

DISSERTATION GUIDANCE (12 credits)

The completed dissertation must represent an original and publishable contribution to the knowledge in the candidate's field of study. It is expected that the dissertation will not only demonstrate expertise in the student's designated area, but also advance an original argument suitable for publication in the field.

Once students pass their qualifying examinations, they will submit an [Application to Candidacy](#) before the appropriate deadline dates for approval at the department, decanal, (divisional committee where required), and Graduate School levels. At this time, students will also select a major professor (Dissertation Chair), if they have not already done so. Thereafter, a committee, selected by the student with the approval of the Dissertation Chair and the DGS, oversees the remainder of the work toward dissertation completion. The committee must be comprised of the major advisor/dissertation chair and at least two additional committee members, one of whom must come from outside the department. All of the dissertation committee members must be members of the UB Graduate Faculty.

After a committee has been formed, the student will submit a dissertation prospectus to be approved by the dissertation committee and the DGS. This prospectus will outline the central research question, research plan, objective, methodology, preliminary biography, and proposed timeline for completion. Upon approval of the prospectus, the student may proceed with research.

Following the completion of the dissertation, an oral defense must be held. The Oral Defense is a public event scheduled by the department and is attended by the candidate's Dissertation Chair, graduate committee, members of the faculty from the department, and if required, the outside reader. Examination questions will focus on the arguments and implications of the dissertation. The defense should occur no later than six weeks prior to the UB Graduate School's deadline for submission of materials.

Section IV: PHD DISSERTATION GUIDELINES

Overview

This section describes the PhD Dissertation process. The dissertation is the final stage of the PhD program. It consists of a substantial research project designed and carried out by the student with the approval of, and in consultation with, the supervising committee. The subject of the dissertation will vary, but the expectations of quality are consistent. All dissertations must: build on existing knowledge; create an original argument consistent with current publications; include rigorous analysis of primary research materials; offer a compelling interpretation of these materials; possess critical depth; and be well-composed.

Dissertation Proposal

From the earliest stages of developing a dissertation research project, a student should work closely with committee members, especially the major advisor/chair. Prior to formally beginning the dissertation, the student must present her/his plans for the work to the committee. This involves the written dissertation proposal. The proposal has two purposes: 1) for the committee to vet the project's meaningfulness, originality, and feasibility within the proposed timeframe; and 2) for the committee and student to establish common expectations for the dissertation project and process (e.g., timetable, frequency of contact, structure).

The **written proposal's** format and content will be determined by the student's area of study and the preferences of the committee. At minimum, the proposal must include:

- Thorough, well-organized literature review of the substantive area and theoretical framework(s)
- Clearly defined central argument and/or research question
- Proposed structure, i.e., how many chapters are expected, what topics will be explored
- Proposed schedule for meeting project goals over the course of the dissertation including target date for the final defense; expectations for committee members' involvement (e.g., communication regarding drafts, review of research, etc.).
- The committee makes one of the following determinations:
 - **Pass, no revisions required.** The student may begin work on the dissertation.
 - **Pass, contingent upon revisions.** Revisions must be completed before dissertation research may proceed. The required revisions should be clearly communicated to the candidate and copied to the DGS, either in writing or email. The dissertation research may not begin until these revisions are received and approved by the committee.

- **Fail, with recommendation to re-submit.** If a proposal is determined to be insufficient, it can be revised and/or a new version submitted to the committee. After the second “fail”, the student will be dismissed from the program.

DISSERTATION PREPARATION AND DEFENSE

While **preparing the dissertation**, a student should:

- Refer to the Graduate School’s [PhD Candidate Requirements](#) to ensure eligibility for degree conferral.
- Familiarize her/himself with the Graduate School’s [Guidelines for Electronic Thesis/Dissertation Preparation and Submission](#). It provides details regarding the dissertation’s required format (e.g., reference styles, font, pagination), applicable copyright policies, and steps for final submission.
- Recall that the expectations and consequences set forth in the *Academic Integrity Agreement* form (signed and submitted prior to the comprehensive exam) are applicable to the dissertation. Any violation of this may result in immediate dismissal from the program.
- Consult periodically with her/his committee as per the expectations set forth at the proposal defense.
- Set a mutually convenient defense date once the committee agrees there is sufficient evidence that the dissertation is nearing completion and that it will meet standards of accuracy, clarity, depth, and rigor.
- Submit a full and polished final version to the committee at least two weeks in advance of the defense.
- Inform the DGS and Graduate Program Staff Assistant of the defense time and location.

Formatting

PhD Dissertation should follow conventions and formats consistent with the discipline and agreed to by the student and the major advisor/chair. Generally, MLA or Chicago Manual of Style endnote citations are preferred. Specific guidelines from the UB Graduate School are outlined in the [Guidelines for Electronic Thesis/Dissertation Preparation and Submission](#).

Oral Defense

A public oral defense of the dissertation is required for all students who complete a PhD dissertation research project. The oral defense is attended by the candidate's major

advisor (committee chair), dissertation committee, and members of departmental faculty (as agreed to by the candidate and major advisor). The candidate has the prerogative to open the dissertation defense to a larger audience, but this is not required.

The oral defense consists of a brief presentation by the student followed by questions and comments from the committee. Alternative formats may be allowed at the discretion of the dissertation advisor/chair and in consultation with the committee members. The purpose of this defense is not, as the name may imply, to challenge the candidate's work, but to allow for an open review of the process. The terms set forth in the abstract should appropriately outline the goals for the project and set the parameters for the defense. Did the research unfold as anticipated? Were there new, unforeseen revelations or complications? This is a discussion to explore the various aspects of the project and to understand the dissertation or project as a process.

After the question and comment period, the committee confers privately to reach a determination on the status of the dissertation. The major advisor notes all feedback and recommendations and is responsible for providing the student with a written summary thereof following the defense. The student is then invited to rejoin the committee and is informed of the outcome, which may include:

- **Unconditional Pass.** No revisions needed. Committee members sign and submit the [Multi-purpose Form](#) (M-Form) to the Director of Graduate Studies. The student may proceed to the final steps for PhD Conferral.
- **Conditional Pass.** The dissertation is passed contingent upon adequate revision. Committee members sign the [M-Form](#). The student must make required revisions and obtain the approval of all committee members. The chair signs the M-Form again to attest that revisions have been approved by all committee members. Once the M-Form is received by the DGS, the student may proceed to the [final steps required for degree conferral](#).
- **Determination Postponed: pending revision.** Any committee member who feels that extensive revisions are required and that the dissertation is not passable—even on a contingent basis—in its current form may decline to sign the M-Form. In this case, the student must make revisions and submit these to the abstaining committee member(s) to obtain approval. Once the M-Form has been signed by all committee members and all final revisions have been accepted, the student may proceed to the [final steps required by the Graduate School for degree conferral](#).
- **Determination Postponed: pending revision & re-defense.** If the dissertation and defense are considered inadequate, the committee may offer the student an opportunity to make substantial revisions and re-defend the dissertation. In such cases, a strict schedule for revision and re-defense must be established and communicated to the student. If the student does not meet the deadline for re-defense or is not passed upon re-defense, the student will be dismissed from the PhD Program.

- **Unconditional Fail.** If the committee reaches the unanimous conclusion that the dissertation's flaws are unresolvable and that the student's work is without merit, the dissertation is considered failed and the student will be dismissed from the PhD Program. There will be no opportunity for revision.