

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

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 Rules of the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. The Rules can be found here:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/files/current-faculty-rules-ma-and-phdrevised-may-2018pdf>

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

HIGHLIGHTS

Role of the Chair:

The Chair protects the interests of the student and of the GSAS by insuring that the oral examination is both respectful and rigorous, and that the examiners agree on a fair and accurate assessment at the end. The Chair is obliged to discuss plans for publishing the results of the dissertation with the student and the dissertation director, either at the end of the oral examination or at some other date before Dec. 15 (if it is a December degree) or before Commencement.

Before the examination:

The student must deliver copies of the dissertation to the office of the GSAS by the deadline. The Director of the candidate's work will submit a letter recommending its acceptance by the Supervising Committee to the GSAS Office. The GSAS office distributes the copies of the dissertation to committee members and provides each member with a copy of the director's letter and a form on which to record her or his acceptance of the dissertation and any comments. This form must be returned to the chair at least 7 days before the oral examination. 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:

On the day of the oral exam, the Chair must pick up the student's *Ph.D. candidacy form*, from the GSAS office (Old Library, room 120). 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 below, under "Dissertation"), at least one examiner must ask questions in one of the fields of the Ph.D. Preliminary Examinations. 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 stylistic changes* (to be used when the changes are mostly mechanical); *Satisfactory with minor revisions* (to be used when some rewriting is required); *Unsatisfactory* (to be used when extensive rewriting is required). The permissible votes on the 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 signatures*, one for the dissertation and one for the examination, from every examiner. The Chair also signs the candidacy form (in a different place) to confirm her or his oversight of the exam.

Keep one copy of the dissertation:

The student normally takes all copies of their dissertation but one, in order to collate any corrections made by examiners. The Chair must return their copy to the GSAS office.

Return the form:

The Chair delivers the signed Ph.D. candidacy form and one copy of the accepted dissertation to the GSAS office immediately after the examination.

SUMMARY OF FACULTY RULES (Rules of the General Faculty Governing the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, C. 3-4 and D. 5-9)

Constitution of the Ph.D. Supervising Committee

GSAS: The Committee must have at least four members plus the Chair. The four members must include the Director of the student's work and two other members of the student's department; the fourth member can be from another department. If the Director of the dissertation is not a member of the student's department, another member of the Supervising Committee who is in the student's department must be designated general director of the student's progress. Committee members are recommended to the Graduate Council by the Director of the student's work and the department chair at the time of the student's application for Ph.D. candidacy. Appointment of a committee member not on the faculty of Bryn Mawr College requires the prior approval of the Dean.

Responsibilities of the Ph.D. Supervising Committee

The Director of the candidate's work has principal responsibility for the candidate's progress, including defining the fields of the preliminary examinations and the subject of the dissertation, and overseeing the preparation of the dissertation and changes required by the Supervising Committee at the Final Oral Examination. The Supervising Committee shares responsibility, reading all Preliminary Examinations and the dissertation and advising as appropriate. The Supervising Committee may be called upon to mediate disputes between the student and his or her Director should any arise.

Dissertation

The dissertation must be deposited in the GSAS Office no later than 45 days before the end of classes in Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology, Greek and Latin, and History of Art; and no later than 25 days before the end of classes in Chemistry, Clinical Developmental Psychology, Mathematics, and Physics. *No member of a Supervising Committee should be asked to read dissertations during the summer.* The Graduate School office will circulate the dissertation to members of the Supervising Committee together with (1) a letter from the Director recommending the acceptance of the dissertation, and (2) a form for each Supervising Committee member on which she or he should indicate acceptance or rejection of the dissertation and any comments for improvement. This form is to be returned to the Chair at least *seven days* before the scheduled date of the Final Oral Examination. The dissertation must be judged provisionally satisfactory before the Final Examination can be held. If any member of the Committee finds the dissertation unacceptable he or she must tell the Chair *within the seven-day limit* described above. If informed of a negative assessment, the Chair must convene the Committee for discussion. The Committee can decide to request revisions which may (or may not) lead to postponement of the Final Examination, or the Committee may reject the dissertation.

The "60-month Rule" (D. 7) requires that if any part of the Preliminary Examinations has been taken more than 60 months before the Final Oral Examination, the final examination must be written as well as oral, and must cover one of the general fields or areas of the Preliminary Examinations. Students who have

been teaching or continuously active in research since the Preliminary Examinations may request exemption from this Rule. Exemption must be requested by the student's Director on the student's behalf, and approved by the Dean. If exemption has not been requested, or has not been approved, the candidate must take the written re-examination before she or he can take the Final Oral Examination.

The *Final Oral Examination* must be taken at least 14 days before Commencement, or by November 25 for a December degree. The examination must be at least one and not more than three hours long. The Ph.D. Supervising Committee does the examining, but any Bryn Mawr faculty member who wishes to do so may attend. Faculty Rules require that the Chair of the Ph.D. Supervising Committee discuss with the candidate how he or she plans to publish the dissertation. This discussion normally occurs at the Final Oral Examination, although it may take place elsewhere. The Rules require that the dissertation be published "in full or in substantial part". If no other publisher has been found within two years from the date of the conferral of the degree, the dissertation will be sent to University Microfilms for publication. At the end of the examination the Committee must take two votes: one on the dissertation and one on the examination.

There are *four permissible votes* on the dissertation:

- "Satisfactory"
- "Satisfactory with minor stylistic changes"
- "Satisfactory with minor revisions" -- to be used when some rewriting is required.
- "Unsatisfactory" -- to be used when extensive rewriting is required. The Committee must describe the revisions required for reconsideration to the candidate in writing.

If more than one member of the committee dissents from the majority opinion of the dissertation, the case has to be referred to the Graduate Council. Another member of the appropriate faculty or, by arrangement with the appropriate Dean, an outside scholar competent in the field of the dissertation may be called in for consultation. The Supervising Committee must file a report to the Dean, who will bring it to the Graduate Council.

There are *two permissible votes* on the Final Oral Examination:

- "Satisfactory"
- "Unsatisfactory".

A vote of "Satisfactory" should be reported to the candidate by the Committee. If the vote is "Unsatisfactory" the candidate should be told by her or his director. Both votes, one on the dissertation and one on the examination, are recorded on the candidacy form. The Chair should be aware that *two sets of signatures are required*, one for each vote. The Chair returns the signed form with one copy of the dissertation to the office of the Graduate School as soon as possible after the examination. The Dean notifies the candidate in writing of the votes on both the dissertation and the Final Oral Examination.