

Jeff Foster – Information for the Discussion on Ph.D. Student Defenses

In recent years the graduate school has been emailing a summary of policies and procedures to the committee chair and dean's representative of each Dissertation Examining Committee. Below are some excerpts from the email, with points to be mentioned or discussed at the education meeting noted in red.

Committee preparation. The members of the Dissertation Examining Committee must receive the complete dissertation at least ten working days before the scheduled Examination. Should the Dissertation Examining Committee deem it reasonable and appropriate, it may require submission of the dissertation more than ten working days in advance of the Examination.

Please make sure your students follow this rule.

Identification of the Dean's Representative. The Dean's Representative must be identified at the beginning of the defense.

Please remember to make this announcement.

Student presentation. The dissertation defense shall consist of two parts. Part 1 shall be a public presentation by the candidate on the main aspects of the research reported in the dissertation. During Part 1, questions from the audience to the candidate will be permitted. For questions from persons who are not members of the Dissertation Examination Committee, the Chair of the Dissertation Examination Committee shall have discretion to decide whether such questions are germane to the topic of the dissertation and how much time shall be allotted for the answers.

Part 2 shall be a formal examination by the Dissertation Examination Committee. This part shall be open only to Dissertation Examination Committee, other members of the Graduate Faculty, and graduate students from the candidate's department/graduate program. During Part 2, only members of the Dissertation Examination Committee shall be permitted to ask questions. Departments/programs may vote to establish a policy to have Part 2 open only to members of the Dissertation Examination Committee and other members of the Graduate Faculty.

Notice that members of the Graduate Faculty may always attend both parts of the examination, though they may not ask questions during Part 2. (They must also leave during the committee's private discussion.) Also note that we may permit other CS graduate students to attend Part 2. However, in most defenses the students are asked to leave during Part 2. Should we adopt a rule that Part 2 should always be closed?

Passage or failure. The student passes if one member of the Dissertation Examining Committee refuses to sign the Report of the Examining Committee, but the other members of the Committee agree to sign, before or after the approval of the recommended changes. Two or more negative votes constitute a failure of the candidate to meet the dissertation requirement. In cases of failure, the Dissertation Examining Committee must specify in detail and in writing the nature of the deficiencies in the dissertation and/or the oral performance that led to failure. This statement is to be submitted to the program's director of graduate studies, the Dean of the Graduate School and the student. A second defense may be permitted if the student will be in good standing at the time of the proposed second defense. A second defense requires the approval of the program 's director of graduate studies and the Dean of the Graduate School. If the student fails this second defense, or if a second defense is not permitted, the student's admission to the graduate program is terminated.

Notice that a student can still pass if one committee member refuses to sign.