

School of Engineering Doctoral Dissertation Oral Defense

These guidelines establish the:

1. Minimum time allowed for the director and readers to read the dissertation;
2. Expectations of the chair and secretary;
3. Procedure for the selections of the chair and secretary.

Minimum Time Allowed for the Director and Readers to Read the Dissertation

A student wishing to defend his or her dissertation must provide a copy (electronic or hardcopy) to the director and readers a minimum of four weeks prior to the desired oral defense date, which allows for a minimum of two weeks for them to read the dissertation. The director and readers must sign the “Oral Examination for the Doctorate: Request for Approval” form a minimum of two weeks prior to the desired oral defense date. By signing the form, the director and readers are indicating they believe the dissertation is ready for defense, but are not making any judgment on the eventual outcome (i.e., pass/fail) of the defense. Note: the form must be submitted to the Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies a minimum of two weeks prior to the desired oral defense date.

Expectations of the Director

The director is mainly responsible in assuring a good quality dissertation, and communicating on a regular basis these expectations to the student. The director and student are expected to work closely to the completion of the dissertation topic. If throughout the course of the dissertation research, the director finds that his/her expectations for the quality of the dissertation are not being met, the director should inform the student that s/he will no longer agree to direct the dissertation, and the student must form a new committee and have a new topic approved. The signature of the Director on the “Oral Examination for the Doctorate: Request for Approval” form indicates that the dissertation is substantially complete and has met his/her expectations in terms of quality of work, which includes the overall quality of the written dissertation. However, it does not guarantee that further non-substantive changes will not be requested as a result of the discussions during the defense. If the committee finds weaknesses as a result of the discussions at the defense, non-substantive changes can be requested of the student.

Expectations of the Readers

The reader(s) of a dissertation committee are responsible to monitor the progress of the proposed work on a regular basis, with a minimum of once a semester meeting. These meetings serve the purpose of keeping the progress in a direction acceptable to the Director and the readers. The student must be provided with feedback on such issues as the data, interpretation and presentation of the finds, analyses, conclusions, and clarity of writing which should be assessed in the following meeting. Regardless, the feedback should not be so detailed as to supersede the opportunity for the student’s own contribution and style. If any of the readers decide that the student is not following the provided recommendations, they will provide the Chair of the

Department a written feedback expressing their concerns. The readers on a committee cannot be replaced by a request from the student or the Director. The reader to be replaced must also agree and a written statement for the reasons must be provided to the Department Chair, who will then file the statement in the student's academic file. The signature of the readers on the "Oral Examination for the Doctorate: Request for Approval" form indicates that the dissertation is substantially complete and has met their expectations in terms of quality of work, which includes the overall quality of the written dissertation. However, it does not guarantee that further non-substantive changes will not be requested as a result of the discussions during the defense. If the committee finds weaknesses as a result of the discussions at the defense, non-substantive changes can be requested of the student. The refusal of one reader to sign is a reason to prevent scheduling of the dissertation defense. However, if the director and the other reader agree, then they can petition the dean of the school to allow the defense to occur. If the dean endorses the petition, it would have then to be approved the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies.

Expectations of the Chair and Secretary

While the chair and secretary can choose to read the dissertation, they are not under obligation to do so. They, like the director and readers, must sign the "Oral Examination for the Doctorate: Request for Approval" form a minimum of two weeks prior to the desired oral defense date; however, by the signing the form, the chair and secretary are simply acknowledging they have received the dissertation (they are not making a judgment on the readiness of the dissertation for defense.) Note: were they to be required to make a judgment on its readiness for defense, they would be serving as de facto readers.

Procedures for the Selections of the Chair and Secretary

The Associate Dean of Engineering will maintain a list of all engineering faculty members—excluding the dean—eligible to serve as chair and/or secretary. The Director of Student Services and Academic Support (DSSAS) will assign the chair and secretary from these lists on a rotational basis. The selected faculty members are under obligation to serve when assigned and must confirm within two days of notice with the DSSAS that they can and will serve. Note: a faculty member who is unable to serve when assigned must notify via email the DSSAS, the Associate Dean of Engineering, and his or her department chairperson (in the case of a department chairperson serving as a chair or secretary, the latter does not apply) detailing the reasons for being unable to serve (examples of valid reasons could be teaching obligations, work travel, reasonable schedule conflicts, work deadlines requiring dedicated time and effort, etc.) In the event a faculty member is unable to serve when assigned, he or she will remain at the top of the rotation list.