

**NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY**  
**Graduate College**  
**Procedures for Doctoral Oral Examinations (Dissertation Defenses)**

**Scheduling the Defense:** The doctoral advisor, in consultation with the student, is responsible for contacting all members of the committee to establish the date, time and location of the dissertation defense so that **all** committee members can attend. The advisor and student must complete the Dissertation Defense Scheduling Form, have it signed by the doctoral advisor and the department chair, and submit it to the Graduate College (Ashurst, Room A-107) at least two weeks (10 working days) before the defense date **with** a copy of the dissertation. (This copy of the dissertation is for the University Graduate Committee representative to the defense. Another copy must be submitted for format review.) The doctoral advisor and student share the responsibility for scheduling the defense and submitting the dissertation scheduling form by the due date.

No defenses are permitted during reading week or final examination week during the fall and spring semesters. Defenses may be held during the summer if permitted by the academic department involved and if all committee members agree to be present for the defense.

The defense date should not be scheduled until after all committee members have had an opportunity to review the final draft of the dissertation and agree that it is ready for defense. While minor changes and corrections may be suggested at the oral exam, the defense copy of the dissertation must be complete and in its final form when it is provided to the committee members and the University Graduate Committee representative. Signatures of the dissertation chair and department chair on the defense scheduling form certify that the dissertation is in final form, is ready for defense and that all committee members agree it is ready for defense.

When the defense scheduling form is received in the Graduate College, Graduate College staff arrange for a member of the University Graduate Committee to attend the defense as an observer and representative of the Graduate Dean. When the UGC representative is identified, the Graduate College issues a memorandum confirming the date, time and location of the defense to all committee members, student and the UGC representative.

Upon receipt of the dissertation for review, if any committee member or the University Graduate Committee representative feels the dissertation is incomplete or seriously flawed (in terms of format, clarity or consistency), or it is felt that there are serious correctable errors in analysis or interpretation of data, it is his/her responsibility to bring the problem to the attention of the committee chair and, if necessary, to the Graduate Dean. The chair may, at this point, decide to cancel the oral exam and have the student's committee convene to discuss major problems. Assuming that all committee members and the University Graduate Committee representative are satisfied with the quality of the dissertation, the oral exam can take place as scheduled. The University Graduate Committee representative should not hold the student responsible for design flaws that

were approved in the prospectus, but may choose to bring such issues to the attention of the Graduate Dean.

**University Graduate Committee Representative Role:** The role of the University Graduate Committee representative is to represent the Graduate Dean and ensure that examinations are conducted in a manner consistent with the expectations and standards of the Graduate College. He/she is responsible for:

- 1.) Clarifying policy and procedures at the beginning of the examination.
- 2.) Observing the flow of the examination.
- 3.) Intervening where matters of policy, fairness or clarification dictate.
- 4.) Participating in the questioning of the candidate (at the representative's discretion).
- 5.) Initiating and supervising the voting process for the pass/fail decision.
- 6.) Reporting the results of the examination to the Graduate College

**Format Review:** The presence of the University Graduate Committee representative does not signify approval of the dissertation format; format approval is given by the Graduate College's format editor and is a separate process. (Ideally, the initial format review will have occurred early in the semester in which the student seeks to graduate). The Format Editor submits the final grade change for the student's dissertation (799) hours after the dissertation has been approved by the committee and after the format has been approved. To graduate in a particular semester, the student must successfully defend the dissertation, complete the format review process and submit final copies, forms and fees to the Format Editor by the last day of the semester. (See the Checklist for Doctoral Students for more information.)

**Attendance at the Oral Exam.** All members of the committee must be present in person for the entire oral exam. If a committee member is away from campus on sabbatical and unable to return to participate in the defense in person, the dissertation chair may petition the Graduate Dean, in writing, to have that committee member participate in the entire defense by speaker phone. If this is approved, the dissertation chair and the University Graduate Committee representative will be notified in writing. Such a request must be approved before the Dissertation Defense Scheduling Form is submitted. (See Appendix C)

The oral defense is open to faculty and students at the university and interested community members. In order to inform other interested parties of the defense, the student and dissertation chair are encouraged to post a flyer in a visible location in the department announcing the date, time, place and topic of the defense.

If a committee member must be absent because of a last-minute emergency such as illness, the University Graduate Committee representative and the committee chair will discuss the feasibility of postponing the exam. In cases where the candidate may have traveled a great distance, rescheduling may be inappropriate. The Graduate Dean, or his/her designee, should be consulted. Only in an unavoidable emergency will the oral exam take place with less than the full committee present.

**Food at the defense:** Only light refreshments, such as coffee and soft drinks, should be present during a defense. If a student wishes to provide additional food to celebrate after the conclusion of the defense, it should be in a different room.

**Procedures:** At the beginning of the defense, the committee chair asks the candidate (and other guests present) to leave the room. The committee members discuss the readiness of the dissertation for defense and review procedures to be used for the defense. If all committee members agree that the defense should proceed, the candidate (and guests) are invited back into the room. (If one committee member does not attend due to any emergency, such as illness, and permission is given by the Graduate College to proceed with the defense, the chair or the University Graduate Committee representative must inform the candidate of the voting requirements. A two-thirds majority of the appointed committee is required for the student to pass. If only four members of a five member committee attend, all four must vote yes. If the candidate does not wish to proceed with the defense under these conditions, the defense will be rescheduled.)

