

A Guide for Graduate Students Preparing for a Master's Thesis Defense In Arts, Sciences and Engineering

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I. BEFORE DEFENSE

Prepare for the Defense

After completing the research required for your thesis, you must decide on a date for the master's thesis defense. You should also inform your Graduate Administrator that you have started the process to prepare for your defense. A master's thesis defense committee must include your advisor, a second faculty member from within your program, and a faculty member from outside of your department.

Selecting a Defense Date

The <u>academic calendar</u> 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 Arts, Sciences and Engineering 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—you and your advisor must both be physically present in the room for the defense. Participation of a committee member by Skype must be approved by the AS&E Dean of Graduate Studies before the thesis is registered for defense.

When all members of your committee have agreed to a specific date and time for the defense, inform your Graduate Administrator of the scheduled defense date as soon as possible. Your Graduate Administrator will advise you of any program-specific requirements for the defense as well as prepare your thesis defense paperwork. This paperwork requires signatures from your advisor and the department chair/program director, indicating their approval that the thesis is ready for defense. Check with your Graduate Administrator to determine if you or the Graduate Administrator will obtain the signatures for your paperwork. You should provide your committee members at least one week to read and comment on your thesis before the thesis defense.

International Students and Work Visas

We strongly recommend that international students meet with an <u>International Services Office (ISO)</u> representative. 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), if you have completed all your credit requirements, you will register for one of the following registration categories:



899: "Master's Thesis" non-credit bearing registration category that indicates the Master's student has completed all of the requirements for the degree except the thesis 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.

895: "Continuation of Enrollment" non-credit bearing registration category that indicates the Master's student has completed all of the requirements for the degree except the thesis 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.

Thesis Writing and Guidelines

The University of Rochester offers the manual "<u>Preparing Your Thesis</u>" to graduate students to help you to bring your thesis up to the required standard of organization, appearance, and format for the University of Rochester. Note that while this document is specifically for PhD Dissertations, the same formatting rules apply for Master's theses. Before preparing the defense copy of your thesis, check the contents of the manual carefully. The manual does not deal with the art of scholarship. There are numerous guidebooks and style manuals available for thesis writers. However, before beginning the writing of your thesis, you should consult with your Advisor regarding preferred styles.

Including material produced by other authors in your thesis can serve a legitimate research purpose, but you want to avoid copyright infringement and plagiarism in the process. Republishing someone else's work, even in abbreviated form, requires permission from the author or copyright owner and proper attribution. You must receive permission from the author(s) and include it with your submission before it can be published in your thesis.

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.*

Printing and Binding Your Thesis for Defense

You must provide copies of the thesis to your committee members. 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 thesis can be expensive. Most students use the Copy Center to print and bind their theses. 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 theses. 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 Thesis

"Registering" simply means that you have presented a thesis document, which you intend to defend, to the AS&E Dean of Graduate Studies. Your thesis must be approved as ready to defend by your advisor, as noted by the Advisor signature on the Master's Thesis Defense Appointment Form (note that this form can only be accessed by staff). Registration must occur on a date that allows 5 full working days to pass between the registration date and your actual defense date. When registering your Master's thesis, you must present a bound defense copy of your thesis to the Graduate Studies Office, Lattimore 218.

The copy of your thesis that you register will be reviewed, and you will be informed of possible corrections that must be addressed in the final thesis.

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 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 thesis document, a pen or pencil and a note pad or an electronic device to record comments, 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.

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.

Address Questions with Confidence

 <u>Listen</u> 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

At the conclusion of your defense, your committee will either determine that you have passed or failed the exam. In the event that the outcome is a failure of the exam, you may request reexamination after four months have passed.

III. AFTER THE DEFENSE

Student Status

You may submit the final corrected copies of your thesis as soon as you address any remaining comments that were brought up during the defense or emailed to you by the AS&E Graduate Studies Office based on the registration copy of your thesis. Your degree conferral date will depend on when you submit the final corrected copies of your thesis document and complete all remaining credits for your program of study.

Final Corrected Copies of the Thesis

You need to submit two unbound copies of your final thesis to the Graduate Studies Office in Lattimore 218.

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 Thesis

The University of Rochester requires all master's thesis candidates to deposit their theses for publication with the University libraries. Two hard copies of the thesis (unbound) are required by the Graduate Studies Office to provide to the Library.

Binding Your Final Master's Thesis

Your department may want a bound copy of your thesis. 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.

Date of Degree Completion

Degree requirements are met on the day your final thesis document is submitted to the AS&E Graduate Studies Office and all credits for your program of study are complete.



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 May through late-August = October conferral date Completion Sept 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 master's degree candidates is held in May of each year. 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 AS&E Graduate Studies Office 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 notated 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 <u>University IT</u>. 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