Doctoral Degree Requirements

Dissertation Defense
After the Doctoral Committee has determined that the final draft of the dissertation is suitable for presentation; the Committee will request the scheduling and announcement of the Dissertation Defense (also called Final Oral Examination or Oral Defense.) Check with the College and program for college and program specific procedures for this process. A copy of the announcement should be sent to the Graduate School, preferably two weeks in advance of the defense date. The announcement must also be posted in a public forum for a minimum of twenty-four hours to comply with statute requirements for a public meeting. A student must successfully defend the dissertation in order to be able to proceed and complete the final submission process.

Outside Chair of the Dissertation Defense
The Dissertation Defense (or Final Oral Examination) shall be presided by a senior and distinguished scholar from outside the department, nominated by the Major Professor. If the chair is from another institution, this individual should have the equivalent qualifications necessary to chair a dissertation in the subject area at the University of South Florida. Note that the Major Professor may not serve as the “Outside Chair.”

Procedures for Conducting the Oral Defense
1. The oral defense should be conducted to allow for the student to make any necessary corrections following the defense and still meet the final copy deadline for turning in the dissertation to the Office of Graduate School.

2. It is required that all members of the Dissertation Committee be present for the examination unless an absence is approved prior to the defense taking place by the Graduate School Dean. In the event that a member cannot attend in person, participation is permissible via speakerphone or video conference. A minimum of three members, including the Major Professor is required to proceed with the defense. The Outside Chair is not considered as part of the Committee.

3. The presentation should be considered an important function in the department and all graduate students and faculty be encouraged to attend.

4. The presentation and defense are open to the public and as such, must meet the requirements of the Sunshine Laws for the State of Florida. The voting is not public.

5. The room selected for the examination should have adequate seating with an alternate room selected in case of problems.

6. The Outside Chair should open the proceedings by introducing the candidate and the Dissertation Committee.

7. The examination should begin with a presentation by the candidate designed to summarize the dissertation.

8. The remainder of the examination may take place in a different setting and will consist of questions about the research by the Outside Chair and the Dissertation Committee and by other interested persons. It is suggested that questioning should be limited to about 15 minutes for each person with subsequent rounds of questioning as necessary.
9. Questions from the faculty-at-large and/or the public may be allowed at the end of the committee’s questioning.

10. The length of the examination period will generally not exceed three hours. Throughout this time the Outside Chair is to be in charge of all proceedings and, ideally, is expected to play a balancing role between advocacy and contention. The Outside Chair, at anytime during the course of the examination, may request all visitors to leave.

11. Following the completion of these proceedings, the Outside Chair will ask all visitors and the candidate to leave and will re-convene the Dissertation Committee only. The Outside Chair may share his/her impressions and opinions of the candidate and the dissertation. The Outside Chair will preside over the deliberations and voting of the committee, but is not to participate in the voting. The voting is to be limited to “pass” and “fail” votes. The Outside Chair has the responsibility of tallying the votes and of informing the candidate of the final decision. The vote of the Dissertation Committee must be unanimous and recorded on the Successful Defense form. The College Graduate Dean will resolve substitutions and disagreements within the committee.

12. The Outside chair will convey the decision of the Dissertation Committee (Successful Defense form) to the Department/College Graduate office to be kept in the student’s file.


1. Introduction of Candidate and Committee Members.
2. Presentation by Candidate.
3. Questions by Committee Members.
4. Questions from other faculty and/or other observers.
5. Candidate and observers leave the examination room.
6. Deliberation and voting by the committee, only; Sign documentation (to be determined by College/Department) if defense is successful.
7. The candidate shall be informed of the vote.
8. The record of the successful defense (to be determined by the College or Department) is forwarded to the College/Department for the student’s file.

on the website at http://www.grad.usf.edu/thesis.asp