



Master's Thesis Oral Defense Instructions

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

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

Oral Defense Committee

The master's candidate's thesis oral defense committee is recommended by the school or program 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 thesis proposal has been approved or defended but no later than the first day of the quarter in which the student expects to complete his/her degree.

Composition

The committee is composed of a minimum of three and a maximum of five members. Minimally two are voting members, including the thesis director. The chair of the committee is a non-voting member and must be from a department, school or college other than that of the candidate. All voting 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 programs who hold the terminal degree in their field may serve on the committee as long as the candidate's graduate program has the majority representation and a majority of the members hold the earned doctorate. When a master's degree is interdisciplinary, faculty representation from all disciplines must be reflected on the committee.

Oral Defense Committee Chair

The committee member from outside of the student's graduate department 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 or tenure-track member of the DU faculty. It is the responsibility of the student to find an appropriate oral defense committee chair to serve who meets these requirements.

Thesis Director

The thesis director must be a tenured or tenure-track member of the candidate's graduate program. It is the thesis 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

In rare occasions, students may request to add an adjunct faculty member, post-doctoral appointee, a professor from another institution, or another qualified person—including someone without a doctorate but with other appropriate qualifications—as a special committee member. A special member may not be considered a substitute for one who meets the University requirements; rather, the special member should be considered as an addition to the core committee.

Students also may request that a non-tenure track, full-time appointed DU faculty member serve as committee chair. These requests must be supported by a strong rationale, have the support of the student's program and be



approved by the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies. The request must include a statement of rationale, the proposed special member's CV, and the Thesis/Dissertation Oral Defense Committee Recommendation form.

Unit-Specific Requirements

Schools and departments reserve the right to establish requirements that are more restrictive 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 program's responsibility to ensure that those requirements have been met before submitting the committee recommendation form to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Master's Thesis Oral Defense

The candidate's oral defense committee conducts the oral defense of the master's thesis. 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 thesis at least two weeks prior to the scheduled defense.

The defense is 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

The student must make arrangements for appointing the defense committee and for the date and time of the oral defense with the thesis director. Students must submit a completed *Schedule of Oral Defense Form* to the appropriate student services office and their academic program **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 thesis 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 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 thesis. The chair must be familiar with the standards for doctoral research and should have some general knowledge of the topic of the student's thesis. The chair is expected to have read the thesis 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 thesis. 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 and 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 thesis director, but committee members also may require their approval before final submission.
- **Fail** indicates that the thesis 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 thesis and a new or related study usually will need to be undertaken.

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. In rare occasions, when a committee member participates remotely, a faxed or scanned signature will be accepted.

Note: Other units may have more specific requirements regarding the committee. Contact the unit for details.