



A Guide for Graduate Students Preparing for a PhD Defense in Arts, Sciences and Engineering

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I. BEFORE DEFENSE

Get Permission to Start Writing

After completing all course, exam and research requirements for your program of study, there are several things that must be done before a thesis defense can occur. Most importantly, you must meet with your advisory committee to ensure that everyone agrees that the work is ready to defend. You will need to decide on a date by which the defense should occur. You should also inform your Graduate Administrator that you have started the process to prepare for your defense.

Nominate a Faculty Member to Serve as Chair for Your Defense

A Chair is appointed for each PhD oral defense exam to monitor and promote fairness and rigor in the conduct of the defense. [Instructions for the Chair](#) can be accessed on the AS&E Intranet by faculty and staff. The Chair's status as a non-member of the student's program or department enables distance from previously established judgments on the candidate's work.

You must identify a faculty member to serve as Chair for your defense. This individual must be a current full-time faculty member at assistant professor rank or higher from outside the department offering the degree program or not a core member of the interdisciplinary degree program faculty. The selection of the Chair is subject to the approval of the department/program, the Dean of Graduate Studies in Arts, Sciences and Engineering and the University Dean of Graduate Studies.

Selecting a Defense Date

You should begin scheduling the actual defense date three months in advance to ensure that your advisor, all committee members and your appointed Chair are able to be present at your defense and that rooms are available on the date and time selected.

The [academic calendar](#) includes important dates for defense for each semester of the academic year. When you and your advisor begin thinking about defending, check the academic calendar for deadlines. Defenses may be held on any day the University Graduate Studies office is open for business (i.e., not weekends, evenings, or holidays, or the days between Christmas and New Years).

It is permissible for a member of your committee to participate in the defense remotely via Skype, with the exception of your advisor and the Chair—you, your advisor and the Chair of the committee must all be physically present in the room for the defense. Additionally, if a member of your committee plans to participate via Skype, all committee members must agree to the arrangement, including the appointed Chair; someone other than you and your committee must handle the IT setup and be on standby for any problems; and if during the defense, anyone involved finds the remote participation arrangement or quality of transmission is interfering with the defense, he or she may request that the defense be rescheduled. Participation of a committee member by Skype must be approved by the AS&E Dean of Graduate Studies and the University Dean of Graduate Studies before the dissertation is registered for defense.



When all members of your committee and your Chair agree to a specific date and time for the defense, inform your Graduate Administrator of the scheduled defense date as soon as you possibly can but no later than 6 weeks prior to your defense date. Your Graduate Administrator will advise you of any program-specific requirements for the defense as well as work with you to prepare for your thesis defense. *Check with your Graduate Administrator to determine the procedure for registering your thesis electronically.* You should provide your committee members at least two weeks to read and comment on your dissertation before the date you need to register your dissertation.

International Students and Work Visas

We strongly recommend that international students meet with an [International Services Office \(ISO\)](#) representative as soon as permission to start writing is granted. The ISO will provide information on visa options, documentation, and timelines for applying for a visa for employment in the US.

Registration Categories for Defense

In your final semester (the semester in which you defend), you will register for one of the following registration categories:

999: “*Dissertation*” non-credit bearing registration category that indicates the PhD student has completed all of the requirements for the degree except the dissertation and is in residence as a full-time student.

- You must be in residence full-time.
- You are eligible for student health insurance, loan deferments, and University housing, but you are not eligible for financial aid in the form of student loans.

995: “*Continuation of Enrollment*” non-credit bearing registration category that indicates the PhD student has completed all of the requirements for the degree except the dissertation and is not in residence as a full-time student. When registered for Continuation of Enrollment, your time status is “X”, meaning less than part-time.

- Appropriate if you have left the University prior to completion for a job or personal reasons but have a defense planned during the upcoming semester.
- You are not eligible for student health insurance, loan deferments, University housing, or financial aid in the form of student loans.

Dissertation Writing and Guidelines

The University of Rochester offers the manual “[Preparing Your Thesis](#)” to graduate students to help you to bring your dissertation up to the required standard of organization, appearance, and format for the University of Rochester. Before preparing the defense copy of your dissertation, check the contents of the manual carefully. In so doing, you may avoid mistakes that can be time-consuming and costly to correct. The manual does not deal with the art of scholarship. There are numerous



guidebooks and style manuals available for dissertation writers. However, before beginning the writing of your dissertation, you should consult with your Advisor regarding preferred styles.

