

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

OF
BRYN MAWR
COLLEGE

(Updated 3/11/2024)

FINAL ORAL EXAMINATION FOR THE PH.D.

Guidelines for Chairs and Members of Ph.D. Supervising Committees

The responsibilities and procedures of Ph.D. Supervising Committees are outlined in the Academic Rules of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. The Academic Rules can be found here:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/gsas/about-school/policies-forms#Academic%20Rules>

The present summary is intended for ready reference. Chairs, Supervising Committee members, and students are encouraged to consult the Academic Rules for more complete information.

HIGHLIGHTS

Role of the Chair:

The role of the chair of the Ph.D. Supervising Committee is to be an impartial moderator at oral examinations, to ensure that examinations are civil and fair, and to ensure that all requirements are completed and that documentation of examinations is accurate and complete. The student may appeal to the chair in the event of irreconcilable differences with the Dissertation Director. The chair convenes the Supervising Committee before the Ph.D. oral Preliminary Examination or the oral Final Examination if one or more committee members are dissatisfied with the student's performance. The chair of the Supervising Committee shall discuss with the candidate and the Dissertation Director at the Final Examination the proposed form of publication of the dissertation.

Before the examination:

The student must submit the dissertation and a separate vita to the GSAS Office by the deadline following the Guidelines for Dissertation Format and Submission.

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/gsas/academics/completing-your-degree/phd-degree-requirements/dissertation-format-guidelines>

The Ph.D. candidate should provide a paper copy of the dissertation and vita for any member of the Supervising Committee who prefers a physical copy. The Dissertation Director will submit a letter recommending its acceptance by the Supervising Committee to the GSAS Office and all Committee members by email.

The GSAS office distributes the PDF files of the dissertation, vita and Dissertation Director's letter to all Committee members by email, as well as a link to the Dissertation Acceptance Form.

At least 7 days before the oral examination, all Committee members need to complete the online Dissertation Acceptance Form, which will be automatically sent to the Chair once submitted. If any member of the committee finds the dissertation deficient, the Chair convenes the committee to determine whether to proceed to the oral, to postpone it, or to reject the dissertation entirely.

Conduct of the oral examination:

By the day of the oral exam, the Chair must pick up the student's *Ph.D. Dissertation Defense form*, from the GSAS office (Old Library, room 120) or print the form from the following link:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/gsas/about-school/policies-forms#Dissertation%20Defense%20Form>

The outcome of the examination will be recorded on this form. At the beginning of the exam, the Chair asks the student to leave the room so the committee can briefly discuss the dissertation and fix the time and order allotted to each examiner (the exam must last at least one hour; normally, examiners are initially allotted 15-20 minutes apiece). If the student is in violation of the "60 month Rule" (see the GSAS Academic Rules), the Final Examination must be both written and oral and must cover one of the general fields or areas offered for the Preliminary Examinations. In this case, the Supervising Committee shall read the written examinations promptly. Normally, the Chair asks about publication plans after the examiners have finished their questions. After the examination, the student is excused again so the examiners can discuss the results. Unless one or more verdict is "Unsatisfactory," the student is invited to return a final time to hear the results; in the rare case of "Unsatisfactory," the director should leave the room to inform the student privately.

Possible outcomes:

There are two votes: one on the dissertation and one on the examination. The only permissible votes on the dissertation are: "*Satisfactory*"; "*Satisfactory with minor revisions*"; or "*Unsatisfactory*." The permissible votes on the oral examination are *Satisfactory* and *Unsatisfactory*. Note that the votes of individual committee members are confidential and should not be communicated to the student. The student is told only the outcome determined by the majority of votes.

Get the signatures:

The Chair must be careful to get *two sets of signatures*, one for the dissertation and one for the oral examination, from every examiner on the Ph.D. Dissertation Defense form (linked above). The Chair also signs the Dissertation Defense form (in a different place) to confirm their oversight of the exam.

Return the form:

The Chair delivers the signed Ph.D. Dissertation Defense form to the GSAS office immediately after the examination.