THE FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

The Final Examination (or dissertation defense) is a public meeting of a student and his or her supervisory committee, during which the student is examined on the dissertation and related areas. Final Examinations at UW are public events, so all are welcome to attend. Typically, the student provides a short presentation of the dissertation, followed by questions from the committee and any others in attendance, and finally, an executive session of the Supervisory Committee. If the student’s performance on examination is satisfactory, the Supervisory Committee then recommends to Graduate School that Ph.D. degree be awarded.

REQUEST FOR FINAL EXAMINATION

When the Supervisory Committee determines that the student is ready to defend the dissertation, the student begins the process of preparing for and scheduling the Final Exam. This involves ensuring that all departmental requirements have been met, and contacting all members of the supervisory committee (including the Graduate School Representative) to find a mutually convenient time for the exam. A request for a Final Exam must be submitted to the Graduate School at least 3 weeks in advance of the exam date. Specific steps in this process are outlined below:

- **Request a Degree Audit:** In preparation for scheduling a Final Exam, and to demonstrate that minimum departmental requirements have been met, request a current degree audit by emailing the Graduate Program Advisor. This process usually takes at least a few business days, unless your audit was very recently updated. If you need it very urgently, please inform the GPA. Do this as soon as you decide that you will be defending your Final Exam.

- **Appoint Your Reading Committee:** Ensure that you have appointed your Ph.D. Reading Committee. A Reading Committee is a subset of your dissertation committee, and is the group that must approve your final dissertation draft. Once you have determined who is going to be on your Reading Committee, send an email to the Graduate Program Advisor, who will record this information for you.

- **Date, and Time:** Work with committee members to identify a date and time for the Final Exam.

- **Reserve a Room:** Reserve the room for the exam, see the room reservation procedure page.

- **Committee Confirmation Emails:** Once the time, date, and location details are settled, the student must collect confirmation (via email) from each member of the committee, stating “I agree that the student [student’s name] is ready to schedule the Final Exam, scheduled for [date/time] and [location]. I agree to attend the exam as scheduled. I will attend the exam [in person or remotely]”. ALL members of the Supervisory Committee including the GSR, regardless of whether or not they intend to attend the exam, must agree to the scheduling of the exam and will need to confirm their agreement via email. If a committee member is planning to remote in, or will not be in attendance, please have them let the Graduate Program Advisor know. Forward all committee confirmation emails to the Sociology Graduate Program Advisor.

- **Schedule the Exam with the Graduate School:** Formally schedule the exam using the Graduate School online form using the MyGrad Student View.

- **Committee Paperwork and Forms:** The Graduate Program Advisor will put the warrant in the supervisory chair’s department mailbox, along with any other needed paperwork.

- **Special Note Regarding the Ph.D. Reading Committee Authorization Form:**
  - This is a required Graduate School form that you will submit along with your final version of your Dissertation via the ETD system.
  - The Graduate Program Advisor will obtain properly filled out forms from your committee on your behalf as part of your defense.
  - The form requires signatures from all parties. Emails, faxes, and other types of substitutions are not allowed.
  - **IMPORTANT:**
If you have any committee member who will be away during your defense, and not available to immediately sign your form, make arrangements with the Graduate Program Advisor in advance as special arrangements will have to be made to obtain the signature of this committee member.

THE FINAL EXAMINATION

- At least four members of the supervisory committee (including Chair and Graduate School Representative) must be present at the Final Examination.
- The supervisory chair brings the warrant and other required paperwork to the Final Exam for the committee members’ signatures.
- If you or a committee member needs to videoconference into the exam, special rules apply, make sure to read the entire next section on this web page. The GSR must by physically present, and cannot remote in. Be sure to inform the Graduate Program Advisor as soon as you know one or more of your committee needs to remote in for the defense.
- The decision of the committee could be to:
  - Pass the candidate
  - Recommend reexamining the candidate; requires resubmission of a Request for Final Examination.
  - Not recommend the candidate for further work on the degree; this terminates the student's enrollment in the doctoral program.
- The decision of the majority of the committee is indicated by their signatures on the warrant; any dissenting members may sign a Minority Report on the warrant.
- After the exam, the signed warrant and all other paperwork must be returned to the Graduate Program Advisor for submission to the Graduate School, and filing in the student's file.

Graduate School guidelines and policies for the Final Exam
Graduate School Doctoral Dissertation information

VIDEOCONFERENCING, REMOTING INTO THE EXAM, AND EFFECTS ON POST-EXAM STEPS

Exam:
If you or one of your committee members are going to be away from campus and need to videoconference into the exam, Graduate School special rules apply. You must also coordinate with the Graduate Program Advisor to make arrangements. The GSR committee member is not allowed to remote in for the exam, and must be physically present.

Post-Exam:
Likewise, if you or one of your committee members are going to be away from campus post-defense such that obtaining signatures on the final paperwork is going to be challenging, make sure to contact the Graduate Program Advisor to determine the best arrangement to fulfill this need. Closing paperwork on the degree requires original signature, and they cannot be emailed or faxed in, so arrangements will need to be made in advance of you finishing. See all the steps for completing the degree, post-exam, here.

Source URL: https://soc.washington.edu/final-examination-phd-degree