Including material produced by other authors in your dissertation can serve a legitimate research purpose, but you want to avoid copyright infringement in the process. Republishing someone else's work, even in abbreviated form, requires permission from the author or copyright owner. You must receive permission from the author(s) and include it with your submission before it can be published in your dissertation. For detailed guidance on avoiding copyright infringement, please see Proquest's [Copyright Guide](#).

Rooms for Your Defense

You must reserve a room for your oral presentation and for your closed exam. *Check with your Graduate Administrator to determine who will schedule the room for your thesis defense.*

Preparing Your Dissertation for Defense

The University requires that you provide copies of the dissertation to your committee members and for the faculty member who will chair the exam. You should check with your committee members to see if they prefer printed copies or electronic copies (or both). If they select printed copies, these copies do not need to be printed on heavy-weight, expensive paper unless there is the need to do so for figures and images.

Printing and binding a dissertation can be expensive. Most students use the Copy Center to print and bind their dissertations. If you have questions about the process, including turn-around time for the finished product, call (585) 275-3879 or visit the Medical Center Copy Center location. Binding at the Copy Center is black tape binding. Printing at the Copy Center includes a proof before the final copies are printed and this can take up to a week; it is advisable to check into turnaround time well before printing is needed.

On occasion, some students use FedEx/Kinkos to print and bind their dissertations. FedEx/Kinkos offers a 24 hour turn-around time for printing and binding, which is a plastic spiral and is perfectly acceptable. Although requesting a proof copy will extend the turn-around time at FedEx/Kinkos, it is advisable to do so before your final copies are printed. Printing costs are generally higher at FedEx/Kinkos.

Registering Your Dissertation for the Final Oral Exam

In order to register your dissertation, you, your program's Graduate Administrator, or both of you together, will need to create a record in the University of Rochester Graduate Studies PhD Completion website. This record will include your degree information, your past degrees, important contact information, and attachments including the defense version of your dissertation in pdf format, and other relevant documents provided by your Graduate Administrator. The version of your dissertation attached to your online record is considered the registration copy.

When your PhD completion record is finalized by your Graduate Administrator, committee members will receive emails with links to access your record and approve your dissertation to progress to



defense. Well before the record is finalized (at least two weeks), you must provide copies of the dissertation identical to the registration copy to all members of your committee. Please consult with your committee members for their preferred format. Some will accept a pdf document and others will choose a hard copy. Each of these individuals must have possession of your dissertation for a minimum of two weeks before they are asked to sign off on the readiness of the work for defense. Also provide a copy of the dissertation to the Chair of your oral defense in his/her preferred format. The Chair does not need to comment or sign off on the dissertation before it is registered but should have it at least two weeks prior to the defense.

There may be deadlines for registering your dissertation specific to your program and school. Consult with your Graduate Administrator to ascertain those deadlines and follow them carefully. Please plan the completion of your degree by following your program and school deadlines in tandem with the PhD calendar.

After all committee members have provided their approval, the faculty director of your PhD program or your department Chair will approve the thesis for registration using the same online system. Then, requests for review and approval will go to the Arts, Sciences and Engineering Dean of Graduate Studies office and finally to the office of the University Dean of Graduate Studies. When all of these officials have approved your committee and dissertation for defense, your dissertation is considered registered. You will be able to track these approvals in your online record and will receive a confirmation email when approvals are complete.

The Graduate Studies Office and the AS&E Dean of Graduate Studies as well as the University Graduate Studies office may make corrections to the pdf of your dissertation. This annotated copy of your dissertation, along with the original version, will be stored in the PhD Completion website for you to reference at the conclusion of your defense. You are not permitted to distribute updated versions of your dissertation prior to the defense, but be sure to incorporate any corrections in the final copy after the defense before uploading your final dissertation to ProQuest®.

After the defense, if the committee has required major revisions to be approved by one or more of its members, it is your responsibility to provide them with the corrected final version for their approval. They will be asked to submit written confirmation of that approval to University Graduate Studies. Failure to do so could delay conferral of your degree.

After the defense, you will receive additional instructions by email for completion of all PhD degree requirements.

