

DISSERTATION FOR THE DOCTORAL DEGREE

ASK A QUESTION OR SUBMIT FEEDBACK ON THIS POLICY

Effective Date: Fall 2025

Last Reviewed: Spring 2025

Last Revised: Fall 2020

Next Review: Fall 2030

Policy Statement

A dissertation is required of candidates for the Ph.D. and Ed.D. degrees and must demonstrate the candidate's ability to plan, conduct and present scholarly research and activity within their field or research area under the direction of members of the graduate faculty.

Dissertation Registration and Applicability Toward Degree

Each doctoral student, upon admission to candidacy, must register continuously for Dissertation I (8x199) each semester (fall, spring) for 30 credit hours. A student who has completed the required 30 credit hours of Dissertation I but has not finished the dissertation is expected, thereafter, to register continuously for Dissertation II (8x299) each semester (fall, spring) until all degree requirements are met. Students who are planning to defend their dissertation in summer or early fall, or who are requiring access to university resources during the summer months — including, but not limited to, feedback or mentoring from their dissertation advisors, use of university buildings and other research resources — must register for dissertation in the summer term. For students in good standing, those credit hours will be approved by the academic unit administrator. The student receives an In-Progress (IP) administrative mark until the dissertation is completed, when the IP mark is changed to either the Satisfactory (S) or Unsatisfactory (U) grade.

No more than 30 credit hours of Dissertation I may be counted toward completion of degree requirements. Credit hours earned in Dissertation II do not, under any circumstances, count toward the degree.

Dissertation Prospectus

The dissertation topic must be approved by the academic unit and filed with the college dean no later than one semester preceding that in which the candidate expects to receive the degree. Each graduate unit has adopted a procedure for the preparation of a dissertation prospectus. The prospectus must be in writing, but an oral presentation may also be required.

This document normally will include the following:

- An outline of the parameters of the projected dissertation topic with a statement of the problem to be undertaken;
- The procedure or methodology to be used in the research;
- A preliminary review of the literature substantiating the need for the study; and
- The principle sources of information for the dissertation.

Dissertation Committee

When the student has developed a dissertation topic acceptable to the advisor, a dissertation committee is convened, responsible for overseeing the progress of the candidate's dissertation. The program coordinator appoints the members of the committee in consultation with the student

and the student's advisor. This group will consist, at minimum, of three members:

1. The advisor who serves as dissertation director and who chairs the committee. The director must have full graduate faculty status in their college and be approved to direct dissertations and must be in the student's program area.
2. One committee member from the candidate's unit (school, department or college). This member must have full or associate graduate faculty status.
3. One committee member from outside the program. This member must have graduate faculty status and may be from outside the university.
4. Optional additional members (can be from outside the university). This member(s) must have graduate faculty status.

Special permission must be obtained from the college dean for anyone on the dissertation committee who does not meet the qualifications stated above.

The student can change committee membership at any time in consultation with the program coordinator or academic unit administrator. In the event of a change, the program coordinator or academic unit administrator will notify the committee members of the changes and request that the student initiate committee changes using the appropriate doctoral form.

Examining Committee

When the advisor believes the candidate's dissertation is ready for preliminary approval, the advisor will convene an examining committee. The examining committee will consist of members of the dissertation committee and an appointed graduate faculty representative. The procedures for appointing the graduate faculty representative are detailed in the procedures section below.

Once the graduate faculty representative is appointed, the advisor will submit the dissertation to the committee members for a 10-day reading period. Following the reading period, the advisor will convene the examination committee to evaluate the dissertation. The advisor will note and communicate to the candidate any revisions recommended by the committee. When, in the advisor and the candidate's opinion, the appropriate revisions have been made, the advisor will inform the graduate/program coordinator, the academic unit's lead administrator and the college dean.

Final Examination (Oral Defense)

Upon completion of the revisions, if any, the student will be required to defend the findings before a committee of graduate faculty members, including the dissertation committee and others chosen by the academic unit and college dean.

The dissertation must be in final form (not just a late draft) before the final oral defense. If, in the opinion of more than one member of the examining committee, the dissertation is not in acceptable final form, the oral defense will not be held. An acceptable final form refers to the substance and usefulness of the dissertation and the writing's quality. The decision to halt the defense is to be determined by vote prior to the final oral examination and without the candidate or others being present. If a negative vote occurs, the candidate may be called in to provide clarification.

A rescheduling of the oral defense, if necessary, will occur when, in the advisor and student's opinion, the dissertation has been modified to

incorporate the suggested changes. The dissertation must be acceptable, with no more than one dissenting vote, before the rescheduled final oral can be held. If the dissertation is not in suitable form at this second scheduled oral, the advisor will notify the college dean. Further action is then the responsibility of the college dean.

The procedures for the defense are detailed in the procedures section below.

Dissertation Submission

After passing the oral examination, doctoral candidates must submit their dissertation in electronic form to the OhioLINK Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (ETD) Center, where the dissertation is made publicly available. The dissertation must include an abstract of maximum 350 words. The dissertation must be prepared according to established guidelines, which are available in the college office.

Individual units may still require submission of a paper copy for their archives, and the deadline for the dissertation to be filed in the college office is the last day of classes for the term of graduation (some colleges may require an earlier deadline). It is the doctoral student's responsibility to fulfill this requirement.

All dissertations must be submitted to ProQuest for archiving, indexing and dissemination. This submission is made when students upload their dissertation to the OhioLINK ETD Center. All communications and relations between faculty or students and ProQuest shall be carried out only through the Kent State University Libraries or OhioLINK. Publication of the complete dissertation or significant parts of it through other avenues is expected, but this is not to be used in lieu of the requirement stated herein.

