4.8.1 Doctoral Degrees, Dissertations & Dissertation Reading Committees: Policy

Summary

Completion of a satisfactory dissertation is a university requirement for conferral of a doctoral degree. Policy and procedures for presentation, review and approval of the dissertation are included here.

Rationale

Submission of an approved doctoral dissertation to the department and the Committee on Graduate Studies is required for the Ph.D., Ed.D., and J.S.D. degrees. The doctoral dissertation is expected to be an original contribution to scholarship or scientific knowledge, to exemplify the highest standards of the discipline, and to be of lasting value to the intellectual community. Every doctoral dissertation is read and approved by members of the Stanford faculty to ensure that standards for departmental and university quality are met. Standards for professional presentation of doctoral work have been established by the Committee on Graduate Studies.

Policy

An approved doctoral dissertation is required for the Ph.D., Ed. D., and J.S.D. degrees. Every doctoral dissertation is read and approved by the three members of the student’s doctoral dissertation reading committee.

Authority:

- Committee on Graduate Studies (policy)
- Office of the Registrar [1] via HelpSU (implementation)
- Departmental Office (implementation)

Applicability:

Ph.D. & J.S.D. students and programs.

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1. Doctoral Dissertation Reading Committee

The doctoral dissertation reading committee consists of the principal dissertation advisor and, typically, two other readers. The doctoral dissertation reading committee must have three members and may not have more than five members. At least one member must be from the student’s major department. Normally, all committee members are members of the Stanford University Academic Council or are emeritus Academic Council members. The student’s department chair may, in some cases, approve the appointment of a reader who is not a current or emeritus member of the Academic Council, if that person is particularly well qualified to consult on the dissertation topic and holds a Ph.D. or equivalent foreign degree. Former Stanford Academic Council members and non-Academic Council members may thus, on occasion, serve on a reading committee. A non-Academic Council member (including former Academic Council members) may replace only one of three required members of dissertation reading committees. If the reading committee has four or five members, at least three members (comprising the majority) must be current or emeritus members of the Academic Council.

Any member of the Academic Council may serve as the principal dissertation advisor. If former Academic Council members, emeritus Academic Council members, or non-Academic Council members are to serve as the principal dissertation advisor, the appointment of a co-advisor who is currently on the Academic Council is required. This is to ensure representation for the student in the department by someone playing a major advisor role in completion of the dissertation. However, a co-advisor is not required during the first two years following retirement for emeritus Academic Council members who are recalled to active service.

The reading committee, as proposed by the student and agreed to by the prospective members, is endorsed by the chair of the major department on the Doctoral Dissertation Reading Committee form. This form must be submitted before approval of Terminal Graduate Registration (TGR) status or before scheduling a university oral examination that is a defense of the dissertation. The reading committee may be appointed earlier, according to the department timetable for doctoral programs. All subsequent changes to the reading committee must be approved by the chair of the major department. The reading committee must conform to university requirements at the time of degree conferral.

Non-Academic Council Dissertation Reading Committee Membership

The student’s department chair may, in some cases, approve the appointment of a reader who is not a current or emeritus member of the Academic Council via the Petition for Non-Academic Council Doctoral Committee Members, if that person is particularly well qualified to consult on the dissertation topic and holds a Ph.D. or equivalent foreign degree. Exceptions for individuals whose terminal degree is not the PhD or equivalent foreign degree may be granted by the Vice Provost for Graduate Education, upon the request of the student’s department chair.

A non-Academic Council member (including former Academic Council members) may replace only one of three required members of dissertation reading committees.

The reading committee must conform to university requirements at the time of degree conferral.

Prospective committee members in the following categories may be approved without submission of a curriculum vita: former Academic Council member, visiting professor, visiting associate professor, visiting assistant professor, senior Stanford University officer who holds a Ph.D. but does not have an academic appointment.

A curriculum vita is required for prospective committee members in the following categories: senior research associate, senior lecturer, consulting professor, consulting associate professor, consulting assistant professor, acting professor, acting associate professor, acting assistant professor, senior fellow of the Hoover Institution,
members of the professoriate at other universities, distinguished scholars who may currently hold no academic title. The curriculum vita should include a summary of education, professional experience, publications, and academic or other honors.

**Principal Advisors and Co-Advisors**

Any member of the Academic Council may serve as the principal dissertation advisor. If former Academic Council members, emeritus Academic Council members, or non-Academic Council members are to serve as the principal dissertation advisor, the appointment of a co-advisor who is currently on the Academic Council is required. This is to ensure representation for the student in the department by someone playing a major advisor role in completion of the dissertation. However, a co-advisor is not required during the first two years following retirement for emeritus Academic Council members who are recalled to active service.

At their discretion, students may request the appointment of co-advisors who are both members of the Academic Council.

**Changing Membership**

Students may petition to add or remove members of the reading committee or change principal advisors. The resulting committee must conform to university requirements.

