

Dissertation Process

(updated 7/08)

Immediately following the completion of field comprehensive evaluations, students should choose an Advocate and a Research Advisory Committee to guide the dissertation process.

The following procedures apply:

- At least 45 days before the dissertation proposal defense, the student forwards to the doctoral office, for review and approval, the “Proposal/Dissertation Examining Committee Approval form” with the signatures of the Research Advisory Committee members and the two research-active individuals who have agreed to serve as outside examiners. The outside examiners should have a general knowledge of the student’s field, and should *not* be untenured faculty members in the department of the advocate. Dissertation committee members should not have conflicts of interest with the student such as would arise from a supervisory or business relationship or a personal relationship outside the university. Duties and responsibilities of each of the members of this committee are specified in Appendix I.
- Prior to proposal defense, students should not approach outside examiners to discuss the proposal. However, such interaction is permitted after the proposal defense and prior to the dissertation defense.
- The members of the student’s Research Advisory Committee must sign a “Proposal Defense Request form” before the student is permitted to schedule a proposal defense. Signing this form indicates that the Research Advisory Committee member has read the proposal and has judged the student is ready to defend their proposal. *Signing the proposal defense request form does not indicate a commitment to pass the student.* No less than three weeks prior to the scheduled proposal defense date, the student must submit the signed Proposal Defense Request form and two bound copies of the proposal to the Doctoral Office and at the same time distribute bound copies of the proposal to the three Research Advisory Committee members and outside examiners.
- The members of the student’s Research Advisory Committee must sign a "Dissertation Defense Request" form before the student is permitted to schedule a dissertation defense. Signing this form indicates that the Research Advisory Committee member has read the dissertation and has judged the student is ready to defend. *Signing the dissertation defense request form does not indicate a commitment to pass the student.* No less than four weeks prior to the scheduled defense date, the student must submit the signed Dissertation Defense Request form and two bound copies of the dissertation to the Doctoral Office and at the same time distribute bound copies of the dissertation to the three Research Advisory Committee members and outside examiners.
- **No less than three months must transpire between the proposal defense and the final dissertation defense.**

Style and Format of Dissertations

The APA or Turabian Manuals of Style are recommended, but not required, to prepare the dissertation. **Required margins:** 1.5 inch left margin; 1 inch right margin

Dissertation Timeline Summary

Activity	Timeframe
Selection of the research advisory committee	Immediately following completion of all comprehensive examinations
Submit to Doctoral Office "Proposal/Dissertation Examining Committee Approval form" for review and approval	No less than 45 days prior to defense
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ File "Proposal Defense Request" form and two bound copies of proposal with Doctoral Office ◆ Deliver copies of the proposal to the Research Advisory Committee members and external examiners 	Upon approval of draft proposal by Research Advisory Committee
Proposal defense	No less than three weeks after filing "Proposal Defense Request" form and delivering copies to Committee and external examiners
Complete dissertation	Following successful proposal defense
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ File "Final Dissertation Acceptance Request" form with Doctoral Office ◆ Deliver two bound copies of the dissertation to the Doctoral Office ◆ File Graduation Application* ◆ Abstract of dissertation ◆ Distribute copies of dissertation to Research Advisory Committee members and external reviewers 	Upon approval of dissertation by Research Advisory Committee *Graduation Applications due in Doctoral Office by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ October 1 for January graduation ◆ February 1 for May graduation ◆ June 1 for August graduation
Dissertation Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ At least three months since date of proposal defense ◆ Four weeks after filing "Final Dissertation Acceptance Request" form ◆ By end of March for May graduation ◆ By end of May for August graduation ◆ By end of November for January graduation

Appendix I: Doctoral Dissertation Committee

GWSB doctoral dissertation committees consist of not less than six members. At least three members comprise the Dissertation Research Advisory Committee, and at least two members are designated outside examiners. Finally, a representative of the Committee on Doctoral Studies, selected by the Associate Dean for Research and Doctoral Studies, presides at the proposal defense and final dissertation defense meetings.

