

## Dissertation Defense Examining Committee Members

The student and the student's dissertation advisor must select at least four examining committee members: an examination chair (who is a member of the dissertation advisory committee), and three examiners.

The student, arranges the date, time, and place of the examination and seminar after contacting the examination committee; some programs may have the program administrator make these arrangements. At least four weeks before the scheduled date, the student submits the Program Approval and Proposed Examiners forms and Dissertation Information sheet to the Division of Medical Sciences, along with an abstract and title page.

The Director of Academic Administration of the Division of Medical Sciences, the student's dissertation advisor and the Program Head will approve the members from a list submitted by the candidate and his or her advisor (the Proposed Examiners form).

The exam committee should be assembled as follows:

**Exam Chair:** The chair of the exam committee must be a Division of Medical Sciences faculty member and be a member of the student's Dissertation Advisory Committee (DAC). None of the members other than the chair may have served on the student's DAC.

**Examiner 1:** In addition to the chair, at least one examiner must be a Division of Medical Sciences faculty member.

**Examiner 2:** To broaden the examination and enhance its significance, one member of the examination committee must be from outside Harvard University.

**Examiner 3:** Faculty member from any institution.

1. The dissertation advisor is not eligible to be an examiner or the chair, but usually attends the exam ex officio.

2. All proposed examiners must be the rank of assistant professor or higher at an academic institution.
3. Past collaborators and co-authors are usually not appropriate to be examiners. It is the student's responsibility to indicate any possible relationship of this kind. Faculty members who have collaborated with the student or the student's advisor on the student's area of research within the past five years may not serve on the exam committee. Faculty with whom the student has done a regular laboratory rotation in the process of selecting the dissertation laboratory are eligible if there are no other collaborations. Students may therefore petition DMS to approve examiners whose collaboration with the student or advisor was not directly related to the dissertation research.
4. Emeritus Faculty may not serve on a student's examining committee unless that student has been under the supervision of that faculty member, e.g. the dissertation advisory committee.
5. If the student's non-Harvard examiner is a former Harvard professor, then the following requirements must be met before s/he is eligible to serve on the committee as an external examiner:
  - the faculty member should have served in their post-Harvard position for at least one year
  - the faculty member should have not participated directly with the student in any other capacity (e.g. as a program advisor, dissertation advisory committee member, qualifying exam committee member) during her/his time at Harvard.
6. An alternate examiner may be requested by the student, the dissertation advisor, the program, or the Division. If an alternate examiner is selected, the alternate must be available to attend the seminar and defense, and must receive and read a copy of the dissertation.
7. All exceptions to these rules must be approved by the Director of Academic Administration of the Division of Medical Sciences.

Students must distribute a copy of the dissertation to the members of the dissertation examination committee not less than 14 days before the examination. The candidate should consult with the members of the dissertation examination committee to determine if they prefer an electronic or

physical copy. Should the dissertation be delivered late to the readers, the examination will be rescheduled unless other arrangements are agreed upon with the chair of the exam and examiners.

The examination committee chair does not function as a voting examiner but may participate in the questioning of the candidate. They are responsible for:

- i. contacting all readers not less than 72 hours before the examination to determine whether they find the dissertation generally acceptable. If one or more reader feel that there are substantive deficiencies that must be remedied to make the dissertation acceptable, the chair must contact or meet with the readers, the dissertation advisor, and the candidate to discuss the situation and decide whether to proceed with the examination. The Director of Graduate Studies of the Division of Medical Sciences and the chair of the student's Ph.D. program should be contacted immediately and kept apprised of the committee's decisions.
- ii. making sure that corrections to the dissertation are clearly defined and are carried out and approved in a timely fashion. A specific deadline for completion of corrections must be given to the student.
- iii. getting the dissertation examiners to sign the acceptance certificate at the end of the examination if the student successfully completes the examination.
- iv. immediately notifying DMS whether the student has passed his/ her dissertation defense examination and is thus eligible for the Ph.D.
- v. returning all student documents to the Division of Medical Sciences immediately following the examination.
- vi. if the defense is not successful, the chair of the exam must provide a thorough report to DMS and the student's program head detailing the areas of substantial deficiency of the dissertation.

**Dissertation Acceptance Certificate and Record of Final Examination:** The examination committee chair is provided with two forms that should be completed following the examination.

1. The *Dissertation Acceptance Certificate* must be signed by all readers if the candidate passes the examination. The certificate should be returned promptly to the Division for submission to the Registrar when any necessary changes to the dissertation are completed (see below). An electronic copy of the certificate is emailed to the student once they receive a clear pass. The student must then digitally attach the certificate to the first page of the final dissertation and submit it electronically to the registrar's office online (see below).

2. The Record of Final Ph.D. Examination indicates the outcome of the examination and is completed by the examination committee chair. It should be submitted to the Division, where it will be filed as the official record of the examination. If there are revisions to the dissertation that require approval of the examiners before the dissertation is formally accepted, an itemized list of the corrections should be given to the student and noted in the Record of Final Examination Form. In addition, the chair should request that corrections be submitted within a reasonable period, normally one month unless corrections are extensive.