

Office of Graduate Studies
University of Kansas Medical Center

Dissertation

The candidate must present a dissertation showing the planning, conduct, and results of original research and scholarly creativity. The purpose of the dissertation is to encourage and ensure the development of broad intellectual capabilities as well as to demonstrate an intensive focus on a problem or research area. The dissertation itself should be an evident product of the candidate's growth and attainment of the ability to identify significant problems; organize, analyze, and communicate scholarly results; and bring to bear on a useful area of interest a variety of research skills and scholarly or creative processes. It must show some original accomplishment, but it should also demonstrate without doubt the candidate's potential to make future contributions to knowledge and understanding.

The dissertation is to be a coherent scholarly work, not a collage of separate, distinct pieces. Its unity of theme and treatment may still accommodate several subtopics by demonstrating their relationships and interactions. If previously published material by other authors is included in the dissertation, it must be quoted and documented. It should be noted that prior publication does not guarantee acceptance of the dissertation by the dissertation committee. Final acceptance of the dissertation is subject to the approval of the dissertation committee. The dissertation—or one or more substantial portions of it, often rewritten—is expected to be publishable and indeed to be published (see the Dissertation Submission and Publication section).

Both the dissertation research and the dissertation itself are to be completed under the guidance and direction of the dissertation committee. Instructions about the proper format of the dissertation are available on the Graduate Studies website. Candidates and faculty members are reminded that the dissertation is to be a coherent, logically organized scholarly document. Because the demands and practices of different disciplines are varied, the format is somewhat flexibly described, and moderate departures from the norm are allowed when justified by the nature of the work or the circumstances of presentation. Any substantial divergences must be approved in advance as prescribed by the instructions, and candidates and faculty members are urged to seek early approval to avoid last-minute disappointments over unacceptable format or reproduction.

Final Oral Examination (dissertation defense)

Completion of the dissertation is the culminating academic phase of a doctoral program, climaxed by the final oral examination and defense of the dissertation. In all but the rarest cases, tentative approval of the dissertation is followed promptly by the final oral examination. When the completed dissertation has been accepted by the committee in final draft form, and all other degree requirements have been satisfied, the chair of the committee requests Graduate Studies approve the scheduling of the final oral examination via the Progress to Degree form. This request must be made in advance of the desired examination by at least 3 weeks to allow sufficient time to publicize the examination so that interested members of the university community may attend.

At least 5 months must elapse between the successful completion of the comprehensive oral examination and the date of the final oral examination. Under normal circumstances, the doctoral candidacy period between passage of the oral comprehensive examination and the final dissertation defense must last no longer than 5 years. If a student took the oral comprehensive examination more than 5 years prior to the dissertation defense, a re-evaluation of the student's candidacy status is necessary. Re-evaluation of the student's candidacy status can include retaking the comprehensive oral examination.

The committee for the final oral examination must consist of at least 5 members, all of whom must be members of the Graduate Faculty (see Graduate Faculty section of this catalog.) At least one member of the committee must be from a department other than the aspirant's major department. This outside committee member represents the Office of Graduate Studies and must hold either regular or dissertation graduate faculty status to be eligible to serve in this capacity. Before the examination, Graduate Studies provides the outside committee member a list of responsibilities as the Graduate Studies representative. The Graduate Studies representative is a voting member of the committee, has full right to participate in the examination, and reports any unsatisfactory or irregular aspects of the examination to the committee chair, department chair, and Graduate Studies.

The Office of Graduate Studies verifies that all criteria described in the preceding three paragraphs has been met upon receiving a Progress to Degree form requesting the scheduling of the Final Oral Exam. If the criteria has been met, Graduate Studies approves the request to proceed with the exam. Upon approval of the request, Graduate Studies publishes the final oral examination information in a Medical Center campus news medium so interested members of the university community may attend the examination.

For every scheduled final oral examination, the department reports to Graduate Studies an examination result of Honors, Satisfactory, or Unsatisfactory for the candidate's performance. If an Unsatisfactory grade is reported, the candidate may be allowed to repeat the examination on the recommendation of the department.

Committee Attendance for Exam

Ideally, all members of the committee are physically present at graduate student oral examinations. For M.S. and M.S. students this includes the final general exam, project defense or thesis defense. For Ph.D. students this includes the doctoral comprehensive oral exam, and the doctoral final oral exam (i.e., dissertation defense).

A majority of committee members must be physically present for an examination to commence; for doctoral oral examinations this requirement is 3 of the 5 members, for master's oral examinations the requirement is 2 of the 3 members.

In addition, it is required that the student being examined, the chair of the committee, and the outside committee member all be physically present at the examination or defense. Mediated attendance by the student, chair and outside member is prohibited. When a situation arises in

which a member cannot be physically present, attendance via mediated means (tele/video-conferencing) is acceptable at the discretion of the committee chair.

In cases where the student prefers an examination in which all committee members are physically present, the student's preference shall be honored.

In the case of failure of technology during the examination, all members of the committee present must concur that the examination was substantially complete. If any member of the committee dissents, the examination is considered cancelled and must be rescheduled. The committee members at remote locations must be contacted to submit their decision concerning the assessment of the examination before the exam results are recorded.

The Office of Graduate Studies will manage consideration of and decisions on exceptions to the policy outlined above. Requests for exceptions to this policy shall be submitted in writing to the Dean of Graduate Studies. If exceptions are granted, Graduate Studies will request that a member of the departmental leadership (the chair or director of graduate studies) be present at the examination.

Committee Composition

The majority of committee members serving on a graduate student oral examination committee in most cases are in the candidate's department/program of study.

Ph.D. doctoral committees are composed of at least five voting members and must adhere to the following requirements:

1. The chair of the committee must hold dissertation status. If the committee has co-chairs, at least one of the co-chairs must hold dissertation status.
2. One member must meet the requirements for serving as an outside member: i.e., be a KU faculty member holding regular or dissertation graduate faculty status and is not a faculty member holding graduate status in the candidate's department/program. The outside member represents Graduate Studies and is a voting member of the committee, has full rights to participate in the examination, and reports any unsatisfactory or irregular aspects of the examination.