Dissertation Research Advisory Committee

The dissertation is guided by the Dissertation Research Advisory Committee, which consists of three members: the chairperson and two additional members. Additionally,

- ◆ the chairperson (advocate) must be a full-time, research-active GWSB faculty member with expertise in research area addressed in the thesis;
- ◆ the two additional committee members may be chosen from among the research-active GWSB faculty, other University departments, or, if approved by the Associate Dean for Research and Doctoral Studies, from another university, a government agency, or industry;
- ◆ non-academician committee members are expected to be acknowledged experts in the subject matter of the dissertation and must possess doctoral credentials;
- ◆ at least one of the committee members must be a full-time member of the faculty of department that houses the student's field .

Responsibility of Dissertation Research Advisory Committee

The Dissertation Research Advisory Committee members act as consultants to the student in the design, implementation, and interpretation of the work that will make up the dissertation proposal and final dissertation, participate in the committee and defense meetings, approve the dissertation proposal, and approve the final version of the dissertation after the student defends it.

Designated Positions and Duties

Chairperson (Advocate)

The chairperson is usually a faculty member in the student's program area with specific expertise in the field of scholarship related to the student's dissertation topic. The chairperson

- ◆ serves as the student's primary advisor during the entire dissertation process;
- ◆ works with the student to identify the two additional committee members;
- ◆ leads the Dissertation Research Advisory Committee;
- ◆ acts as the liaison between the student, the program, the department, and the Graduate School;
- ◆ offers guidance in the structure, content, and methodology of the dissertation;
- ◆ ensures that the student is cognizant of the applicable GW and GWSB standards for the dissertation manuscript, including requirements for studies using Human Subjects
- ◆ reviews all oral and written materials to be presented to the other committee members and serves as first reader on the dissertation;
- ◆ along with the student is responsible for scheduling the date and time of the defense with the other members of the Research Advisory Committee and the two outside examiners; and
- ◆ ensures that the required modifications identified in the defense are made to the proposal and the final dissertation.

Additional Members of the Dissertation Research Advisory Committee

The committee members should be selected on the basis of their relevant expertise for the dissertation (e.g., topic under study, methodology). These committee members

- ◆ review written material submitted by the student before each meeting,
- ◆ provide feedback and suggestions at meetings,
- ◆ consult with the student informally between meetings as needed,
- ◆ review and critique the final draft of the dissertation proposal and dissertation,
- ◆ notify the student of any major problems, and
- ◆ attend and offer final comments at the proposal and final dissertation defenses.

Outside Examiners

The external reviewers should at a minimum be knowledgeable about the topic of the dissertation, if not experts on that topic. Their role is to provide an objective critique of the dissertation proposal and final dissertation. As such, these reviewers are not involved in any way with preparation of the dissertation proposal, except to the extent that they review the content of the proposal when it is provided to them within the required pre-defense timeframe. After the proposal defense and prior to the final defense, the student is free to consult with the outside examiners. Outside examiners participate in both the proposal defense and the final defense.

Conflicts of Interest

Dissertation committee members should not have conflicts of interest with the student such as would arise from a supervisory or business relationship or a personal relationship outside the university.

Defending the Proposal

The dissertation proposal defense provides the student with a formal evaluation of the proposed research plan and helps the candidate develop necessary changes, additions, or deletions. Up to this point, only the three-person Research Advisory Committee will have been reviewing drafts of the document. Only when the draft meets the approval of the Research Advisory Committee should the candidate fill out the "**Proposal Defense Request**" form. The completed form includes 1) student name, 2) title of proposal, 3) date and time of defense, 4) signatures of the Research Advisory Committee, 5) names of the two outside examiners, and 6) contact information and a resume for any non-GWU person. **The student and advocate are responsible for scheduling the date and time of defense with the Research Advisory Committee members and the two outside examiners.**

