

Procedural Guidelines for the Dissertation and Ph.D. Defense

The guidelines below are intended to inform Department of Molecular & Cellular Biochemistry doctoral candidates and their advisors as to what is required by the Department and by the Graduate School for a successful dissertation defense. The procedure is somewhat complex. The items in **boldface type** are Graduate School rules that need to be adhered to. Items in *red italics and boldface type* are extremely important and often are rules that will not be waived.

Note that the Graduate School guidelines will always supersede the Department's guidelines. Please consult the Graduate School web site as well as this document when preparing to defend.

Application for the degree. To be eligible for a degree, students must file an Application for Degree form in the Graduate School within 30 days after the beginning of the semester, or 15 days into the eight-week Summer Session, in which they expect to complete their dissertation. Applications for degrees are valid for one year, so if you don't finish within that time you will need to file it again. A good time to file this form is immediately after your committee has agreed in the Final Committee Meeting (see below) that your research phase is complete. No student may graduate if an "I" or "S" grade remains on his/her record. (Exceptions: "S" in 748, 749, 768, 769 or in graduate courses which carry no credit.)

For detailed guidelines, see: <http://gradschool.uky.edu/electronic-dissertation-defense>

Final committee meeting. Once the dissertation research is complete, the candidate should call a meeting of their Advisory Committee. At this meeting, the candidate should outline the contents of the proposed dissertation. Special attention should be paid to demonstrating the scope and quality of the research, the hypothesis being tested, and the conclusions that have been reached. This meeting will be greatly facilitated if the Advisory Committee has been kept informed of the candidate's research progress on a regular (at least annual) basis. If the committee agrees that the research phase is complete, the candidate usually begins to write the dissertation full-time. It should be noted, however, that the writing can begin at any time in the graduate student's career and that bench work can continue during the writing phase.

Notification of Intent. After the advisory committee has agreed that the research phase is complete, the chair of the committee should inform the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) and the student should file a "**Notification of Intent to Schedule a Final Exam**" online. **Note that this form must be received by the Graduate School at least 8 weeks before the earliest anticipated date of the defense.** Once the Graduate School has been notified, the Dean of the Graduate School appoints an Outside Examiner. (Note: this Outside Examiner is not the same person as the Advisory Committee Member from outside the Department that has been on the candidate's committee from the beginning, but is an additional committee member that

represents the Graduate School's interests). **Following the appointment of the Outside Examiner, the final examination date may be set.** Although the final exam date may be set at this time, this is usually not done until the written dissertation itself is complete. *The final exam date cannot be set until the Outside Examiner is appointed.*

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Requirement for paper submission/publication before filing the “Notification of Intent to Schedule a Final Exam” form. The department has had an informal policy that graduate students should have at least one first author, peer-reviewed research paper published, or at least submitted for publication, before the student proceeds to the dissertation defense. This policy was put in place because of the recognized importance of publications as a measure of a successful graduate career and for the ability of the student to compete for future positions. Starting with students that enter the Biochemistry graduate program in June 2011 and thereafter, the department will require that students must have at least one first-authored, peer-reviewed research paper published or submitted for publication before the student can submit the Notification of Intent to Schedule a Final Doctoral Examination form. Requests for exceptions to this policy by the student or the student’s mentor should be brought to the attention of the DGS, who after consulting with the student, the student’s mentor, and the members of the student’s dissertation committee, will recommend to the department chair whether or not to allow the requested exception. The chair will then make a final decision and transmit the decision to the DGS, the student, the student’s mentor, and the members of the student’s dissertation committee.

Writing the dissertation. The written dissertation must follow a format set by the graduate school. You are strongly advised to review the guidelines on the Graduate School web site as you approach the time that you will need to write the thesis.

Once the dissertation writing is complete, the student provides copies to all members of the committee (including the outside examiner) *a minimum of three weeks in advance of the defense* for them to examine and determine if it meets their standards with respect to the quality of the data, writing, and figures. If it does not, the student must correct the deficiencies and provide revised copies to all committee members. Also, the student should not give the dissertation to the committee members unless it contains, in the proper format, all the elements that make up a dissertation. A majority of the student’s dissertation must inform the DGS that the dissertation is defensible *more than two weeks prior to the defense (preferably 17 days prior)*. The DGS cannot approve holding the defense if this is not done.