Typically, the candidate begins the formal oral defense by making a presentation outlining the study and its relevance. (If the candidate's presentation takes the form of a seminar at a different time and place than the defense, it is expected that the University Graduate Committee representative will be invited to the presentation.) At his/her discretion, the chair may allow questions during the presentation to clarify points. Following the presentation the chair provides an opportunity for all committee members and the University Graduate Committee representative to question the candidate. At the discretion of the chair, questions may be received from the audience. At his/her discretion, the chair may ask all visitors to leave when questioning begins.

At the conclusion of the questioning period, the candidate (and any remaining visitors) is asked to leave the room and the committee discusses the student's performance on the exam. The University Graduate Committee representative provides the ballots and conducts a secret ballot vote as to whether the student passes the exam. The University Graduate Committee representative does not vote. A two-thirds majority of the appointed committee is required for the student to pass. (For example, four affirmative votes are required on a five person committee and three affirmative votes are required on a four person committee. If only four members of a five member committee attend, all four must vote yes.) If the candidate passes the defense and there are minor changes in the dissertation to be made, the committee should note those changes on the Final Doctoral Oral Examination form and specify a process to verify that the changes are made prior to submission of the final copy.

If a student does not perform satisfactorily on the oral exam, or if there are major problems with the dissertation (such as rewrite of a chapter or re-analysis of data), the student should be advised of the deficiencies. The oral exam should be rescheduled after the committee is satisfied that the deficiencies have been corrected. A student may repeat the oral examination once. If serious problems with the dissertation are agreed upon at the end of the oral defense, the committee may decide not to take a formal vote on the exam, but to require the student to make corrections and then appear before the

committee at a later date. Whether or not a formal vote is taken, this will be considered a first defense and the student will have one more opportunity to pass the defense.

**Forms.** The University Graduate Committee representative provides the Final Oral Examination for the Doctoral Degree form on which the vote is recorded and which the committee members sign. The University Graduate Committee representative returns this form to the Graduate College (Ashurst A-107) no more than 48 hours after the exam. The University Graduate Committee representative also completes a Report to the Graduate Dean on the Doctoral Oral examination form. A copy of the Report form is sent to the committee chair and department chair by the Graduate College.

**No University Graduate Committee Representative Present:** In the rare situations when a defense is held without a representative of the University Graduate Committee, the chair of the committee shall conduct the defense and conduct the balloting. The Final Oral Examination for Doctoral Degree form and ballots will be sent to the dissertation committee chair, who is responsible for obtaining the signatures of the committee and returning the form to the Graduate College within the 48 hour time frame. When there is no University Graduate Committee representative, that signature line on the form is left blank and the Report to the Graduate Dean form is not completed.

**Telephone Participation.** The participation of a committee member in a dissertation defense via speakerphone is not desirable. Permission to do so, with a justification, must be requested in writing of the Graduate College prior to submitting the Dissertation Defense Scheduling Form. Permission is granted only when there is no other option available (such as a committee member is sabbatical out of state and there is no alternative defense date. ) When permission for speakerphone participation is granted, the committee member on the telephone must participate in the entire defense. The voting must be private. The University Graduate Committee representative signs the Final Oral Examination for Doctoral Degree form for the telephone participant, with their permission.

### **Dissertation Defenses on IITV**

It is most desirable for all members of the dissertation committee, the doctoral student and the University Graduate Committee representative to be present at the same location for a dissertation defense. However, given the “geographically distributed” nature of some NAU doctoral programs, it is recognized that a requirement that all participants in a defense be physically present at the same location presents a hardship for some faculty and students. Therefore, dissertation defenses may be conducted with participants at different locations linked by NAU’s Interactive Instructional Television (IITV) system.

1. The decision to conduct a dissertation defense via IITV must be agreeable to the student and all members of the committee. If the student or any member of the committee is not comfortable participating in an IITV defense, all participants must be present at the same location, normally Flagstaff.

2. There must be a minimum of two other participants in the same location as the student, normally the advisor and one other committee member.
3. All participants in the defense will be at IITV locations. Telephone participation is not acceptable. Arrangements for the IITV defense are made by the dissertation committee chair or department secretary/administrative assistant of the student's department. If there are problems with the IITV technology (e.g. the system "goes down" during the defense) the committee must wait for the problem to be resolved or reschedule the defense.
4. Any handouts prepared in advance by the doctoral candidate should be mailed to participants at other locations.
5. Voting will be by secret ballot, consistent with existing dissertation defense guidelines. The ballots will be faxed to the University Graduate Committee representative who will tally them and announce the results.
6. A copy of the Final Doctoral Oral Examination form will be mailed to each site where participants are present. Participants at the remote site(s) will sign the original form and fax it to the University Graduate Committee representative. Participants at the site with the UGC representative will sign the faxed form and the UGC representative will submit it to the Graduate College within 48 hours of the defense. The original form(s) from the site(s) will be mailed to the Graduate College, where it (they) will be attached to the faxed form, thus providing original signatures from all participants.
7. The Procedures for Doctoral Oral Examinations should be followed as closely as possible.

Approved by the University Graduate Committee 11/03/94  
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