

CHAPTER II

Completing the Doctoral Degree Requirements

Before the Oral Defense – The Pre-Defense Meeting

After your committee has given preliminary approval to the final draft of your dissertation, you should make certain that your dissertation meets Rackham format requirements.

You must register on-line for a group Pre-Defense meeting at: **www.rackham.umich.edu/OARD**. Registration must be completed at least 3 working days before the meeting occurs. The Pre-Defense meeting you attend must occur at least 10 working days prior to the oral defense. At this meeting, the Rackham Abstract and Dissertation Format Guidelines will be reviewed along with the requirements for doctoral degree completion. It may be helpful to bring a copy of your dissertation and abstract to mark any corrections or notes for your reference during this meeting. Please note that staff will not check each dissertation and/or abstract individually. However, there will be time allowed at the end of the meeting to address any specific questions and/or concerns.

At the Pre-Defense meeting you will also receive a folder of forms and other instructions. These forms must be completed and returned to OARD by the deadline date determined by your registration. Deadlines are on the OARD website.

If you are not in town, you may have your Pre-Defense meeting by mail. Send one unbound copy of your dissertation and abstract to OARD along with a cover letter providing your: name, program, U of M identification number, date, time and place of the oral defense, telephone number and email address where you can be reached during

normal business hours. Include the names and fax numbers of each of your dissertation committee members and OARD will send the dissertation evaluation forms to them.

You are not required to make the corrections to your dissertation prior to your defense, but you must be certain that they are included with whatever revisions your committee wishes you to make after the oral defense. Most dissertations will need both content and format revisions. Please keep this in mind so that you do not miss the deadline you are working with.

Distributing Your Dissertation, Abstract and Evaluation Forms

You will receive the dissertation evaluation forms at the Pre-Defense meeting. Distribute the evaluation forms with copies of the dissertation and abstract to all committee members at least ten working days before the oral defense. If the student does not supply each committee member with an evaluation form and a copy of the dissertation and abstract at least ten working days before the oral defense, the committee member may ask for a postponement of the defense. Remind all committee members that the completed evaluation form is due in OARD three working days before your oral defense. The evaluations must be submitted directly by the committee member via fax or email. The fax number and email address are listed on the evaluation form as well as the OARD website.

It is your responsibility to follow up with your committee members and OARD, as many times as needed, to ensure that the evaluation forms have been returned. Committee members may return their evaluations to OARD in person; by fax to (734) 936-1809; or by e-mail to **evaluations@umich.edu**. They are strongly advised not to return them via campus mail. Once all of the evaluations have been received, a member of the OARD staff will check to make certain that everything is in order. To verify that all the evaluation forms have been completed and returned, go to **www.wolverineaccess.umich.edu** and click on “View my Committee.”

If you attend the Pre-Defense meeting less than ten working days before the oral defense, your dissertation committee chair must confirm in writing or email (oard.staff@umich.edu) that: 1) Your committee has agreed to conduct the oral defense on short notice; and 2) The evaluation forms will be returned to OARD by 5:00 p.m. no later than two working days before the oral defense.

Authorization of Your Oral Defense

If your committee members agree in their evaluation of your dissertation and consider it ready to be defended, OARD will authorize your oral defense as scheduled (a need for minor alterations will not affect this authorization). If major revisions are required, Rackham will check with your dissertation committee chair (or co-chairs) to confirm that your oral defense should proceed.

In the event of any disagreement among committee members over the acceptability of your dissertation, the Dean of the Graduate School (or his/her designee) will consult with your committee and will act as final arbiter. Either the oral defense will be authorized as scheduled or your committee will meet with you to discuss the matter further.

You should remember that authorization of your oral defense is only one stage in the process of completing your dissertation requirements. It has no bearing on the outcome of the oral defense or on your committee's final report.

Final Preparations for Your Oral Defense

Once OARD has received evaluations from all of your committee members and has authorized your oral defense, a defense packet will be prepared for you to pick up. You will be informed at the Pre-Defense meeting if you are required to bring proof of registration when you arrive to pick up your defense packet. You will then take your defense packet (containing authorization of your oral defense, each committee member's

confidential evaluation, and a form for the results of the oral defense) and deliver it, unopened, to your dissertation committee chair or co-chair at the defense.

