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. 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. 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 via Stanford Services & Support (implementation)
- Departmental Office (implementation)
- Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education (exceptions)

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 principal dissertation advisor must be an Academic Council member. Professors who have recently become emeritus and have been recalled to active duty may serve as principal dissertation advisors, though they are no longer current members of the Academic Council.

A non-Academic Council member (including former Academic Council members) may replace only one of three required members of dissertation reading committees. However, emeritus faculty, whether recalled to active duty or not, count as an Academic Council member on dissertation reading and oral defense committees (clarified by the Committee on Graduate Studies in 2011; see SenD#6535).

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.

Principal Dissertation Advisors and Co-Advisors

Any member of the Academic Council may serve as the principal dissertation advisor. A non-Academic Council member, former Academic Council member, or emeritus Academic Council member may serve as co-advisor with the appointment of a principal dissertation advisor who is currently on the Academic Council. This is to ensure representation for the student in the department by someone playing a major advisor role in completion of the dissertation. Professors who became emeritus within two years of the student’s anticipated degree completion and who have been recalled to active duty may serve as principal dissertation advisors, though they are no longer current members of the Academic Council. The reading committee must conform to university requirements at the time of degree conferral.

Requests for further exceptions to the requirement that the principal dissertation advisor be a current member of the Academic Council, for example for recently retired emeritus professors who are still actively engaged on campus, but not recalled to active duty, will be reviewed by the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education.

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

Non-Academic Council Dissertation Reading Committee Membership

The student's department chair or faculty director of graduate studies, according to local policy, 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, via the Petition for Non-Academic Council Doctoral Committee Members [4]. 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. Emeritus Stanford faculty, though no longer current members of the Academic Council, count as Academic Council members on dissertation reading committees (see SenD#6535, 2011).

Prospective committee members in the following categories may be approved without submission of a curriculum vitae: 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.

Exceptions for individuals whose terminal degree is not the Ph.D. or equivalent foreign degree may be granted by the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education, upon the request of the student’s department chair or faculty director of graduate studies. The prospective committee member’s curriculum vitae and a brief description of their contributions to the student's research should be submitted via email [2] to the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education.

Changing Membership

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

In the rare case where a student’s dissertation research on an approved project is in an advanced stage and the principal 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 [5] (see GAP 3.3, Academic Advising [6]).

In the event that a student’s principal dissertation advisor leaves Stanford University or becomes emeritus, and has not been recalled to active duty, that advisor may continue to work with the graduate student as a co-advisor and serve on the oral and dissertation reading committees, with the appointment of a principal dissertation advisor who is currently a member of the Academic Council(see GAP 4.8, Doctoral Degrees: Dissertations and Dissertation Reading Committees [7]). Professors who have recently become emeritus and have been recalled to active duty may serve as principal dissertation advisor, though they are no longer members of the Academic Council. Requests for further exceptions to the requirement that the principal dissertation advisor be a current member of the Academic Council, for example for recently retired emeritus professors who are still actively engaged on campus, will be reviewed by the Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education.

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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 [8]
- Directions for Preparing Doctoral Dissertations for Paper Submission [9]
- Directions for Preparing Engineer Theses for Electronic Submission [10]
- Directions for Preparing Engineer Theses for Paper Submission [11]

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 [12]). 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 current member of the Academic Council, reads the dissertation in its final form and certifies on the Certificate of Final Reading that department and university specifications, described below, have been met. Typically the principal dissertation advisor serves as final reader though another member of the committee who is a current Academic Council member may provide the final signature.

- 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.

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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, 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 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 Policies
- GAP 3.1, Registration, Enrollment and Academic Progress
- GAP 3.3, Academic Advising
- GAP 4.7, Doctoral Degrees: University Oral Examinations and Committees

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

Related Information and Forms
- Doctoral Dissertation Reading Committee form (pdf)
- Petition for Non-Academic Council Doctoral Committee Members (pdf)
- General information on Dissertation and Thesis Submission
- Directions for Preparing Doctoral Dissertations for Electronic Submission
- Directions for Preparing Doctoral Dissertations for Paper Submission
- Directions for Preparing Engineer Theses for Electronic Submission
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