



Doctoral Dissertation Oral Defense Committee Instructions

Content taken from the 2013-2014 Graduate Policy Manual, available here:

<http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/gradpolmanual.pdf>.

The Doctoral candidate's dissertation oral defense committee is recommended by the school or department and approved by the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies. The *Thesis/Dissertation Oral Defense Committee Recommendation Form* should be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies as soon as the dissertation proposal has been approved or defended.

Composition

The committee is comprised of a minimum of four and a maximum of seven members. Minimally three are voting members, including the Dissertation Director. The Chair of the oral defense committee is a non-voting member and must be from a program, department, school or college other than that of the candidate. All members of the committee must be full-time appointed faculty at DU and have research records appropriate to the student's area of specialization.

Faculty from appropriately related units who hold the terminal degree in their field may serve on the committee as long as the candidate's graduate unit has the majority representation and a two-thirds majority of the members, excluding the director, hold the earned doctorate.

When a Doctoral degree is interdisciplinary, faculty representation from all disciplines must be reflected on the committee.

Oral Defense Committee Chair

The committee member from outside the student's graduate unit represents the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and serves as Chair of the oral defense committee. The Oral Defense Committee Chair must be a tenured member of the DU faculty and must hold an earned doctorate from an accredited institution.

It is the responsibility of the student to find an appropriate Oral Defense Committee Chair to serve who meets these requirements.

Dissertation Director

The Dissertation Director must be a tenured or tenure-track member of the candidate's graduate unit. It is the Dissertation Director's responsibility to ensure that the student's research meets appropriate academic standards for the discipline in which the degree is being conferred.

Special Members

Exceptions can be made in that adjunct faculty members, post-doctoral appointees, professors from other institutions, or other qualified persons—including someone without a doctorate but with other appropriate qualifications—can serve as special committee members. Students also may request that a non-tenure track, full-time appointed DU faculty member serve as Committee Chair. These exceptions must be supported by a strong rationale, have the support of the student's unit, and be approved by the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies. If an exception is requested, a statement of rationale and the proposed special member's CV must accompany the committee proposal form.



Unit-Specific Requirements

Schools and departments reserve the right to establish requirements that are stricter than the minimal University standards. It is the student's responsibility to determine whether or not the unit has requirements in addition to University policy and the unit's responsibility to ensure that those requirements have been met before submitting the committee proposal form to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Doctoral Dissertation Oral Defense

An oral defense of the dissertation is required and is conducted by the candidate's oral defense committee. The defense is concerned primarily with the dissertation or research project but also may include such other information in the major field as the committee deems pertinent. The defense must be held at least three weeks before the end of the term in which the degree is to be granted. All members of the defense committee must receive a copy of the candidate's dissertation at least two weeks prior to the scheduled defense.

Exams are expected to be held with the student present in person at DU unless emergency circumstances make it impossible for the student to be physically present. Permission to hold a defense with the student participating by conference call, webcast or other medium should be obtained by petitioning the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies. Petitions for faculty members to participate by conference call or other medium are not required.

Scheduling and Verification of the Oral Defense

Arrangements for appointing the defense committee and for the date and time of the oral defense must be made by the student with the college, school or departmental director. Students must submit a completed *Schedule of Oral Defense Form* to the appropriate student services office and their academic unit **no later than four weeks prior to the date of the defense**.

On the form, the candidate will designate the Oral Defense Committee Chair, the Dissertation Director, and all other members of the oral defense committee. After the form has been submitted, the Office of Graduate Studies will verify that all members meet the minimum University requirements.

Responsibilities of Oral Defense Committee Chair

As a representative of the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies, the Chair of the oral defense committee must hold an earned doctorate from an accredited institution and must be a tenured or tenure track faculty member of the University of Denver from a different program, department, or discipline than that of the candidate.

The role of the Chair is to provide a non-specialist's perspective on the quality of the dissertation. The Chair must be familiar with the standards for doctoral research and should have some general knowledge of the topic of the student's dissertation. The Chair is expected to have read the dissertation prior to the examination and to participate in the examination as his/her academic expertise permits, but he/she does not vote on the committee.

Conducting the Defense

The Oral Defense Committee Chair will preside over and manage the defense process. He or she is responsible for making certain that the defense is conducted in a professional manner and that the student has a fair opportunity to defend his/her dissertation. The Chair is expected to provide opportunities for each voting member of the oral defense committee to participate in the defense and to ensure that the examination is of high quality while remaining within proper limits of inquiry. Interested faculty members, and in accordance with departmental policy, currently enrolled graduate students also may attend the oral defense. After the oral



defense committee has conducted the essential examination of the candidate, questions may be asked by others present if pertinent, appropriate as determined by the defense committee.

When the defense is completed, the Chair will request that the candidate and all other persons not on the examination committee leave the room and will call for a motion to pass or fail the candidate. A recommendation to pass can have no more than one negative vote from members of the committee. If the motion is a recommendation to pass, the committee must then agree on the conditions of the recommendation as follows:

- **Pass with no revisions** means that only grammatical, labeling or numbering changes are required. Only a limited number of sentence additions or deletions should be necessary.
- **Pass with minor revisions** indicates that the candidate will be required to reorganize portions of the manuscript and change some of the content.
- **Pass with major revisions** means that a complete chapter or chapters must be rewritten, additional tables are required and interpreted, or the general format must be changed. Responsibility for seeing that needed revisions are made rests with the Dissertation Director, but committee members also may require their approval before final submission.
- **Fail** indicates that the dissertation content is not of acceptable quality or that the candidate cannot defend the research. In most cases, failing the defense results in the rejection of the student's dissertation and a new or related study usually will need to be undertaken.

However, a candidate who fails the oral defense may petition to the oral defense committee for a maximum of one re-examination. If granted, the re-examination must be scheduled through the Office of Graduate Studies and must occur within normal timelines.

The *Result of Oral Defense Form* must be signed by all committee members and returned immediately to the Office of Graduate Studies. All signatures must be original. Faxed, photocopied, or electronic signatures will not be accepted.