Procedures for Oral Defense of PhD Dissertation

- Dissertation research and oral defense must be completed within three years of admission to candidacy
- Must obtain approval of the dissertation
- Conduct the oral defense 2 weeks after submission of the dissertation
- Must include 1-2 readers who will have voting rights
- Follow the guidelines for conducting the dissertation oral defense
- Major Advisor chairs the oral defense
  - Makes sure (ahead of time) that candidate has met all program requirements up to this point
  - Circulate the evaluation form and the procedures described below to the committee and readers ahead of time
  - Remind committee members
    - To be appropriately attired for the occasion as a show of respect to the dignity and decorum of the oral defense proceedings, as well as honor the candidate's rite-of-passage ritual as they transition from being a doctoral candidate to a doctoral graduate
    - To prepare several questions in advance
    - To be present for the entire oral defense lasting 3.5 to 4 hours
    - To come prepared to take notes
Procedures for Oral Defense of PhD Dissertation

- **Summary of timeline leading up to Oral Defense**
  - Candidate attends mandatory dissertation bootcamp  
    - Beginning of semester
  - Candidate applies for graduation  
    - Middle of semester
  - Candidate submits finished draft of dissertation to Advisor  
    - 9 weeks out
  - Candidate emails names of 1-2 readers to Program Director  
    - 9 weeks out
  - *Advisor approves and distributes dissertation to members*  
    - 5 weeks out
  - Candidate reserves the oral defense presentation room  
    - 2 weeks out
  - Candidate submits time and place of oral defense to Program Director  
    - 2 weeks out
  - Candidate submits approval of dissertation draft to Program Director  
    - 2 weeks out
  - Candidate emails time and place of oral defense to everyone  
    - 2 weeks out
  - Advisor emails procedures for oral defense to committee and readers  
    - 2 weeks out
  - Advisor emails oral defense evaluation form to committee and readers  
    - 2 weeks out
  - Advisor emails committee members  
    - 2 weeks out
    - ▪ To be appropriately attired for the occasion
    - ▪ To prepare several questions in advance
    - ▪ To be present for the entire oral defense lasting 3.5 to 4 hours
    - ▪ To come prepared to take notes
  - Candidate emails presentation to committee and readers  
    - 2 weeks out

*See Appendix A for details*

- **Summary of timeline on the day of Oral Defense**
  - Public session
    - Advisor introduces committee members and candidate  
      - 5 minutes
    - Candidate presents dissertation  
      - 45 minutes
    - Candidate answers questions from the public  
      - 15 minutes
  - Break  
    - 15 minutes
  - Closed committee session
    - Candidate answers questions from committee and readers  
      - 90 minutes
  - Candidate leaves the room  
  - Committee discusses the candidate's performance, votes, and informs candidate of outcome  
    - 45 minutes
  - Total  
    - 215 minutes
Procedures for Oral Defense of PhD Dissertation

1. The oral defense will be announced publicly

2. Dissertation committee (including the readers) will be chaired by Major Advisor
   2.1. All committee members and readers must attend the public and private components of the exam
   2.2. Committee members & readers should read the dissertation ahead of time and prepare several questions in advance
   2.3. Committee members & readers should come prepared to take notes

PROCEDURES FOR THE PUBLIC COMPONENT OF THE ORAL DEFENSE

3. Major Advisor will welcome the candidate and guests (including members of the public), thank the committee and readers and introduce the committee members and candidate
   3.1. Introduce the candidate's background and course of study
   3.2. Briefly explain the public and private components of the oral exam

4. Candidate will make a 40-45 minute public presentation of the dissertation, generally uninterrupted
   4.1. Presentation will be in the standard format of a scientific research seminar utilizing appropriate visual aids

5. Following the presentation, the Major Advisor will open the floor to questions from the general audience
   5.1. Advisor will moderate the question/answer session to allow for as many questions as are feasible
   5.2. Prevent excessive follow-up on questions for which the candidate is unable to provide a satisfactory answer
   5.3. Committee members may take note of such questions and reopen discussion during the committee’s rounds of questioning if the topic/subject is deemed essential to the defense
   5.4. This public presentation & question session should last no more than 1-hour
       5.4.1. Advisor will end the questions at the appropriate time and thank the candidate for the presentation (applause)
       5.4.2. Announce that the public session is adjourned, and that the committee will begin its private examination of the candidate after a 10-15 minutes break

PROCEDURES FOR THE PRIVATE COMPONENT OF THE ORAL DEFENSE

6. If presentation has been held in a large venue, the candidate and committee may adjourn to a smaller room for the remainder of the proceedings
   6.1. Room should be equipped for the student to show their presentation, including a white board

7. Committee including readers should prepare several questions in advance
Procedures for Oral Defense of PhD Dissertation

7.1. Questions should relate to dissertation and generate discussion from candidate to defend statements, graphs, tables, statistics, techniques, and conclusions

7.2. Advisor will moderate the session

7.2.1. Two or three rounds of questioning are expected

7.2.2. In each round, a member has 10 minutes to ask questions

7.2.3. Candidate can seek clarification of any question

7.2.3.1. Advisor may help to clarify questions

7.2.4. Session should last no more than 90 minutes

8. Candidate is permitted reasonable time to gather his/her thoughts before answering questions

8.1. Candidate is permitted any time to leave the room to attend to personal functions

9. Following consensus that questioning by the committee is complete, candidate will be asked to leave the room

10. The closed committee meeting will be called to order by the Advisor

10.1. Advisor will provide the committee with the candidate’s background and course of study (similar to the introduction earlier) and attest to the completion of all program requirements up to this point

11. Advisor will conduct a 45-minute discussion of the candidate’s performance

11.1. Each committee member and reader should discuss the performance and the dissertation in the following terms:

A. Pass (Includes Minor Revisions)
B. Pass (Pending Major Revisions)
C. Fail

11.2. A formal vote will be taken and a plurality will be taken as to the consensus of the committee

11.2.1. If Pass with Minor Revisions, major advisor will assume responsibility for seeing that the revisions are in place before the final dissertation is submitted electronically to The Graduate School

11.2.1.1. Committee members will additionally vote (by ballot) (readers not included) whether the student passed with distinction based on overall performance

11.2.1.2. If Distinction, the dean will indicate in the student’s record that the student passed with distinction

11.2.2. If Pass with Major Revisions, Advisor will work with The Graduate School to appoint a committee of at least two to supervise the revisions and a deadline for completion of the revisions

12. The candidate will be invited into the room by the committee chair (i.e., Major Advisor) and informed of the consensus of the examining committee
Appendix A

Approval of Dissertation

- Your approval of the candidate's dissertation at this point does not imply that there are no corrections that have to be made later.
- Your approval implies the following:
  - That there are no major alterations necessary in the investigations or in the body of the text;
  - That the review of the literature is adequate;
  - That the data adequately supports the conclusions;
  - That the quality and amount of work represented by the dissertation is, in general, consistent with the expectations of a doctoral degree.
- **Do not approve the scheduling of the oral defense until these criteria are met.**
- Your approval at this point will have no bearing on the outcome of the oral defense.