Dissertation Committee Representation at the Oral Defense

At least four members of your dissertation committee including your chair or co-chair and your cognate member, must attend the oral defense. Attendance may be in person or by conference call. The chair must sign in on the Oral Examination Report form for any member that attends by conference call.

Guidelines for Substitutions at the Oral Defense

If your dissertation committee chair cannot attend the oral defense, you must either (a) change the date of your oral defense or (b) formally revise your dissertation committee so that you have two co-chairs rather than a sole chair. If option (b) is selected, your chair will request one of the regular members of your committee to serve as co-chair (this member must be able to attend). You must then complete and submit to OARD the Dissertation Committee Form available on the OARD website. Please note it must be signed by both your committee chair and your program chair, and must indicate the revisions to your committee. The form must be submitted at least two weeks prior to your defense.

If one co-chair cannot attend the oral defense, no changes need to be made as long as the second co-chair and three other committee members, including the cognate member, are able to attend or otherwise participate in the oral defense.

If the cognate member of your committee cannot participate in the oral defense, then you (or the committee member who will be absent) must find a substitute who will qualify as a cognate member in his/her own right.

If you must make a substitution for a regular member of your dissertation committee, you (or the committee member who will be absent) should seek a faculty member in your program who is knowledgeable about your area of research and is of equal or higher qualifications than the member for whom he/she is substituting.

Responsibilities of Substitute Members of Dissertation Committees

While a substitute member who attends the oral defense is not responsible for submitting an individual evaluation of the dissertation before the defense, he/she does participate in the writing and signing of the oral defense report as well as passing on the concerns of the committee member he/she is representing.

Responsibilities of Committee Members Unable to Participate in the Oral Defense

A committee member unable to participate in the oral defense may, if he/she wishes, communicate questions in advance to the chair for discussion at the oral defense. At least four members of your committee must participate in the defense, including the chair and cognate member, and all members, whether attending or not, must return the evaluation forms before the defense.

Under exceptional circumstances, an absent committee member may request of your chair that a separate oral defense be held. If the chair agrees, he/she must notify OARD in advance of the intention to hold a separate oral defense. Your chair will then incorporate the findings from this separate defense into the final report of your oral defense performance.

The Oral Defense

The oral defense provides you with an excellent opportunity to leave the members of your dissertation committee with the best possible impression of you. Here are some

tips that may help.

First of all, it is useful for you to know what to expect in the course of an oral defense. Since defenses vary considerably from department to department and from committee to committee, be sure to talk to your chair about what you can expect to take place. While there is no set time limit for an oral defense, the average duration is two hours. When the oral defense has concluded, members of your dissertation committee will discuss your performance and agree on the revisions to be made to the dissertation.

There are a number of strategies you can pursue that will help you to negotiate the oral defense more smoothly. If possible, you should talk to students in your field who have recently defended their dissertations. Also consider attending a few oral defenses, in your own field if possible and also in related fields. Remember that oral defenses are public events—the date, time and place of every defense is posted in the Graduate School’s lobby as well as on the OARD website: www.rackham.umich.edu/OARD. Interested faculty, students, members of the public and even family members of the degree candidate are welcome to attend. Attending a number of oral defenses will give you a much better idea of what to anticipate at your own.

Another important strategy is to talk with your committee chair about what exactly will be expected of you at the oral defense. Many disciplines, for example, require the degree candidate to make an opening presentation. If there is a time limit to your presentation, or if you’re expected to follow a specific approach or cover a certain range of topics or issues, then be sure to take careful note of those expectations and follow them to the letter. It can also be helpful for you to practice your presentation by gathering together some of your fellow doctoral students for a trial run. They can provide you with helpful, knowledgeable and supportive critiques.

Situations can arise in the course of an oral defense that you simply cannot control or prepare for in advance. Be sure to talk to your committee chair and to other faculty in your field beforehand about ways in which awkward situations, such as potential disagreements among committee members, can be addressed tactfully while keeping your

oral defense on track. These are important skills to learn and ones that will stand you in good stead when you make presentations at other venues.

One final note: It is extremely rare for a dissertation to be approved without revisions, so be prepared, once your oral defense is finished, to begin work immediately on your revisions. There are still other requirements you will need to meet by specific deadlines before you are finished.

