

Oral Defense of Thesis or Dissertation

EXM 995: Oral Defense of Dissertation-Doctoral Students (2 credits)

This examination is an oral defense of the doctoral dissertation conducted by the graduate committee immediately following their reading of the dissertation manuscript. The process follows guidelines published by the University.

Author: Dr. Douglass Capogrossi

Revised 9 January 2012

- Preparation for Oral Defense
- Standard Policies concerning Oral Conference
- Scheduling the Conference Call
- Conducting the Oral Conference
- Alternatives to the Conference Call
- Grading the Oral Defense
- Actions following Passing of the Oral Defense
- Actions following Failure of the Oral Defense
- Final Approval of the Manuscript

Preparation for Oral Defense

Once the graduate student has effectively addressed the concerns of the faculty Committee and submits an approved draft of the thesis or dissertation manuscript, the Committee Chair will authorize the student to undertake the Oral Defense of Thesis or Dissertation. The Committee Chair will send a communication to that effect, authorizing the student to schedule the oral defense teleconference or an alternative venue for meeting.

Immediately upon receipt of the communication (which may be sent by email to speed the process) authorizing the Oral Defense, the graduate student should prepare and distribute complete copies of the draft research manuscript to all members of the faculty committee. As arranged with the Committee membership, to speed the distribution of the approved draft manuscript, it may be sent by email attachment. Once the manuscript has been mailed to the Committee, the graduate student should work with the Committee membership to determine a suitable date and time for the Oral Defense of the Thesis or Dissertation.

The Oral Defense should be scheduled for not less than four weeks from the date the manuscript is provided for review to the Committee members. The Committee Chair shall communicate the scheduling details of the Oral Defense to the student and all Committee members in writing by email at least three weeks before the event. Under the direction of the Committee Chair, the graduate student will make the actual arrangements and schedule the conference particulars with the telecommunications company. The student must arrange for tape-recording the Oral Defense.

The Committee Chair should direct the Committee members to complete the manuscript reading within sufficient time before the Oral Defense. This is necessary in order to prepare and send general comments and an errata sheet, and focus questions covering the salient aspects of the student's project and manuscript. The Chair should provide the Committee members with instructions relative to the conduct of the Oral Defense and verify with the student that all arrangements have been confirmed, including the taping of the conference call. It is the

responsibility of the Committee Chair to gather and select three to five focus questions for discussion at the Oral Defense.

Standard Policies concerning Oral Conference

Graduate students participate in a real time conference with their Committees in the conduct of the Oral Defense. The standard manner of conferencing is the telephone conference call. To facilitate the telephone conferencing, the University has established an arrangement with telecommunications companies for domestic and international rates that are approximately 30% lower than most other companies. Students may make their own arrangements for scheduling and tape-recording the conference or they may request referrals to telecommunication companies from the University Administration. On the day of the conference, at the appointed time, the teleconference company will establish the conference connection with all participants and tape-record the proceedings. They should be instructed to mail the audiotape to the University administration in Hawaii.

Conducting the Oral Conference

On the scheduled date of the Oral Defense, the student meets with all members of the graduate Committee through telephone conference or an approved alternative method of conferencing. At the appointed time, on the date of the Oral Defense, the graduate student or the telecommunications company shall initiate the electronic conference connection bringing on line the student and faculty committee.

During the Oral Defense, Committee members will present their focus questions relative to the research and the manuscript in an order determined by the Committee Chair. Each member of the Committee will keep notes related to their reactions to the student's replies to the focus questions.

The presentation of each of the focus questions should take approximately one minute. The student will be asked to reply to each question, limiting the response to a five-minute period. Then, regarding the focus questions, Committee members will have an opportunity to provide a follow-up question to the student. Follow-up questions should take one minute for presentation. The student will reply to each follow-up question in order, limiting each reply to three minutes. The process of presenting the remaining focus questions will proceed in this same manner with a maximum time of 15 minutes allotted to cover each focus question, respectively.

At the completion of the Oral Defense, the student will depart the conference, allowing the Committee members a brief time for follow-up discussion before closing. Immediately following the Oral Defense, each member of the faculty Committee will prepare and submit written commentary on the students' performance, and send to the Chair by email within one week, including also a recommended letter grade (A, B or F). The Chair will determine the final grade, drawing consensus from the commentary of the faculty committee. A grade of B or better is required for a graduate student to successfully pass the Oral Defense. The Committee Chairs should inform all parties of the decision in writing by email within one week of receipt of the faculty Committee recommendations and send the grade and supporting materials to the University. Following conduct of the conference, the faculty Committee members will finalize their evaluations, submitting commentary and grades from the Defense to the Committee Chair.

