Doctoral Dissertation Oral Defense

An oral defense of the dissertation is required and is conducted by the candidate’s oral defense committee. The defense is concerned primarily with the dissertation or research project but also may include such other information in the major field as the committee deems pertinent. The defense must be held at least three weeks before the end of the quarter in which the degree is to be granted. All members of the defense committee must receive a copy of the candidate’s dissertation at least two weeks prior to the scheduled defense.

The defense is expected to be held with the student present in person at DU unless emergency circumstances make it impossible for the student to be physically present. Permission to hold a defense with the student participating by conference call, webcast or other medium should be obtained by petitioning the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies. Petitions for faculty members to participate by conference call or other medium are not required.

Scheduling and Verification of the Oral Defense

The student must make arrangements for appointing the defense committee and for the date and time of the oral defense with the college, school or departmental director. Students must submit a completed Schedule of Oral Defense form to the appropriate student services office and their academic unit no later than three weeks prior to the date of the defense.

On the form, the candidate will designate the oral defense committee chair, the dissertation director and all other members of the oral defense committee. After the form has been submitted, the Office of Graduate Studies will verify that all members meet the minimum University requirements.

Responsibilities of Oral Defense Committee Chair

As a representative of the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies, the chair of the oral defense committee must hold an earned doctorate from an accredited institution and must be a tenured faculty member of the University of Denver from a different department, or discipline than that of the candidate.

The role of the chair is to provide a non-specialist’s perspective on the quality of the dissertation. The chair must be familiar with the standards for doctoral research and should have some general knowledge of the topic of the student’s dissertation. The chair is expected to have read the dissertation prior to the defense and to participate in the defense as his/her academic expertise permits, but the chair does not vote on the committee.

Conducting the Defense

The oral defense committee chair will preside over and manage the defense process. The chair is responsible for making certain that the defense is conducted in a professional manner and that the student has a fair opportunity to defend the dissertation. The chair is expected to provide opportunities for each voting member of the oral defense committee to participate in the defense and to ensure that the defense is of high quality while remaining within proper limits of inquiry. Interested faculty members, and in accordance with departmental policy, currently enrolled graduate students also may attend the oral defense. After the oral defense committee has conducted the essential examination of the candidate, questions may be asked by others present if pertinent, appropriate as determined by the defense committee.

When the defense is completed, the chair will request that the candidate and all other persons not on the defense committee leave the room and will call for a motion to pass or fail the candidate. A recommendation to pass can have no more than one negative vote from members of the committee. If the motion is a recommendation to pass, the committee must then agree on the conditions of the recommendation as follows:

- **Pass with no revisions** means that only grammatical, labeling or numbering changes are required. Only a limited number of sentence additions or deletions should be necessary.
- **Pass with minor revisions** indicates that the candidate will be required to reorganize portions of the manuscript and change some of the content.
- **Pass with major revisions** means that a complete chapter or chapters must be rewritten, additional tables are required and interpreted, or the general format must be changed. Responsibility for seeing that needed revisions are made rests with the dissertation director, but committee members also may require their approval before final submission.
- **Fail** indicates that the dissertation content is not of acceptable quality or that the candidate cannot defend the research. In most cases, failing the defense results in the rejection of the student’s dissertation and a new or related study usually will need to be undertaken.

However, a candidate who fails the oral defense may petition to the oral defense committee for a maximum of one re-examination. If granted, the re-defense must be scheduled through the Office of Graduate Studies and must occur within normal timelines.

The Result of Oral Defense form must be signed by all committee members and returned immediately to the Office of Graduate Studies. All signatures must be original. In rare occasions, when a committee member participates remotely, a faxed or scanned signature will be accepted.

Advancement to Final Candidacy

The student must apply for or be recommended for advancement to final candidacy as soon as all requirements are fulfilled, and no later than the first day of the quarter in which the student expects to complete the degree. In no case can a student graduate the same quarter as advancement to final
candidacy. The minimum requirements for advancement to final candidacy include: satisfactory progress in coursework, certification of the completion of tool requirements, progress in research for the dissertation and proposal approved, and satisfactory completion of the comprehensive examination.