Once approved, the dissertation should **NOT** be further revised until after the final examination is held. It is important that all committee members have the same version of the dissertation at the defense.

For detailed guidelines, see: <http://gradschool.uky.edu/electronic-dissertation-preparation>

Request for Final Doctoral Examination. The candidate should contact all members of the Advisory Committee and the Outside Examiner and schedule a date for the exam. Once a date is found to be acceptable by all committee members, the student files the online form called the “Request for Final Doctoral Examination”.

The Outside Examiner and all members of the Advisory Committee must be present at the Final Exam. The Request for Final Doctoral Examination must be approved by the Graduate School at least two weeks before the scheduled date for the Final Exam. The Graduate School will send announcements of the examination to all committee members and the student. The Final Exam card is sent to the DGS, who will forward it to the mentor.

The student must also schedule a room and date in which a final, public seminar is held. The campus community must be notified of the date, time, place and title of this seminar. Normally, this seminar is held immediately prior to the Final Examination, but it is permissible (with the pre-approval of the DGS, Advisory Committee and Outside Examiner) to present the seminar at a date prior to the Final Examination. ***All members of the Advisory Committee and the Outside Examiner must attend the final seminar.***

The candidate is expected to demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the candidate's field of study and to defend the conclusions of the dissertation. The examining committee may (and often does) require revisions of the dissertation as a consequence of this exam. At the conclusion of the examination, all members of the exam committee sign the Final Exam Card and indicate whether the student passes or fails. A simple majority of the committee, including the Outside Examiner, need to indicate pass to enable the candidate to receive a doctorate.

If the student passes he/she must make any changes requested by committee members and then turn it into the graduate school for the official format check. **The final copy of the dissertation incorporating any revisions required by the examining committee must be presented to the Graduate School within sixty (60) days of the Final Exam or on the last day to present a dissertation for a graduate candidate (as defined by the Application for a Degree) whichever is earlier. Failure to present the dissertation within 60 days may result in the student's having to be re-examined. The final copy of the dissertation must contain an Approval Sheet signed by the dissertation director and the DGS when it is submitted to the Graduate School.**

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Additional assorted rules:

- **FIVE YEAR RULE.** All requirements for the doctoral degree must be completed within 5 (five) years of the semester or summer session in which the candidate passes the qualifying exam. If this deadline is not met, the student must retake (and pass) the qualifying examination as it is currently administered by the department. Failure to pass results in the termination of degree candidacy. After passing the requalifying examination, the DGS must then petition the Graduate Council for an extension. A single extension of no more than 5 years may be granted.
- The Dissertation Advisory Committee may be changed at the time that the Notification of Intent to Schedule a Final Exam is filed only with the approval of the Graduate Dean.
- A student will not be allowed to sit for the Final Examination until all "S" or "I" grades have been removed from the record.
- The format of the dissertation (margins, etc.) has to be approved by the library before a doctorate will be awarded.

Rules regarding allowable inclusion of others' figures/data in your dissertation

Below are some guidelines concerning the inclusion in your dissertation of figures such as cartoons or diagrams from other people's published work and also about the use of data from experiments done by other members of your lab.

1. Using a limited number of cartoons, diagrams, etc. from reviews or papers published by other labs is permitted (these are typically found in the Introduction to the Dissertation), as long as you include a sentence at the end of the figure legend saying something like "This figure is from XXXXXX et al. (2005)" if you are using the whole figure or "This figure is modified from XXXXXX et al. (2005)" if you are using only a part of the figure.
2. Regarding using research data generated by others, this should be VERY limited and done only where it is absolutely necessary for your results to make sense, and should only be data from another member of the same laboratory. For example, if you have 4 or more figures in a chapter from your own data, maybe one other figure could be from the work of someone else in the lab (current or past member), and should be noted in the Figure legend by the sentence "This figure is from XXXXXX et al. (2005)" if it is published or "This figure is from XXXXXX et al. (submitted/in preparation)", whatever the case may be. The UK Grad School rule is that if you want to use data from a paper from your lab on which you are not first author, at the time you submit your Dissertation Approval Sheet you must also submit a signed letter from the DGS approving the inclusion of this data in the dissertation.

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