When the Research Advisory Committee has approved the proposal, the student delivers the defense request form and two (2) bound copies of the proposal to the Doctoral Office and at the same time distributes copies of the proposal to the three Research Advisory Committee members and outside examiners. The request form must be submitted, and proposal copies distributed (spiral bound, 3 ring binder, etc.), **at least three (3) calendar weeks in advance of the proposed defense date.**

The proposal defense examining committee consists of six members: the Research Advisory Committee members, two outside examiners, and a representative of the Committee on Doctoral Studies, who presides. At least one of the three members of the Research Advisory Committee must be a full-time member of the faculty of the department that houses the student's field. The selection of the representative of the Doctoral Committee is made by the Associate Dean for Research and Doctoral Studies. Defenses are open to faculty and doctoral students from GWSB.

The proposal defense consists of an oral presentation by the student (lasting no longer than 20 minutes), followed by questions from the examining committee members in the following order: outside examiners, Advisory Committee members, chairperson (advocate) of the Advisory Committee, representative of the Committee on Doctoral Studies. Prior to the defense, the candidate should ensure that any necessary visual aid equipment (LCD and laptop, overhead projector, etc.) is available.

At the end of this process, the examining committee evaluates the defense in an executive session. For a proposal to be accepted, at least five of the six examiners must concur with either of the following alternatives: to accept the proposal without modifications or to accept the proposal subject to specified modifications. The student and the Dissertation Research Advisory Committee have the responsibility to see that any required modifications are made. In the absence of such concurrence, the proposal is rejected and a re-defense must be arranged.

*****Human Research Requirements*****

Students planning to conduct research at GWU using human subjects must obtain Institutional Review Board approval before collecting data. Contact: Office of Human Research, www.gwumc.edu/research/human.htm; 202-994-2715

Researching the Topic and Writing the Dissertation

After successfully defending the proposal, the student conducts the research and writing under the supervision of the Dissertation Research Advisory Committee. Major deviations from the accepted proposal should in general be avoided, but in any event must be accounted for during the defense of the final dissertation.

Final Approval

The final approval stage is designed to ascertain that the dissertation is in accordance with the accepted proposal, that it meets all style and format requirements (**APA or Turabian Manuals of Style are recommended**), and that it can be accepted by the University as a scholarly effort worthy of the Ph.D. degree. This process involves the Dissertation Research Advisory Committee, two outside examiners, and a representative of the Committee on Doctoral Studies. These six readers are expected to evaluate the dissertation carefully and to participate in a final approval meeting **scheduled by the student and his/her advocate**. The dissertation defense follows the same format as the proposal defense and five out of six members must approve the dissertation for it to be accepted

Defending the Dissertation

When the Research Advisory Committee has approved the dissertation, the student fills out the "**Final Dissertation Acceptance Request**" form. The completed form includes 1) student name, 2) title of dissertation, 3) date and time of defense, 4) signatures of the Research Advisory Committee, 5) names of the two outside examiners, and 6) contact information and a resume for any non-GWU person. **The student and advocate are responsible for scheduling the date and time of defense with the Research Advisory Committee members and the two outside examiners.**

When the Research Advisory Committee has approved the dissertation, the student delivers the acceptance request form and two (2) bound copies of the dissertation to the Doctoral Office and at the same time distributes copies of the dissertation to the three Research Advisory Committee members and the two outside examiners. The request form must be submitted, and dissertation copies distributed (spiral bound, 3 ring binder, etc.), **at least four (4) calendar weeks in advance of the proposed defense date**. The selection of the representative of the Doctoral Committee is made by the Associate Dean for Research and Doctoral Studies. Defenses are open to faculty and doctoral students from GWSB.

Defense Procedure

The candidate presents a maximum 20-minute summary of the key points of the dissertation.

The advocate amplifies these comments, if he/she desires.

Examining Committee members question the candidate in the following order: outside examiners, Research Advisory Committee members, chairperson (advocate) of the Research Advisory Committee, representative of the Committee on Doctoral Studies. Ordinarily, time constraints result in questioning only from examining committee members. Questions from others will be permitted at the discretion of the presiding Doctoral Committee representative.