Reason for Policy

Policy enforces uniform standards for the doctoral dissertation submission and oral defense and defines the dissertation committees and applicability toward the doctoral degree.

Procedures

Procedures for Appointing the Graduate Faculty Representative

The college dean, or designee, will appoint the graduate faculty representative to the examining committee after consultation, when appropriate, with the advisor or lead administrator of the academic unit. The graduate faculty representative must have the following credentials:

- Directed a dissertation to completion
- Familiar with the general content area of the candidate's dissertation
- Outside the candidate's program or outside the candidate's area of focus

The graduate faculty representative may be appointed from outside the university but still must have directed a dissertation to completion.

The principal responsibility of the graduate faculty representative is to preside and moderate the final examination (oral defense) and to note whether the nature of the questioning of the faculty and the responses of the candidate meet highly respectable scholarly standards. Any concerns must be presented immediately to the college dean or designee. As moderator, the graduate faculty representative should ensure that all participants in the defense act in a civilized, polite and proper manner. The graduate faculty representative should be familiar

with the procedures of the oral defense and has the authority to suspend the examination should a situation arise that would not be conducive to a fair examination.

The graduate faculty representative is expected to question the candidate and to vote on the passing of the final examination.

If a separate moderator for the final oral defense is desired, that individual will be selected by the dissertation committee from the members of the graduate faculty who have been approved to direct dissertations. The separate moderator will not be a faculty member in the candidate's program.

Procedures for the Final Examination (Oral Defense)

When the dissertation committee has met and has agreed to proceed to the final examination, the advisor will designate the time and place of the final oral defense and notify the student and all members of the examining committee.

The oral defense is open to any member of the university wishing to attend and, therefore, a facility adequate to meet this requirement should be provided. The defense should be scheduled to allow a minimum of 10 days for all members of the examining committee to review the dissertation; this is in addition to the 10-day period preceding the dissertation committee meeting.

In the advisor's absence, the academic unit's lead administrator may postpone the oral defense. In the case of long-term absence or enduring illness of the advisor, the lead administrator, in consultation with the college dean, should make appropriate arrangements for a substitute.

The advisor should notify the academic unit of the time and place of the oral defense so that it may be announced in a suitable way. The student should provide the dissertation abstract to the academic unit so that it will be available to interested individuals prior to the defense with the methodology and findings.

Students may participate in the oral defense in a different location than the committee members (i.e., by web conferencing) if they are declared in a fully online degree program or have obtained permission in advance from the committee chair. See the policy on remote participation in a thesis or dissertation defense in the University Catalog.

The candidate will open the defense with a brief presentation of dissertation findings, after which the members of the examining committee will question the candidate in an order to be determined by the moderator. When, in the moderator's opinion, members of the examining committee have had an adequate opportunity to question the candidate, the moderator may open the examination to appropriate questions from others present. Questions dealing with the substance, meaning and usefulness of the research in the dissertation are of greatest propriety. Questions or comments dealing with punctuation or grammatical minutiae, spelling, etc., are out of order and should be written out and privately submitted to the advisor.

If, in the opinion of the moderator or upon motion duly passed by a majority of the committee, it should be deemed necessary to discontinue the defense, the moderator may recess the defense until a time mutually agreeable to the moderator, the advisor, the candidate and the college dean.

When the questioning has run its course, the moderator will adjourn the defense, and the room will be cleared of everyone except the members of the examining committee. Parliamentary procedure will be observed

to determine the success or failure of the candidate, with the moderator acting as chair without a vote. The committee should evaluate the candidate on (a) the dissertation's overall quality and significance and (b) the oral defense of the findings.

All members of the examining committee will sign the Report of Final Examination form, recording their votes of "yes" or "no." Committee members may not abstain in this vote. A candidate passes the final oral defense if there is no more than one dissenting vote. The moderator and lead administrator of the academic unit must then sign the report, forwarded to the college for the dean's signature. The college returns a copy of the completed form to the academic unit.

Only members of the examining committee who voted "yes" are required to sign the dissertation signature page.

student's advisor to have full graduate faculty status in their college and be in the student's program area.

Amended August 2020: Revised policy clarifies that a dissertation is required for the Ph.D. degree, rather than all doctoral degrees; replaces language regarding dissertation committees with more up-to-date information; removes graduate faculty status levels; eliminates summer registration requirement; add credit hours earned in Dissertation II do not count toward the degree; and adds deadline for filing the dissertation.

Forms/Instructions

- Approval of Dissertation Topic
- Report of Candidacy
- Report of Dissertation Final Examination

Additional Resources

- OhioLINK Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (ETD) Center
- Guidelines for ETD Preparation
- Guidelines for Dissertation Final Examination
- Research Writing Retreat for Graduate Students

Frequently Asked Questions

There is no FAQ associated with this policy.

Definitions

Academic Unit: An academic unit is a department, school or a designated graduate program within a college, department or school.

Defense: Defense refers to students presenting, explaining and defending their ideas submitted in their dissertation. The defense is designed so that faculty members can ask questions to ensure that students understand their chosen field and focus area.

Dissertation: A dissertation is a highly individualized investigative study that results in the development and writing of a scholarly, comprehensive paper and fulfills the culminating requirement for a Ph.D. or Ed.D. degree. The dissertation must demonstrate that the student has acquired the ability to conduct research in a discriminating and original manner. The dissertation should make a significant enough contribution to the field in which it is written that at least one scholarly article suitable for publication in a professional journal may be derived from it or that the findings of the dissertation would be otherwise publishable.

Related Information

- Remote Participation in a Thesis or Dissertation Defense
- Candidacy for Doctoral Degree
- Eligibility for a Doctoral Degree

Revision History

Amended August 2025: Revised policy includes the Ed.D. degree in programs requiring a dissertation; decreases dissertation committee membership from minimum four to three members; and requires