Post-Dissertation Defense Meeting: Submitting Final Copies of Your Dissertation and Other Materials

The Graduate School requires two final copies of your dissertation (one to be submitted to Rackham at your post-defense meeting, and one to be deposited at a Rackham approved bindery). Because the final dissertation deadline is inflexible, it is essential that you make the revisions and corrections to your dissertation as soon as possible after your oral defense. Be sure to show the corrections to your committee chair (or one of your co-chairs) so that he/she can certify that all required revisions and corrections have been made and are acceptable.

As soon as your corrections have been approved by your chair, you will need to register online for a post-defense meeting. Go to www.rackham.umich.edu/OARD, fill in the required fields including your first, second and third choices for the meeting time. Meeting times are between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm only and cannot be scheduled any soon than two business days after registration. At this meeting, an OARD Evaluator will review your dissertation and abstract, page by page, to verify that the documents are in the correct format. Bring with you to this appointment the following that you will leave with OARD:

- One unbound, corrected copy of your dissertation;
- Two corrected copies of your abstract;
- One additional copy of your title page; and
- Your completed paperwork from the Pre-Defense meeting.

It is rare for a dissertation to be approved by OARD without requiring format revisions. Allow enough time before your deadline to make further revisions after having your format checked by an OARD Evaluator at the post-defense meeting.

Once the final format check is completed, you will take another corrected copy of your dissertation to an approved bindery and pay to have it bound for the Graduate School. If you plan to give bound copies to members of your committee or to others, you may wish to make those arrangements at that time.

Your committee chair is responsible for returning to OARD the evaluation forms, Final Oral Report Examination and Certificate of Dissertation Committee Approval certifying that all requested corrections to your dissertation have been completed. All forms and materials must be turned in to OARD by 5:00 p.m. on the final deadline date. Although it is your Chair's responsibility to return these items, it is your degree requirement, so you may want to volunteer to return them yourself. Remember that it is your responsibility to deal with any delays you may encounter from any source.

Binding

Before you take your dissertation copies to a bindery, be sure that the pages are collated properly and that no pages are upside down, reversed or improperly aligned. The bindery is not responsible for such errors, and later repairs will be very costly.

One copy of your dissertation must be bound in a hard cover of plain black material for the Graduate School. The approved binderies below are aware of the Rackham binding requirements. Your full legal name with the University, the title of your dissertation, and the year your degree will be conferred should be stamped in gold on the spine of the bound copy, from top to bottom. If your dissertation consists of more than one volume, be sure that the volume number is stamped on the spine of each volume. The front cover remains plain. Rackham approved binderies are:

Bessenberg Bindery
Bessenberg.com
bessenberg@provide.net
215 N. Fifth Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
(734) 996-9696

Kolossos Printing
KolossosPrinting.com
2055 W. Stadium Blvd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48103
or
1214 S. University Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
Phone: (734) 994-0454
or
301 E. Liberty
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
Phone: 741-1600

Finishing Steps

The final dissertation deadline is a firm, inflexible date, and extensions are not permissible. By 5:00 p.m. on this date you must have completed all degree requirements including all format revisions. If you fail to meet the final deadline, you cannot be listed among the degree recipients for that particular term, nor can you participate in commencement. If you are using the grace period deadline, you will also have to register (and pay) for another full term of candidacy tuition.

If you have indicated to OARD that you plan to attend commencement, you will be informed by email about commencement. For the most detailed and up-to-date commencement information, see www.umich.edu/~gradinfo. You may pick up your diploma from the Diploma Office the week before until the week after commencement. If you attend commencement in the term in which your degree is conferred, you will receive your diploma as you cross the stage. Otherwise, your diploma will be mailed to you

approximately three weeks after commencement.

It is also important to be certain that all of your debts to the University are paid before the end of the term. The University will not issue your diploma or your official transcript until your account has been settled.

Table II.1 Sample Deadline Dates for Intended Final Term of Enrollment: Fall 2007

Degree Conferral Date	Dec. 16, 2007
Last Day to Defend with a Fall Registration	Oct. 23, 2007
All Requirements Must be Completed	Oct. 23, 2007
Degree Conferral Date	Apr. 25, 2008
Last Day to Defend with a Fall Registration	Dec. 20, 2007
All Requirements Must be Completed	Feb. 4, 2008