Top 14 Questions About Completing Your PhD Dissertation, Defending, & Graduating!

Prepared December 2012
Revised May 2017

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
Timelines

1. When should a final draft of my dissertation be ready?
When should a final draft be ready?

- Convocation: June
- Revisions Completed, Dissertation submitted: Mid April
- Defense: Late March
- External appraiser report: Early March
- External appraiser approved by SGS: Late January
- Thesis distributed to Examination Committee: Early January
- Committee “signs off”: Nov? or Dec?
- 1st Completed draft: Nov? or Dec?
- 2 weeks after first completed draft
- 4 weeks after external appraiser report
Deadlines for November Graduation

Dissertation submitted to SGS – EARLY October
Request to IHPME re: Defense – June or July
2. If I do a 3-paper dissertation, do I have to include anything other than the 3 papers?

3. Can I include previously published material in my dissertation?

4. Where can I see examples of past students’ dissertations?
3-paper Dissertation

- 3 publishable papers
- Differs in format from traditional thesis, not content
- 1 or more introductory chapters
- + 3 papers ("may be expanded or supplemented by unpublished material, scholarly notes, necessary appendices")
  - i.e. can include material cut from publications due to space / reviews
  - Generally require “linking” passages, or chapters
- + final synthesis chapter (see next slide)
- + integrated bibliography for whole thesis

Final synthesis chapter

– Summarize, synthesize
– Not just a summary
– Discuss importance, implications for policy, practice, future research
– As if writing a narrative review
– Or introduction to your next grant based on this work
Can I include previously published material in my dissertation?

- [http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/informationfor/students/finup/producingthesis/copyrt.htm](http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/informationfor/students/finup/producingthesis/copyrt.htm)

- Yes, but:
  - Need permission from copyright owner
  - Applies to your published papers
  - Also to figures you want to include from elsewhere, questionnaires, etc.
Where can I see examples of past students’ dissertations?

- Graduate office
- List of titles on IHPME website
- http://www.ihpme.utoronto.ca/about/research/students.htm
- Proquest Dissertations & Theses: Full Text
- http://simplelink.library.utoronto.ca/url.cfm/54551
Defense

5. Who will be at my defense?
6. How do I choose an external examiner?
7. How do I choose an internal examiner?
8. Does everybody have to be at the defense?
9. Who else will be at my defense?
10. Can you bend the rules for me just this once?
11. How do I schedule my defense?
Who will be at my defense?

- Final examination committee includes “at least 4 but no more than 6 voting members”
- Your Advisory Committee
  - Up to 3 Committee members (including supervisor) vote
- External examiner/appraiser
  - Preferably a voting member
- Internal examiner
  - Voting member
- Departmental representative
  - Voting member
- SGS-appointed Chair from outside of IHPME
  - Non-voting; oversees the exam process
How do I choose an external examiner?

- Responsibility of “Supervisor and PhD candidate” to suggest an External Examiner/Appraiser
  - External to U of T
  - Associate Professor level or equivalent, recognized expert
  - **Arm’s length relationship:** past 6 years not a departmental colleague, student-teacher relationship, or collaborated on a research project with Candidate or Supervisor (definitely no joint publications!)

- Name to Graduate Coordinator who sends the recommendation to SGS for approval

- Note that this individual need only fulfill the role of Appraiser and need not, ultimately, vote; in IHPME, however, we strongly encourage Appraisers to serve as External Examiners and contribute their vote
How do I choose an internal examiner?

- Responsibility of “Supervisor and PhD Candidate” to suggest an Internal Examiner to Graduate Coordinator
- Graduate Coordinator approves selection
- Graduate faculty from within UofT, but outside of advisory committee and IHPME (CEHCR – should not be in same research institute or hospital division as student or supervisor)

- Arm’s length relationship
Does everybody on my committee have to be at my defense?

• No, however they generally are; some may not vote since quorum = 4 voting members and (only) up to 3 committee members can vote (and 2 if only 4 members present)

• External can participate by teleconference

• We **strongly** encourage selecting a day/time that accommodates all members of the examination committee!
Who else will be at my defense?

• Closed exam – no friends, family
• Institute representative is typically either Program Director or Graduate Coordinator
• Everyone will ask questions! Even the SGS-appointed Chair
• SGS-appointed Chair from outside of IHPME
Bending Rules

• We will work with you whenever possible to meet your defense objectives; however, SGS sets the rules and the Chair is required to confirm they have all been adhered to

• In particular, the answer will be “No” to request for compressed timelines or inappropriate examiners
How do I Schedule My Defense?

- Complete and submit the PhD Final Oral Exam Booking Request form
- HSR Program Assistant; CEHCR – Zoe Downie-Ross
- Requires ALL committee members to sign that the dissertation is ready to distribute
- Final draft dissertation MUST be ready to distribute ~8 weeks prior to exam date!
The External’s Report

• Required to be submitted 2 weeks prior to the final exam date
• Circulated to entire examination committee
• Should not be discussed with Supervisor
• SGS can cancel the defence if the report is not received by the deadline
• Candidate can (in special circumstances) waive the right to review the external report
Defense cont’d

12. What happens at the defense?
13. What are possible defense outcomes?
14. What happens after the defense?
What Happens at the Defense?

• Initial discussion among examination committee
• Your 20 minute presentation (see next slide)
• Usually two rounds of questions, starting with external examiner, then internal examiner, departmental representative, then your committee and concluding with your supervisor
• Follow up discussion among examination committee, including vote to Pass/Adjourn, and vote re: conditions for Pass
• The Chair will manage the defense process, and usually does not ask questions
• Supervisor maintains list of corrections
20 Minute Presentation

- Opportunity to address external examiner’s comments
- Remember – everyone will have read your dissertation
- Consider Handouts, especially if external examiner is not present
  - send slides to external examiner ahead of time
  - clarify when slides are being changed
What Are the Possible Defense Outcomes?

• Examined on both presentation and written work

• Committee votes twice:
  – Pass / Adjourn
  – If pass
    • As it stands → 1 week
    • Minor corrections → 1 month
    • Minor modifications → 3 months
Minor Corrections

• Supervisor informs Candidate of necessary corrections
• The Supervisor certifies in writing to the Graduate Coordinator who informs the Ph.D. Examinations Office that the corrections have been made
Minor Modifications

• Chair appoints a supervising subcommittee
• At least 2 members; usually includes the Departmental representative
• 1 is appointed the role of Convener, who:
  – Reports minor modifications needed in writing
  – Reports completion to Graduate Coordinator who informs SGS
What Happens After the Defense?

- Make any required changes-and notify Program Assistant with cc to Program Director that all changes have been made and thesis id ready for submission
- Submit final document to SGS (T space)
- Submit article to IHPME for consideration for the Naylor award