# Defense of Doctoral Dissertations

This document is provided to give guidance and general advice to those students nearing the completion of their dissertation. The official rules regarding dissertations and defenses are set by the Graduate School and are outlined in the NIU Graduate Catalog. Students should definitely use the check the website for the [Thesis and Dissertation Office in the Graduate School](https://www.niu.edu/grad/thesis/index.shtml) for important regulations and deadlines. For those students planning on typesetting their own dissertation, please contact Prof. Dan Grubb for LaTeX macro files.

## Overview

1. [Application to Graduate](#_1._Application_to)
2. [External Examiner](#_2._External_Examiner) (4-6 weeks before the defense)
3. [Defense Committee](#_3._Defense_Committee) (3-4 weeks before the defense)
4. [Defensible Draft to the Defense Committee](#_4._Defensible_Draft) (3-4 weeks before the defense)
5. [Committee nomination and pre-defense copy to the Graduate School](#_5._Committee_nomination) (at least three weeks before the defense)
6. [Dissertation Defense](#_6._Dissertation_Defense)
7. [Submit Post-Defense version to the Graduate School](#_7._Post-defense_version). You should allow at least one week after the defense for this; this must be completed by the published deadline for graduation in a specific term.
8. [Final Version of the Dissertation](#_8._Final_Version)

Deadlines for items 1, 5, and 7 are set by the Graduate School, and they are firm unless the student has obtained a written exception to the deadline directly from the Graduate School.

### 1. Application to Graduate

You must file an [Application to Graduate](https://www.niu.edu/registration-records/graduation/index.shtml) form and pay the graduation fee by the published deadline in order to graduate in any particular term. This form must be signed by the director of graduate studies or by the chair of the Department of Mathematical Sciences. The deadlines for applying for graduation for the coming academic terms are on the link mentioned above

This needs to be done only once. If you do not graduate in the term applied for, the application is automatically re-activated for the next term. After that, you must inform the graduate school in writing by the deadline to re-activate your application to graduate.

### 2. External Examiner

The external examiner is someone external to NIU with expertise in the area of the dissertation. This person is nominated by the department chair and appointed by the dean of the Graduate School. The doctoral candidate is generally not directly involved in choosing or contacting the external examiner. Typically, the external examiner is suggested by the dissertation advisor, who may informally contact the person to see if they are agreeable to do the job. The department chair subsequently contacts the external examiner to formally ask for their participation. The external examiner must submit a written report on the dissertation to the department chair and the dean of the Graduate School prior to the defense of the dissertation. The external examiner is also invited to come to DeKalb to hear the dissertation defense, but it is not required that the external examiner be present at the defense.

The external examiner should be identified and contacted by the department chair at least four to six weeks before the anticipated defense date.

### 3. Defense Committee

The student and dissertation advisor prepare a list of people they suggest for the dissertation committee. This should include a proposed external examiner for the defense. Bring this list to the director of graduate studies, who may ask for additions or changes to the committee, based on Graduate School rules or other concerns. This should be done three to four weeks before the anticipated defense date.

The defense committee is separate from the candidacy examination committee. A member of one need not be a member of the other.

### 4. Defensible Draft to the Defense Committee

A defensible copy of the dissertation should be distributed to the dissertation committee and the external examiner at least four weeks before the anticipated defense date (and probably earlier). Also, a time and date for the defense should be found that is agreeable to every committee member, including the external examiner if they will be present at the defense. Give the date and time to the director of graduate studies, who will arrange for a room for the defense and will coordinate the announcements of the defense.

### 5. Committee nomination and pre-defense version to the Graduate School

After the committee members have had time (a week at the minimum) to read over the defensible copy of the dissertation and a suitable date and time for the defense has been determined, the student, the advisor or the director of graduate studies will circulate a Request for Oral Dissertation Defense form that all committee members except the external examiner must sign. This form is for the official nomination of the committee to the Graduate School. In signing this form, each committee member certifies that they have read the dissertation and that they agree to the scheduling of the defense. The completed Request for Oral Dissertation Defense form, together with a defensible copy of the dissertation, must be received by the dean of the Graduate School at least three weeks prior to the defense. This is a firm deadline. It is the student's responsibility to deliver this to the Graduate School. Note that this copy is not required to be on expensive bond paper, though it must be single-sided.

In the period between the defensible copy of the dissertation being distributed to the committee and the Graduate School and the dissertation defense, it is appropriate for the student to make minor revisions to the dissertation. If all changes are minor, then the student should simply keep a list of these changes which can be distributed to the committee a day or two before the defense. However, if any change is not so minor, it would be a good idea to distribute a new copy of the dissertation to the committee as soon as possible before the defense.

### 6. Dissertation Defense

The first part of the defense is an oral presentation of the dissertation research (up to 50 minutes) and is open to the public. After a brief session of questions from the general public, they are excused, and the defense committee remains to question the student further on the dissertation.

### 7. Post-defense version to the Graduate School

The defense committee may approve the dissertation as is, or subject to certain revisions being made in the dissertation; this is indicated on the appropriate part of the dissertation defense form. (It is hoped that any major errors of a catastrophic nature would have been noted well before the defense.) In either case, the committee members sign the dissertation defense form, though there are invariably a few minor changes to be made in the dissertation after the defense. It is the responsibility of the dissertation advisor to see that the student carries out these changes satisfactorily.

Once these changes have been made, the dissertation is in its post-defense form. At this point, the final part of the dissertation defense form is signed by the advisor and any other committee members charged with approving the changes above. The completed form is sent to the Graduate School. The student will then submit the post-defense copy of the dissertation to the Graduate School. This must be done by a specific deadline each academic term in order to receive the doctoral degree that term. The deadlines are included in the link referred to above.

Students are advised to defend their dissertations at least one week before the deadline, to allow time for making the changes called for by the defense committee.

Students should consult with the director of graduate studies as soon as practical regarding their anticipated defense date. Since the director is often a member of the dissertation defense committee, they may be constrained by other obligations which may force a change in the defense date from what the student desires.

### 8. Final Version

The link referred to above contains information and deadlines on submitting the final post-defense version of the dissertation. The Graduate School will then indicate any final changes necessary; these are generally limited to basic editorial changes regarding margins, language and bibliography style.

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