation is in final form and properly formatted before it is forwarded to the designated Thesis Checker who will then forward it to the Department Head. The Thesis Checker may refuse to accept a dissertation that is incorrectly formatted.

If there are any questions regarding format, the student should contact the designated Thesis Checker. Dr. Bob Hughes is currently serving in this role. His email is [hughesro@illinois.edu](mailto:hughesro@illinois.edu).

### **Dissertation Approval and Submission**

After the *Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form (TDA)* form has been signed by the dissertation committee, the dissertation must be approved by the Department Head.

The dissertation must be submitted to the Graduate College after it has been approved by the dissertation committee and the Department Head.

All dissertations must be deposited in the Graduate College by the published deadline to receive

a degree. A checklist to complete before depositing the thesis is available at:

<http://www.grad.uiuc.edu/thesis/thesishandbook/appendixA.asp>

An electronic copy of your dissertation **MUST** be submitted to the Graduate Secretary before the degree will be granted. The current Graduate Secretary is Maria Rund ([mrund@illinois.edu](mailto:mrund@illinois.edu)).

### **Deadlines for Receiving the PhD Degree**

Doctoral degrees are conferred in May, ~~October~~, August, and December. In order to receive a degree, a student must be on the graduation list for the appropriate graduation date.

To be placed on the graduation list, the student must (1) place themselves, by using UI Integrate Self-Service, on the appropriate degree list, and (2) meet the Graduate College deadline depositing for the dissertation. The deadlines for both of these requirements are published in course schedules, the Graduate College Calendar, and at the Graduate College Website:

<http://www.grad.uiuc.edu/thesis/deadlines.htm>

Please notify the Graduate Secretary once you have placed your name on a degree list.

The Graduate College requires all departments to confirm that students on the graduation list have completed all requirements. The Graduate Secretary will remove names of students who are ineligible for graduation.

### **Exit Interview**

An exit interview will be conducted with each student upon completion of the doctoral program. Students should contact the Graduate Secretary to arrange for an exit interview with the Department Head when scheduling the Final Oral Examination.