Alternatives to the Conference Call

Under special conditions, there are times when alternative methods of contact are more appropriate than the telephone conference. Acceptable alternatives include face-to-face conferences; electronic chat room or videoconferences; or rapid exchanges of email. Under very unusual conditions, exchanges of communications with the Committee may be completed by post or fax. Also, the method of contact may vary for individual members of the faculty committee, when necessary, so long as all student-faculty dialogue is recorded effectively and written instructions are placed on file with the University administration.

The approval of an alternative other than the telephone conference rests with the Center Directors, Chief Academic Officer or University President, as appropriate. When an alternative is approved to the conference call, the student and all members of the Committee should be notified in writing clearly spelling out the manner in which the conference will be held, and identifying how each participant will interact. A complete copy of this notice should be sent to the University Administration for the student's permanent records.

Grading the Oral Defense

Immediately following the Oral Defense, the Committee members will submit a grade with written commentary to the Committee Chair. The grading will be according to the following system:

Grade of "A" represents honors level performance

Grade of "B" represents passing performance

Grade less than "B" represents failing performance

The Committee Chair will determine an overall composite grade for the Oral Defense. When differences of opinion occur on a Committee with regard to the grade, determination of the final decision falls upon the Committee Chair. When difficulties arise during the Oral Defense with regard to University policies, the issues are to be referred to the Chief Academic Officer or the University President, as appropriate. If there arise differences of opinion regarding the grading of the student in the Oral defense, mediation assistance should be requested from the Center Director (the Chief Academic Officer or President of the University, as appropriate). The goal of the mediation should be designed to produce a final decision in the case of opposing opinions on the Committee. In the absence of agreement on the Committee, a final decision should be determined and issued by the Center Director (the Chief Academic Officer or President of the University, as appropriate). This decision shall be final and binding upon the Committee and the student.

Grades are to be submitted to the Committee Chair by email within 48 hours of the completion of the Oral Defense. The grade should be accompanied with commentary, observations and recommendations from each Committee member. As needed, the Chair will carry on follow-up activities with the Committee members and then produce a summary statement for the student. The summary statement will include the overall grade, an overview of the comments, observations and recommendations of the Committee (and the assigned corrective action, if a failure is recorded). The Chair should also send copies of the summary statement to the University for entry to the student's permanent record.

Actions following Passing of the Oral Defense

Upon successful completion of the Oral Defense, the Committee Chair will provide the student with written directions for correcting and completing any remaining segments of the thesis or dissertation manuscript. The Committee Chair should prepare a statement of conditions, clearly laying out what is expected of the graduate student prior to final approval of the manuscript. A timeline should be issued that states the expectations for resubmission of the final corrected manuscript.

The Committee Chair will transmit a copy of the summary report, which consolidates the expectations, and findings of the Committee members (and external reviewers, if appropriate), including errata sheets, recommendations and expectations from each reviewer. It is the Committee Chair who determines the final score and constructs the statement of conditions setting the final expectations (and schedule of activities) for approval of the manuscript.

Once the corrected manuscript has been reviewed by the Committee Chair (and other Committee members, as required) the final approval of the manuscript may be authorized by the Committee Chair. Once final approval is awarded, the student should consult with the University Administration for instruction in binding the manuscript.

Actions following Failure of the Oral Defense

Should the student fail to receive a passing score on the Oral Defense, the examination will need to be repeated after the student completes corrective actions assigned by the Committee Chair. In the event of a failure, the Committee Chair will work with the Committee members to determine and assign corrective actions (further reading, rework of the project, or additional coursework) for the student. The student will need to complete the corrective actions and successfully pass the re-examination before being authorized to complete the manuscript leading to final approval.

Final Approval of the Manuscript

Should the student pass the Oral Defense or the re-examination, and subsequently complete all remaining tasks on the manuscript, final approval of the manuscript will be provided. The Committee Chair must issue the final approval of the manuscript to the student, the Committee members and the University administration. The Degree Record form should be completed and dispatched by the Committee Chair to the University headquarters together with the appropriate background materials from faculty. Processing the student's official diploma and transcript will proceed immediately following receipt of the formally bound thesis or dissertation and formal signed documents from faculty.