It is important to walk into the defense knowing that your Committee really WANTS you to pass. Even if criticism is harsh, it is meant to be constructive. The defense is not solely an opportunity for the Committee to compliment and congratulate you for the work you have done. It is also meant to challenge you and force you to consider tough questions.

II. THE DEFENSE

Below you will find suggestions to help you get ready for the defense and information to give you a sense of what to expect.

Know the Rituals

What happens at a thesis defense? The best way to know what happens and the best way for *you* to prepare for your defense is to regularly attend the defenses of your colleagues—those internal and external to your field of expertise. You should be doing this throughout your graduate program, not just several weeks prior to your own defense.

Talk to people from your group and in your department who already defended to find out what their defense was like. They know well what occurs in the closed exam and will likely want to share their experiences with you. You should also speak with your advisor to get a sense of his/her specific expectations of a defense. Don't be afraid to ask!

Guidelines for Presentations

Use PowerPoint or Other Software to Create Slides

You should prepare a presentation of the research that comprises the thesis. Your slides should encapsulate the work and focus on its most salient contributions. In preparing, ask yourself these questions: "What do I want people to know about my thesis? What is the most important information that I can present and talk about?" Here are some basic tips:

- Use text large enough to be readable by the audience (especially text from figures)
- Ensure graphics and tables are clear
- Don't clutter your slides – if necessary have things come up on mouse clicks
- Use spell check and proof-read
- Practice your presentation with your peers
- Work on pronunciation, if required
- Time your presentation to ensure it will fit within the allotted time while allowing time for some questions

Public Lecture

If your defense will include a public lecture, it is recommended that you do a trial run of your presentation a day or two before your defense in the room that has been booked for your public lecture. This will allow you to familiarize yourself with the space and the equipment and to address any problems that arise during the trial run.

Plan your public lecture to allow enough time for questions. Present enough information so that the audience understands what you did, why you did it, what the implications are and what your suggestions are for future research.

Audience

If there is a public lecture, the date/time/location of your defense and thesis topic are advertised to your program and beyond. Departmental/program announcements are sent by your Graduate Administrator to invite faculty and students. Friends and family are welcome to attend the public lecture. Faculty and students in the audience are given the opportunity to ask questions.

Dress Professionally

Plan to dress professionally for the defense in the same way you would if presenting a paper at a conference or for a job interview. You will be standing for a long time on the day of your defense. You might want to keep this in mind when selecting the shoes you'll wear for your defense.

Items to Bring to the Defense

Your presentation, a laser pointer, a copy of your dissertation, a pen or pencil, a note pad and a bottle of water are essentials that you should bring to the public lecture.

The Closed Examination

You will be asked to leave the room while your Committee reviews your program of study, grades and decides whether the thesis is acceptable/not acceptable. The Committee decides whether members will ask sequential questions or whether each member will be allotted a specific time period for questioning.

The person to start the questioning is designated. You will be called back into the examining room and questioning will begin. After all questions have been addressed, you will be asked to leave the room while your Committee decides the outcome of the exam. You will be asked to return to the room to be informed of the outcome by the Chair of your exam committee.

Address Questions with Confidence

- Listen to the entire question no matter how long it takes the faculty member or student to ask it (take notes if necessary.)
- Pause and think about the question before answering.
- Rephrase the question succinctly.
- Answer the question to the best of your ability. ***If you do not know the answer, remain calm and say so in a professional way.***
- Remember no one will know the ins and outs of the thesis and your research materials as well as you. *You* are the foremost expert in the thesis topic and ***YOU*** really do know the research involved. ***Be positive!***

Outcomes

- Acceptable with minor or no revisions (no further approval required)
- Acceptable with major revisions in content or format (in this case, one or more committee members must be responsible for overseeing and approving the major revisions before the final copies are submitted)
- Not acceptable



III. AFTER THE DEFENSE

Student Status

You may submit the final corrected copies of your dissertation as soon as you address any remaining comments that were brought up during the defense or noted in the registration copy of your dissertation, which will be returned to you usually within a few days before or after the defense. If additional time is needed to address the comments, in Arts, Sciences and Engineering you are provided up to one semester following the defense during which you can remain a full-time student. Your degree conferral date will depend on when you submit the final corrected copies of your dissertation.

