

**Dissertation Defense Guidelines**  
**Approved by Faculty: February 8, 2017**

**Preamble:** The dissertation defense is an opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate her/his knowledge of the study she/he has conducted. In the dissertation defense presentation, the candidate should be fully versed in the empirical and theoretical basis for the study, the methods used, the data analytic procedures used, whether the hypotheses were or were not supported, and the limitations, strengths, and implications of the study.

1. The defense consists of two parts: (1) a 25 to 30 minute presentation and brief question and answer part that is open to the “public”, and (2) a question and answer part limited to the candidate and the committee. The entire dissertation defense should be scheduled for 2 hours. Students should give careful consideration to whom they invite to the public part of the defense. See attached for issues to consider.
2. Following the question and answer period, the committee will meet without the candidate to decide one of the following:
  - a. Pass with no revisions to the document.
  - b. Pass with minor revisions to the document.
  - c. Orals and/or question and answer section not passed.
  - d. Document is not acceptable.

**NOTE on public portion of defense:** Based on the advice of students and faculty who have been through this process, we would like to offer a few thoughts to inform the decision of who to invite to the *public* portion of one’s dissertation defense, with the caveat that there is no right or wrong decision. Some students may only wish to have the committee present and, perhaps, a few other colleagues within the department who have been involved in the student’s training, research, etc. As has happened in the past, other students may also elect to invite significant others and/or family members from out of town to be present for the defense, which is then often followed by a small celebratory gathering after the “closed” portion of the defense. There are a number of reasons why this may appeal to some and we certainly want to make clear that we acknowledge that the support of family and friends is important throughout the process of obtaining an advanced degree. However, it is also important for candidates to know that the dissertation defense is not simply a formality; that is, there is a small possibility that the candidate’s committee will need to see major revisions to the dissertation before it can be passed, thus postponing the time for celebration. We set these comments within the context that it is expected that the student’s advisor will not allow them to defend when there are serious problems that might prevent the candidate from passing. In other words, the process leading up to the defense should preclude such a scenario from ever happening at all, but these are things that each student may want to consider in planning for the defense.