



**Instructions for Oral Portion of the Proposal
Defense Examination
(Renamed December 2012)**

Introduction

The purpose of the Proposal Defense is to determine whether the PhD Candidate (the “Candidate”) is on track in his/her doctoral studies and has both the capability and a concrete plan to carry the work forward to completion. This determination will be made by the Advising Committee (the “Committee”) based on a dissertation proposal that is presented in written and oral form, and on an oral examination related to the presentation. Assuming the Candidate passes the examination, a second and equally important task of the Committee is to provide feedback, guidance, and possible suggestions for the Candidate to consider in the ongoing work.

A summary outline of the oral proceedings is as follows:

- a) After brief introductions, the Candidate delivers his/her oral presentation, which should be approximately fifty minutes in duration.
- b) The Candidate then responds to questions from the public and from the Committee. Questions may also be asked during the Candidate’s presentation. Normally, to allow for smooth progression of the defense presentation, interruptions are permitted for clarification purposes only.
- c) The public and any guests are then excused, and the Committee may continue with further questions.
- d) After questioning is concluded, the Candidate is excused from the room. Committee members then discuss and vote on the pass/fail status of the Candidate in closed session.
- e) The Candidate is notified of the outcome and provided with feedback and guidance for the ongoing work.

Detailed Procedures

Pre-examination Details

1. The Moderator of the examination will be a designated faculty member, usually with experience in the supervision of Ph.D. students, who is not the thesis Advisor or a member of the Committee. The role of the Moderator is to ensure the procedures specified in this document are followed. The Moderator has no vote.
2. The Candidate will give all members of the Committee a copy of the written dissertation proposal at least 30 days prior to the Oral Examination.
3. The student will be allowed to proceed to the Oral portion of the examination after the Committee has read the proposal and determined that it is sufficiently comprehensive to proceed to the Oral portion. The Advisor will approve the written portion by signature on behalf of the Examination Committee on form *COE-PHD-07 Application for PhD Comprehensive Exam (Proposal Defense)*.

Oral Presentation and Questioning

4. The Moderator and all Committee members must be present for the examination to proceed. Participation by two-way teleconferencing is permitted.
5. The examination should not exceed three hours in total duration.
6. The Moderator should initiate the proceedings by reading the Introduction section of this document, clarifying the conditions under which the Candidate will accept questions during the presentation, and adding any other logistical details. The thesis Advisor should introduce the other Committee members and the Candidate, and invite the Candidate to take the floor.
7. The Candidate should present his/her dissertation proposal and respond to questions. After a period of public questioning, the Moderator should excuse the public and allow questioning to continue in closed session. In the closed portion, the Committee will ask questions of a more general and comprehensive nature. These questions may be based on course work, fundamentals relating to the student's area of research, or specific issues related to the proposal or the Candidate's presentation.

8. The Moderator should ensure that the Candidate responds to all questions with minimal prompting from the thesis Advisor or other members of the Committee. (Opportunity for thesis Advisor comment and input exists in the closed discussion session below). The thesis Advisor and Candidate should maintain notes of the questions asked and issues raised.

Discussion, Voting and Reporting

9. After questioning is concluded, the Moderator should excuse the Candidate from the room, and open the floor for Committee members to discuss and vote on the Pass/Fail status of the Candidate. A decision to Pass the Candidate must be unanimous, otherwise the Candidate is failed. Prior to the final vote, an anonymous straw ballot is permitted if necessary to determine the general feeling of the Committee. The final vote will be taken by oral vote or show of hands. The Moderator briefly invites the Candidate back into the room to notify him/her of the outcome. Signatures should be obtained on the Proposal Defense Report Form (COE-PHD-07.2).
10. The Committee compiles a brief Statement relating to the strengths and weaknesses of the Candidate with respect to his/her demonstrated knowledge of the field, proposed dissertation and concrete plan of work. The statement is given to the Advisor to share with the Candidate. A copy is also placed on file.
11. The Candidate, with the assistance of the thesis Advisor, compiles a short response to the Statement and to any of the issues raised during questioning. This response is submitted to the Committee within one month of the examination for further informal feedback, and a copy is also placed on file. This procedure is for the Candidate's benefit, and for reference during the final dissertation evaluation.

Examination Re-take

12. In the event that the Committee votes to Fail the student, at the discretion of the thesis Advisor, the Committee may grant the student a second opportunity to take the Proposal Defense Examination. An examination re-take should be scheduled no sooner than one month and no later than six months after the first attempt. The Committee's statement from the initial examination will provide important data to be considered in any subsequent examination. Failure to pass the second Proposal

Defense Examination, or a recommendation from the thesis Advisor that the Candidate should not be allowed to re-take the Examination, will result in the termination of the student's enrollment in the Doctoral Program.