Final Corrected Copies of the Dissertation

The day after your defense, you will receive a document via email from the University Dean of Graduate Studies that provides instructions on how to submit the final corrected copies of your dissertation through ProQuest; how to provide authorization for the release of your dissertation through UR Research; a link to an online exit survey that must be completed; and instructions on how to verify to the University Dean of Graduate Studies' office that the dissertation has been submitted.

Department/Program Requirements Prior to Termination of Student Status

Each department and program has its own process for students who are ending their student status. Be sure to check with your Graduate Administrator to determine if there is additional paperwork that you'll need to complete before your student status is terminated.

Publishing Your Final Dissertation

The University of Rochester requires all doctoral candidates to deposit their dissertations for publication with ProQuest Dissertation Publishing and with the University libraries. Hard copies of the dissertations are not required by the Graduate Studies Office or the Library. The Library receives an electronic copy of the dissertation from ProQuest, but students must give the University their permission to obtain it. For questions regarding publishing through ProQuest, contact Author Relations at disspub@proquest.com or 800.521.0600 ext. 77020.

Binding Your Final Dissertation

Your department may want a bound copy of your dissertation. Please check with your Graduate Administrator to determine this and how the cost of binding is covered. You may also want a bound copy for yourself and others. Printed and bound color copies are available for purchase through ProQuest.

Date of Degree Completion

Degree requirements are met on the day your final dissertation is submitted online to ProQuest.

Date of Degree Conferral

Conferral is the act of officially awarding a degree. The University of Rochester Board of Trustees confers degrees 3 times each year (October, March and May). Your conferral date will be determined by the semester in which all degree requirements are completed.



Completion late-May through late-August = October conferral date

Completion Sept 1 through mid-January = March conferral date

Completion late-January through late-April = May conferral date

Exact deadlines for completion in a given semester are published in the AS&E [academic calendar](#).

Commencement

The graduation ceremony for all University of Rochester doctoral candidates is held in May of each year. Only the students who have completed degree requirements including the submission of the final dissertation to ProQuest are eligible to participate in the ceremony. Diplomas are distributed at Commencement or mailed to those who do not attend.

Information on the Commencement Ceremony and graduation regalia will be mailed to you in early-March.

Proof of Completion

Many employers want “proof” of the degree earned. The University Graduate Studies Office (Wallis Hall, room 259-260) can provide you with a letter indicating the date degree requirements were satisfied and the date the Board of Trustees will confer/conferred the degree. This is your best option for proof of degree immediately following graduate school.

You may also supply employers with your official transcript, which will be annotated to include the date of degree conferral *after* conferral occurs (October, March or May).

Your diploma can also be used as proof of the degree if you wish to copy it for an employer.

Some employers work with agencies that search for, screen and hire employees. They often submit forms to the academic institution that request enrollment information as well as degree verification. The Registrar will provide this information to an agency *if* your signature is provided with the forms indicating approval of the release of information.

Student Loans

If your student loans have been in deferment, you’ll need to notify your loan servicer of a completion date. Some loan servicers accept the completion date via a phone call while other servicers require that you submit a final loan deferment request form or letter from your Registrar before the repayment process can begin. Once a completion date is reported, your loan servicer will provide you with the information needed to start repayment or to continue deferred status, when applicable.

Health Insurance

Your end of program decisions may impact your health insurance options. You should check your health insurance status to assure continuing coverage and access to health care following graduation. If you are enrolled in the University-sponsored Aetna Student Health Insurance plan, coverage continues through the end of the semester in which you cease to be a full-time registered student. If



you are graduating in the fall, the end date is December 31. If you are graduating in the spring, coverage ends on July 31. Your dependents' coverage ends the same time that your coverage ends.

To learn more about your insurance options upon graduation, visit the [UHS Insurance website](#).

UR Email Address

Student UR email addresses will remain active for one year after completion of the degree. You will receive reminder notices before your account is de-activated. If you have questions about this, please contact [University IT](#). If you remain at UR after your defense, your email address will be transferred to a non-student account by the hiring department.

Stay in Touch

Please provide us with your whereabouts so we can keep in touch, provide you with useful, up-to-date information about professional development opportunities and about the University of Rochester, and celebrate all your successes along the way!

<http://www.rochester.edu/college/alumni/info-update.html>