

# Ph.D. Dissertation and Oral Examination

Candidates for the Ph.D. degree must present a written description of the research carried out during their course of study in the form of a dissertation. The dissertation must demonstrate ability on the part of the student to plan and execute original research, and the results must represent a definite contribution to scientific knowledge. The dissertation document must be prepared according to the Graduate Council [Guidelines and Regulations for Completion of Master's and Ph.D. Degrees](#). Although there is flexibility in the amount of work required for the dissertation, in general the thesis should represent the equivalent of at least two first-author publications in significant, peer-reviewed journals, and should be submitted for publication prior to the defense. BME requires that the Dissertation Advisory Committee meet to review and approve the proposed dissertation research before a dissertation defense can be scheduled. The chair of the Dissertation Advisory Committee should send a memo to the BME Graduate Program Director recording approval of the thesis project and approval for scheduling the oral thesis defense.

The composition of the Oral Exam Committee (OEC) should be suggested by the student and mentor, and must be approved by the BME Graduate Program Director. Permission may be requested to replace one of the committee members by a recognized scholar who is not a member of the graduate faculty; see [Graduate Council By-Laws](#). The committee must include at least one member who was not a member of the student's dissertation advisory committee. The Chair of the Oral Examination Committee must be a member of the Graduate Faculty. The oral examination committee shall be appointed by the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies upon the recommendation of the BME Graduate Program Director. After these approvals are obtained, the BME Program Coordinator will submit the form to the [School of Medicine Graduate Studies Office](#) for final approval of the composition of the Oral Exam Committee (OEC) by the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. This form must be submitted no later than 4 weeks prior to the scheduled defense.

Students must present a public seminar describing the Ph.D. research project, pass the oral examination, edit the dissertation document to the satisfaction of the Examination Committee, and meet all other degree requirements specified by the [Graduate Council By-Laws](#). The oral examination typically addresses issues related to the dissertation project, but is not limited to the content of the dissertation document. Questions related to other aspects of the student's graduate education should be anticipated. The public seminar is considered to be an important part of the oral thesis examination and the candidate's performance will be evaluated by the examination committee in the context of determining the general preparedness of the candidate to receive the degree.

A student who fails the Oral Thesis Examination may petition the department for the opportunity to be reexamined. Such petitions must be submitted in the form of a letter to the Department Chair within 2 weeks after the exam. The petition letter should include an explanation of any circumstances that may have adversely affected the student's performance on the exam. Moreover, the letter should provide a rationale for expecting a different outcome upon re-examination. The student's request will be formally considered at a meeting of the department's graduate faculty within 1 month of the receipt of the petition letter. The student will receive written notice of the department's decision. In case of reexamination, the Department Chair may recommend changes in the composition of the proposed Examination Committee. In accord with the [Graduate Council By-Laws](#), a student whose petition for reexamination is denied by the department may appeal to the Graduate Council.