***Doctoral Dissertation Defense (Final Oral Examination)***

Scheduling and Announcement

After the Doctoral Dissertation 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 Major for college and major specific procedures for this process. A copy of the announcement should be sent to the Office of Graduate Studies, 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.

**Attendance**

Except when video conferencing is approved by the College Dean and the Office of Graduate Studies, all members of the final oral examination committee must be present during the entire examination. When video conferencing is approved the student and the Major Professor (or, if Co-Major Professors, at least one) must be physically present at the defense, All committee members are expected to participate fully in questioning during the course of the examination and in the discussion of and decision on the result. Other faculty members and graduate students may physically attend the examination... The student must successfully defend the dissertation to be able to proceed and complete the final submission process.

**Video Conferencing**

Graduate programs must adhere to the following if the final oral examination involves video conferencing. Video conferencing may not be ideal in all circumstances.

Facilities and Support Requirements

The video conferencing room must allow the candidate and all members of the examination committee to see and hear one another during the entire examination.

There must be appropriate software/hardware available for the transmission of any text, graphics, photographs, or writing referred to or generated during the examination.

Audio-only communications are not permitted.

Prior to the defense, tholdingconferencing All participants must confirm in advance that the video conferencing setup is satisfactory. The student may cancel the examination on the day of the defense without penalty if the video conferencing capabilties differ significantly from the initial agreement.

Any technical support staff required to operate equipment must observe strict confidentiality.

The video conference must be scheduled for a three and a half hour time period to allow for any delays resulting from technical issues during the dissertation defense.

Should a technical failure arise, the Outside Chair in consultation with the Major Professor and other committee members will determine if the examination should continue. If the examination is cancelled, the examination will be rescheduled and there will be no penalty to the student.

All committee members must record their vote on the Successful Defense form. This form may be found at [www.grad.usf.edu](http://www.grad.usf.edu). Off-site committee members must sign a copy of the Successful Defense form and scan it back to the Major Professor.

***Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair***

The Doctoral Dissertation Defense (Final Oral Examination) shall be presided by

* an external committee member from outside the Department, School, or equivalent, hosting the doctoral major, but may be within the academic discipline.

OR,

* a non-committee member (a.k.a. Outside Chair), (Refer to the individual Program's Degree Requirements in the Graduate Catalog for information).  If the Chair is from another institution, this individual must be approved for Affiliate Graduate Faculty status.

The Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair’s role includes overseeing the proceedings as well as serving as the student’s advocate, by ensuring fairness of the process.  Faculty holding joint, courtesy, or adjunct appointments in the degree-granting academic unit (i.e. Department or equivalent) cannot serve as the Defense Chair.

***Procedures for Conducting the Doctoral Dissertation Defense (Final Oral Examination)***

1. The Doctoral Dissertation defense (final oral examination) should be conducted within a timeline 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 Studies.

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

3. 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 Doctoral Dissertation Committee deliberation is not public.

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

5. It is required that all members of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee be present for the examination unless an absence is approved prior to the defense taking place by the Office of Graduate Studies Dean. In the event that a member cannot attend in person, participation may be permissible via video conference with approval from the Office of Graduate Studies. The student and Major Professor must be in attendance in person and may not participate via remote access. Aminimum of three members, including the Major Professor is required to proceed with the defense. If a non-committee member (Outside Chair) chairs the Defense, this individual does not count as one of the three required members in attendance. If an unforeseeable situation arises that would prevent compliance with this requirement the Major Professor or Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair should contact the Office of Graduate Studies for guidance and approval to proceed with the defense.

6. The length of the examination period will generally not exceed three hours. Throughout this time the Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair is to be in charge of all proceedings and, ideally, is expected to play a balancing role between advocacy and contention.

7. The Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair, at any time during the course of the examination, may request all visitors to leave.

8. **Presentation**

* The Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair should open the proceedings by introducing the candidate and the Doctoral Dissertation Committee.

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

9. **Questions**

Following the presentation, the Defense may be moved to a different setting for the main examination. The College determines the order of the proceedings described below:

* The examination will consist of questions about the research by the Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair and the Doctoral Dissertation Committee.
* It is suggested that questioning should be limited to about 15 minutes for each Doctoral Dissertation Committee member with subsequent rounds of questioning as necessary.
* Questions from the faculty-at-large and/or the public may be allowed following the presentation. It is suggested that questioning from the general audience be limited up to 5 minutes per person.

10. **Deliberations and Voting**

Following the completion of these proceedings, the Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair

* will ask all visitors and the candidate to leave and will reconvene the Doctoral Dissertation Committee only.
* will preside over the deliberations and voting of the Committee (Note: if a non-committee member (Outside chair) is used he/she will not participate in the voting)
* is responsible for tallying the votes and informing the candidate of the final decision. The voting is to be limited to "pass" and "fail" votes.   *The vote of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee must be unanimous.*If unanimous agreement cannot be reached, the Doctoral Dissertation Defense Chair notifies the student’s Department Chair (or appropriate equivalent) who will endeavor to resolve the dispute in an expedient fashion.
* records the vote on the Successful Defense Form and conveys the decision of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee (Successful Defense Form) to the Department/College Graduate Office to be kept in the student's file.

11. **Approval of the Final Dissertation**

All committee members must approve the final version of the dissertation via the Certificate of Approval Form. If the Committee is unable to **unanimously** approve a final draft of the dissertation, the student’s Department Chair and College Dean will work with the Doctoral Dissertation Committee to seek an equitable resolution.