

Guidelines for the Oral Defense Graduate Program in the Study of Religion (GREL) Effective: Fall 2020

This document lays out the structure of the oral defense required of all PhD candidates in the GREL.

The student must publicly defend their dissertation prior to filing for their degree.

Students can find information about the filing process here:

<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/academics/finishing-your-degree/filing-thesis-or-dissertation>

For filing deadlines, see:

<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/academics/filing-comprehensive-exam-deadlines>

As per Graduate Council policy, all dissertation committee members must be present in person for the student's oral defense (see note below for pandemic exception). They must be present for the entirety of the examination. The Chair of the committee must note the partial attendance or absence of any committee members of the Report of Final Examination (link provided at the bottom of this document). The policy allows for one member to participate remotely. If a member of the committee expects to participate remotely, they must seek an exception from Graduate Studies *prior* to the exam by filling out this form:

<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/sites/default/files/upload/files/facstaff/g342-committee-member-remote-participation-request.pdf>

NOTE: As we are in the pandemic, all oral exams (QE and dissertation defense) are conducted remotely. This is a temporary exception approved by the Grad Council. Graduate Studies staff has asked Graduate Program Coordinators to note "All participants will be remote" on the exam application/candidacy application forms when they are submitted for approval.

The dissertation defense is public. Faculty, fellow graduate students and interested members of the community may participate in the defense (guidelines below for non-committee members' participation).

The Dissertation

The dissertation must be completed prior to the defense. It must be polished and be presented with all its component parts. All citations, footnotes/endnotes, bibliography, and any appendices must be complete prior to the defense.

Committee members are responsible for evaluating the dissertation in a timely manner. Graduate Council policy states that committee members are expected to read and comment on a dissertation within four weeks of receiving it from the student. Some faculty members hold nine-month appointments, so it is expected that the graduate student, with cooperation from the faculty, will schedule delivery of the completed manuscript in accordance with committee members' terms of employment and their need for a four-week review period.

The GREL encourages students to share drafts of their dissertation with their committee members on an ongoing basis, allowing both the student and faculty more time to read, and comment on the work and for the student to incorporate suggestions.

The Oral Defense

The oral defense will be scheduled by the graduate student in coordination with their committee, keeping in mind filing deadlines. Once the defense has been scheduled, the student informs the Program Coordinator and the Graduate Advisor. The Graduate Advisor will share information about the defense with the faculty and graduate students and invite them to attend. The student may invite people that they would like in the audience.

The oral defense usually lasts 3 hours.

The structure of the defense is as follows:

1. The dissertation committee convenes in private to confirm the process for the defense and to raise any concerns or issues that need to be addressed. The committee also agrees on the order in which the committee members will ask questions. One of the committee members, usually the Dissertation Chair, will serve as a timekeeper and moderator. (about 10 minutes)
2. After the private meeting, the candidate and any additional attendees will be invited back in and the Dissertation Chair will review the process with the candidate.
3. The candidate will then provide a 20 to 30-minute presentation of their dissertation.
4. This is followed by the Q&A from the dissertation committee. Each member usually will take 30 minutes, for a total of 1.5 hours.

5. Once the dissertation committee has completed their Q&A, the floor will be opened to the audience for questions for 30 minutes. If there is no public audience, this part of the defense is skipped.
6. At the conclusion of the Q&A, the candidate and the audience are asked to leave so that the committee can confer in private on the evaluation of the student's overall performance (defense and dissertation)
7. Only the candidate is invited back and is informed of the committee's decision. The committee provides feedback, makes requests for revisions, and offers advice for the candidate on publication/future directions. The candidate is also reminded of the proper documentation required and filing deadlines.
8. If there is a request for revisions, the committee must provide the student with written direction of the necessary revisions within twenty-four hours of the completion of the defense.

At the conclusion of the defense, the committee completes and signs the "Report on Final Examination" which must be submitted to Graduate Studies, with a copy retained by the GREL. The form can be found here:

<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/sites/default/files/upload/files/current-students/g326-phd-exam-report-planc.pdf>