In the rare case where a student’s dissertation research on an approved project is in an advanced stage and the dissertation advisor is no longer available, every reasonable effort must be made to appoint a new advisor, usually from the student’s reading committee. This may also require that a new member be added to the reading committee before the draft dissertation is evaluated, to keep the reconstituted committee in compliance with the University requirements for its composition. Advisor changes are made with the Change of Dissertation Adviser or Reading Committee Member form [4] (see GAP 3.3, Academic Advising [5]).

In the event that a student’s advisor leaves Stanford University or becomes emeritus, that advisor may continue to work with the graduate student, including, if needed, upon approval of the appropriate petition, serving on the orals or dissertation reading committee. If this individual is to continue to serve as the principal dissertation advisor, however, the appointment of a co-advisor who is currently on the Academic Council is required. A co-advisor is not required during the first two years following retirement for emeritus Academic Council members who are recalled to active service.

**2. Dissertation Preparation and Submission**

The doctoral dissertation must be an original contribution to scholarship or scientific knowledge and must exemplify the highest standards of the discipline. If it is judged to meet this standard, the dissertation is approved for the school or department by the doctoral dissertation reading committee. Each member of the reading committee signs the signature page of the dissertation to certify that the work is of acceptable scope and quality. These signatures must be in ink; proxy or electronic signatures are not permitted.

Dissertations may be submitted either in paper form or electronically, following the guidelines in:

- Directions for Preparing Doctoral Dissertations for Electronic Submission [6]
- Directions for Preparing Doctoral Dissertations for Paper Submission [7]
- Directions for Preparing Engineer Theses for Electronic Submission [8]
Previously published dissertations should not be used as a guide for preparation of the manuscript. The signed dissertation copies and accompanying documents must be submitted to the Office of the Registrar on or before the quarterly deadline indicated in the university’s academic calendar. A fee is charged for the microfilming and binding of the dissertation copies.

Students must either be registered or on Graduation Quarter in the term they submit the dissertation (see GAP 3.1, Registration, Enrollment and Academic Progress [10]). The period between the last day of final exams of one term and the first day of the subsequent term is considered an extension of the earlier term. At the time the dissertation is submitted, an Application to Graduate must be on file (filed in Axess), all of the department requirements must be complete, and candidacy must be valid through the term of degree conferral.

**Dissertations in a Language Other than English**

Dissertations must be in English. Exceptions to permit dissertations in a language other than English are granted by the school dean upon a written request from the chair of the student’s major department. The student must submit directly to the Student Services Center a paper copy of the approval letter (or email message chain) from the school dean. Approval for writing a dissertation in another language is normally granted only in cases where the other language or literature in that language is also the subject of the discipline. Approval is routinely granted for dissertations in the Division of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages, within department specifications. Dissertations written in another language must include an extended summary in English (usually 15-20 pages in length).

When submitting electronically a dissertation in a language other than English, the student should upload the English summary as a supplemental file. When submitting such a dissertation on paper, the student must submit the abstract for ProQuest in English.

**3. Certificate of Final Reading**

One reading committee member, who must be a member of the Academic Council, reads the dissertation in its final form and certifies on the Certificate of Final Reading [11] that department and university specifications, described below, have been met.

- All suggested changes have been taken into account and incorporated into the manuscript where appropriate.
- If the manuscript includes joint group research, the student's contribution is clearly explained in an introduction.
- Format complies with university requirements.
- If previously published materials are included in the dissertation, publication sources are indicated, written permission has been obtained for copyrighted materials, and all of the dissertation format requirements have been met.
- The dissertation is ready-for-publication in appearance and ready for microfilming and binding.

**4. Deadlines**

The deadline for submission of dissertations for degree conferral in each term is specified by the university
academic calendar. The final dissertation with all required signatures, as indicated on the Doctoral Dissertation Reading Committee form [12], must be submitted to the Office of the Registrar on or before the deadline, if degree conferral is desired. Dissertation deadlines are strictly enforced. Students who miss the deadline may, however, request a Statement of Completion [13] from the Office of the Registrar and apply for degree conferral the following term.

Some departments may set earlier deadlines for submission of dissertations. Dissertation deadlines are strictly enforced and no exceptions are made. Students are strongly encouraged to submit their dissertations at least two weeks prior to the deadline to insure that all requirements can be met in time for the conferral of the degree.

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Related Bulletin Sections
- Doctor of Philosophy: Dissertation and Reading Committee [17]

Related Information and Forms
- Doctoral Dissertation Reading Committee form [2] (pdf)
- General information on Dissertation and Thesis Submission [18]
- Directions for Preparing Doctoral Dissertations for Electronic Submission [6]
- Directions for Preparing Doctoral Dissertations for Paper Submission [19]
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- Doctoral Dissertation Agreement Form - UMI/ProQuest [22] (pdf)
- Change of Dissertation Adviser or Reading Committee Member [4] (pdf)
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