

CHAIR RESPONSIBILITIES FOR Ph.D. DISSERTATION DEFENSES AND FINAL EXAMINATIONS

A Ph.D. dissertation defense and final exam assesses (1) a student's fundamental knowledge regarding existing information, theories and concepts related to their area of study and (2) mastery of and ability to rationally defend their research project including background information, rationale, hypotheses, experimental design, analysis and interpretation of novel results, how their results advance the field; limitations and alternative interpretations of their findings; and potential future directions for the project. Once initiated, an exam must be completed and the student will therefore either pass or fail on the date of the exam.

Although the graduate advisory committee (GAC) is expected to review the dissertation document prior to the defense and should provide suggestions on improvements to the document, the final exam itself focuses on the student's performance in the two areas noted above. A successful defense, therefore, IS NOT a final approval of the dissertation document. The GAC provides final approval (or not) of the dissertation document via the electronic thesis-dissertation (ETD) approval form which is initiated only after a successful defense.

The advisor typically chairs the GAC during the dissertation defense and final exam; alternatively, a dean's representative (DR) may be appointed by the associate dean for graduate education (ADGE) as chair of the GAC for the exam upon request by: the student, any GAC member including the advisor, the graduate program director, or at the discretion of the ADGE. The appointment of a specific individual as DR can be challenged with cause by any of the above. The ADGE will consider the challenge and proceed with either the original or an alternate individual as DR. The DR will be from outside the original GAC, but will participate as a voting member of the GAC for purposes of the dissertation defense and final exam. The chair will:

1. Lead the exam meeting and ensure the exam process is appropriate, equitable to the student and maintains the standards of excellence in our programs.
2. Instruct the GAC as a whole on the purpose of the exam, focusing on the points above.
3. Together with the other members of the GAC, establish the general protocol for the questioning period (e.g. 10-15 minutes per GAC member and number rounds of questions). If the exam is lengthy (e.g. longer than 2 hours) or if the student is exhibiting signs of distress, the chair may call for a brief recess.
4. At the conclusion of the questioning, excuse the student and request a motion and a second of PASS or FAIL for the exam outcome from the other GAC members. The chair calls for and participates in discussion from all GAC members. At the conclusion of the discussion, the chair calls for a vote on the motion by show of hands. All GAC members including the chair must vote either PASS or FAIL on the student's performance. The GAC members including the chair are the only persons allowed to vote. More than one negative vote constitutes failure of the exam.

If the student passes the exam, the GAC as a whole should establish a date by which the student should provide them with a final version of the dissertation such that adequate time is allowed for review, ETD routing and (presumably) approval.

If the student does not pass the exam, the chair should ask the other GAC members if they support a re-examination. If so, an approximate date for re-examination will be determined by the GAC members along with a remediation plan. The Advisor (or Program Director) is responsible for petitioning for the re-examination to the ADGE for review by the School of Medicine Graduate Programs Committee.

5. Recall the student and inform them of the outcome. If the student does not pass the exam, the chair (or another GAC member) relays to the student the recourse decided upon by the GAC.
6. Complete the exam outcome form indicating whether the student passed or failed (including signatures of all GAC members) and provide it to the Office of Graduate Education. Alternatively, the chair can email the outcome of the exam to the Office of Graduate Education with cc: to all other GAC members.