

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

# DOCTORAL DEFENSES

While each program and chair may do things a little differently than others, the format of a dissertation or doctoral applied research study defense tends to be pretty standard.



## WHAT HAPPENS IN A DEFENSE?

-  Chair's welcome & introductions
-  Presentation by doctoral candidate
-  Committee members ask questions
-  Other attendees ask questions (time permitting)
-  All non-committee members are excused
-  Committee collaboratively assess study and defense
-  Candidate is invited to return for results



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **1. What is a dissertation defense?**

A dissertation defense is a formal meeting where a doctoral candidate presents their original research to a committee of faculty members and other invited guests. The committee asks questions and evaluates whether the candidate's work meets the program's standards for a doctoral degree.

## **2. Who can attend a dissertation defense?**

Dissertation defenses are usually open to the public, which means other graduate students, faculty, and guests can attend. However, rules may vary, and some portions (such as deliberation) are always private.

## **3. How long does a dissertation defense typically last?**

The duration can vary but usually lasts between 1.5 to 2 hours. The candidate's presentation typically takes 20-30 minutes, followed by a question-and-answer session for the candidate and committee members, and, time permitting, time for other attendees to ask the candidate questions. After this part, the chair will ask everyone who is not on the committee to leave the room so that the committee can deliberate. After some time passes, the candidate will be invited back into the room to receive their next steps.

## **4. Should I prepare anything before attending a defense?**

While there's no formal preparation required for attendees, it might be helpful to read a summary or abstract of the dissertation to understand the topic and follow along during the presentation.

## **5. Is it appropriate to ask questions during the defense?**

Usually, the question-and-answer period is led by the dissertation committee. However, some defenses may open up to questions from the audience at the end. If this is allowed, feel free to ask thoughtful, relevant questions, but avoid dominating the discussion. Remember: This is often a stressful event for the doctoral candidate who is defending their work!

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **6. Can I leave the room during the defense?**

It's considered respectful to stay for the entire presentation and Q&A session. If you must leave, do so quietly and during a transition.

## **7. Will there be refreshments or a reception?**

This depends on the candidate. Sometimes, refreshments are provided—but it's not guaranteed, expected, or required.

## **8. What happens after the presentation?**

The committee will deliberate privately to decide if the candidate has successfully defended their dissertation. This can take a few minutes or longer, depending on the committee's decision-making process.

## **9. How do I show support for the candidate?**

You can show support by attending the defense, asking thoughtful questions (if appropriate), and offering congratulations afterward!

## **10. What should I learn from attending a dissertation defense?**

Pay attention to how the candidate presents their work, answers questions, and handles feedback. This experience can help you understand what to expect for your own defense and how to best prepare.

## **11. Are defenses different across departments or disciplines?**

Yes, the format and expectations can vary. It's a good idea to attend several defenses in your field to get a sense of what is typical for your program.

## **12. Is it okay to take notes during a defense?**

Yes, taking notes is acceptable, especially if you are trying to learn about the process or the research being presented. Just be sure to do so quietly.

## **13. What happens if a candidate doesn't pass their defense?**

If the committee feels the candidate's work is not yet sufficient, they may require revisions or a re-defense. This is relatively rare if the advisor and committee have approved the dissertation draft in advance.