Decisions by the Examining Committee

At the end of the procedure, the examining committee evaluates both the dissertation and the oral defense in an executive session. For the dissertation to be accepted, at least five of the six examiners must agree on the following:

1. That the dissertation meets all the expectations developed in the proposal (including any subsequent and approved modifications);
2. That the basic research problem is adequately resolved;
 - a. the analysis and results support the conclusions presented;
 - b. the analysis shows sufficient breadth and scope;
 - c. the recommendations and implications based on and drawn from the conclusions are concise and supportable;
 - d. the areas for further research are well defined;

- e. the dissertation makes a contribution to the existing body of knowledge;
- f. the discussion is presented in a concise and coherent manner;
- g. the dissertation format meets the requirements of the most recent edition of the American Psychological Association or Turabian Manuals of Style (both are recommended).

If at least five of the six examiners do not agree that the dissertation meets all of these requirements, the examining committee is expected to advise the student that the dissertation has to be re-defended or that it must be modified in accordance with recommendations made by the examining committee members. In the latter case, the Doctoral Program Office must be advised by the chairperson (advocate) of the Dissertation Research Advisory Committee when the recommended changes have been implemented and that the dissertation can now be approved. If a re-defense is required, the **student and his/her advocate must schedule a new defense date with the Research Advisory Committee members and the two outside examiners.**

For the oral examination part of the final defense to be approved, at least five of the six examiners must agree on the following:

The student showed a good understanding of the general theoretical foundation of the research area.

The student showed a good understanding of the specific theoretical foundations of the research topic.

The student showed a good understanding of the general research methodology appropriate to the research area and of the specific methodology used in the investigation of the topic.

The student understood the implications of the research findings for the existing body of knowledge and practice in the general research area and as they related to the specific research topic.

The student showed an appreciation of the social, political, economic and related implications of the research.

The student answered questions in a non-evasive, concise, complete, scholarly fashion.

If the oral examination performance of the student is not acceptable, **the student and his/her advocate must schedule a new defense date with the Research Advisory Committee members and the two outside examiners.**

Additional Administrative Considerations

Proposal and Dissertation defenses are not held during the break between Fall and Spring semesters, during the Spring Break period, or during the months of June, July, and August.

Proposal and dissertation defenses are difficult to schedule during the last three to four weeks of the regular semesters and defenses should be planned well in advance. For May graduation, the dissertation defense must have taken place by the end of March; for August graduation, by the end of May, and for January graduation, by the end of November.

At the time the Final Dissertation Acceptance Request form is turned in to the Doctoral Program Office, the following is also required:

Graduation Application:

due dates : October 1 (January graduation)

February 1 (May graduation)

June 1 (August graduation)

For any non-GWU examining committee member: 1) full name, 2) professional and/or academic title, 3) mailing address, 4) phone number(s), 5) e-mail address, and 6) resume

Survey of Earned Doctorates form

Electronic submission of dissertation

Prior to being cleared for graduation, the candidate must submit a final electronic copy of the dissertation to the GW Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) site, www.gwu.edu/~etds. Through this site, the dissertation will be sent to ProQuest/Microfilms, <http://dissertations.umi.com/gwu/>.

Prior to submitting the final electronic copy of the dissertation to www.gwu.edu/~etds, the candidate should carefully review all information contained on this site, paying particular attention to the ETD template. The candidate must follow the template format when preparing the dissertation for electronic submission. **Note:** left margin of the dissertation must be 1.5 inches; right margin must be 1.0 inch.

The candidate must submit a signed “Electronic Thesis/Dissertation Approval form” (signed by the candidate and candidate’s advocate) to the Doctoral Office at the time the candidate submits the dissertation online. The form is available at www.gwu.edu/~etds/student_directorapproval.doc, or in the Doctoral Office. Candidates are encouraged to opt for open access of their dissertations. Candidates will pay dissertation fees directly to ProQuest/UMI online.

Deadlines for electronic submission of dissertation:

January 15th (Fall graduates)

April 1st (Spring graduates)

August 15th (Summer graduates)