

Thesis Defense: Students

The thesis defense is the culmination of completing course work, laboratory research and preparing a thesis / dissertation document to be defended before your advisory committee. This event is your opportunity to demonstrate your growth and transition from student to junior colleague. If handled properly the thesis defense can actually be an enjoyable experience for both you and your committee members celebrate your accomplishments. But if you fail to plan ahead and so are not properly prepared when you enter the room you set yourself up for very long and difficult defense. Instead of being a meeting of the minds it is literally a defense against many criticisms that are quite honestly fully justified. This document describes the procedure you should follow to not end up in that position.

Recently we have seen more and more students having excellent projects go into a defense in a rush and quite honestly are not properly prepared to show their achievements at their best. Lack of planning of the defense, unrealistic expectations to be able to prepare the thesis in a short time, combined with a premature planning of departure based on an assumption all will be well are all a part of this. Remember this: a PhD thesis may take as long as 3 month and MS 2 months to write just the first draft if you work on it full time. Even then you are REQUIRED to circulate your thesis 4 weeks before the defense. We have been lenient of late in allowing 2 weeks but this is leading to more problems, not less so we are now sticking to 4 weeks required. Start planning now.

Planning for the exit seminar should take place a semester ahead - do not leave the organization of the defense and writing to the last minute. You must start to organize a defense at the time you begin to write, or even better as soon as you decide to begin. There have recently been mixed assumptions by faculty and students about who does what in preparing for a defense - we have provided this document to outline our expectations. While this is a student defense and it is justifiable to expect the student to organize as such, there are times they meet with resistance and we expect the faculty to help overcome that. In the text that follows we have outlined precisely who is responsible for what in the planning of the defense (student or advisor). Essentially at the time thesis preparation begins You the Candidate should contact your committee and ask for available dates 3 or more months away. Use MeetingWizzard.com to fix the date as soon as you can. Ask your advisor for help if needed with unresponsive Faculty. Notify the office by email of the expected date. Note: Faculty have also been given procedures to follow if it is not possible to have all examiners present at one time.

Next, as soon as you have a complete draft of the thesis get your advisor's approval that it is complete - that tells us you are close to circulating your thesis and we will request a warrant. Only when we receive the enclosed form signed by your advisor and a pdf of the

complete draft will we proceed. Note- if you are unable to get your advisors signature please contact the Program Director.

If at this time you are on track to circulate the Final complete thesis (including all pages, spell checked and final figures) one month ahead of the defense then all is well. If the progress slows and you are way behind we need to adjust your defense date. The one thing we insist upon is you to have your defense thesis in the committee's hands for one month ahead of time and it be in fully printed form (double sided is fine if you want to save paper) delivered by You the Candidate. Several faculty have objected to simply being sent a pdf and expected to print it - I agree this is unreasonable, and sometimes it will not print, and particularly figures in unusual formats.

At this point you have a month to do things all students should do. You still have obligations before you leave and now is a good time to do them. Get your lab notes finalized, sort out the samples, reagents and document your tools properly (plasmids, antibodies, etc) as you should for grant funded work being concluded. Someone else's ability to follow up your work depends on this. Future papers may only get accepted given further study which you will not be there to perform. Get onto preparing remaining chapters for submission as papers. In preparation for the defense look up research areas on PubMed you may need to discuss further.

Once you go into your defense and assuming all goes well you will inevitably have corrections to make. It is important your advisor keeps track of verbal comments but it is also clear any committee member that requires a change before they sign makes that absolutely clear. We will now require all examiners to complete a form at the defense listing that which is a required change. Anything else not listed as required will by default be advisory. Changes that are required should either be undertaken or an explanation provided of why not (and there may be a good reason that only comes up later- that is fine). Either way the final version should be approved by that examiner and this is indicated by a signature on the warrant. Anything else (ie those changes suggested but not required) is by default changed at the discretion of the student with the approval of the advisor.

ADVISOR APPROVAL AND WARRANT REQUEST

By signing below, I as the research advisor for _____
(student name)

have reviewed and approved the first complete draft of the thesis. We therefore formally request the Program obtain the warrant for the defense.

The final draft of the thesis will be ready for distribution to the advisory committee and have established an appropriate timeline to schedule the thesis defense allowing committee members at least four full weeks (28 days) from the date of defense to review the document. The approved document is complete and edited with appropriate components of a MS thesis or PhD dissertation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Proposed Date of Defense agreed by Committee: _____

Location of Defense: _____

Has the Exit Seminar taken place yet or been scheduled: No _____ Yes (Date): _____
Note - it has to be announced as an Exit seminar through the office to be valid.

When and where is your exit seminar (we have to announce it along with the defense):

Research Advisor Signature: _____ Date: _____

ERP Program Office Use

Received by: _____ Date: _____

Date: Warrant Request submitted to the Graduate School _____

ERP PROGRAM THESIS COMMITTEE REVIEW

Student Name: _____

Committee Member: _____ Meeting Date: _____

Some of my changes are required to be incorporated into the final document before signing the degree warrant. Specify in detail your required changes.

Other changes to the final document are advisory (Personal style, possible viewpoints) and at the discretion of the research advisor. I have signed the degree warrant.

Committee Member Signature: _____