

**Cognitive Division**  
**Doctoral Dissertation Process**  
**12/1/03**

*Reminder:* All policies specified for the Cognitive Phd Process are in addition to Departmental and Graduate College requirements.

**Description of the PhD Procedure**

***Phase 1: Proposal Approval***

1. The student, in consultation with his or her advisor, identifies a topic area for a dissertation research project proposal. They also agree on a group of committee members whose expertise and affiliation fulfill departmental and university guidelines. The proposed five-person committee must include a minimum of three faculty from the Department of Psychology (two from the Cognitive Division) and one member from outside Psychology. The committee chairperson must be from Psychology and a member of the UIC Graduate Faculty.
2. The student discusses the dissertation research project with each of the proposed committee members and requests their participation on the committee.
3. The department's Director of Graduate Studies must be notified as to proposed committee membership and must approve the composition of the committee before the prospectus meeting. Membership on the committee is provisional until formal completion of all the steps in the proposal approval process (see # 7 below).
4. The student, in consultation with his or her advisor (and with input from committee members) develops a dissertation research proposal which provides: (a) relevant background literature sufficient to motivate the proposed study, (b) a description of the hypotheses to be tested or the issues to be investigated, (c) details of the research design and methodology sufficient to judge feasibility, and (d) proposed methods of data analysis. Length of the proposal will vary depending on the nature of the problem to be pursued and the complexity of the design and/or analysis plan requiring description. When the student and his or her advisor agree that the proposal is ready for committee review, the proposal draft is disseminated to the committee members and an oral defense is scheduled.
5. At the oral defense, the student provides an overview of the proposed research project. The committee members question the student about the project and provide feedback regarding the logic of the study, issues of design and data analysis, and any concerns about the feasibility or acceptability of the project. At the conclusion of the oral defense, the student is asked to leave and the committee members discuss with the advisor any necessary changes in the

study for it to be approved. The committee invites the student back and orally shares the general nature of the proposed changes. This is followed by a written summary generated by the advisor and shared with the student and the members of the committee. The student responds to the proposed changes, rewrites the plan as necessary, and distributes it to the committee. It is presumed that the study will then be executed in accord with the revised plan.

6. The student carries out the research project described in the original proposal, amended as necessary to reflect changes forwarded in writing following the proposal orals.

7. Immediately following the approval of the prospectus, the student files the Prospectus Approval Form, the prospectus, and a Committee Recommendation Form to the Graduate Coordinator. The form will be sent to the Graduate College, the prospectus will be officially entered as approved, and the Committee will be officially appointed at that time.

### ***Phase 2: Dissertation Defense***

1. When the student and his or her advisor think that a written draft of the completed dissertation research project is ready for oral defense, the dissertation draft is disseminated to the committee. The committee members are asked to return feedback within 2 weeks. Two matters of concern are to be addressed in each committee member's feedback. The first is whether the document is of sufficient quality to be defended orally. (If 4 of the 5 committee members agree, the orals can be scheduled and the process moves to Step 4.) The second is what changes/clarifications, minor or major, are needed in the document prior to holding the oral defense.

2. After all the feedback has been received, the advisor provides appropriate synthetic feedback to the student about any necessary changes. If the advisor thinks that the requested revisions are mutually contradictory, excessive, or unjustified vis-à-vis the original proposal, then the advisor can call a meeting of the committee. The committee meets without the student present to consider the collective requests for revision and how to resolve any differences of opinion. Following this process the advisor provides feedback to the student about necessary revisions. (This step should not normally be needed.) The student works on appropriate revisions and when the advisor deems the revised product to be sufficiently responsive and complete, the student distributes the revised draft.

3. If, within two weeks of receiving the revised draft, a committee member thinks that the product is still not of sufficient quality to be defended, then he or she informs the advisor to that effect. If at least two members of the committee are of this opinion, the oral defense is not scheduled. The committee members can then provide additional feedback on the document which the advisor synthesizes

and passes along to the student. The process goes back to step 2. The cycle of review of the draft by committee members followed by subsequent revisions and re-review by the committee can occur a maximum of two times before an oral defense must be scheduled.

4. Once the committee agrees to an oral defense, the student is required to submit the Title, Abstract, Names of Chair and Committee, and time, date and location of the defense to the department's graduate coordinator two weeks in advance so that it can be publicly announced.

5. At the oral defense, the student provides an overview of the completed research project. The committee members question the student about the project's goals, issues of design and data analysis, and matters of interpretation. At the conclusion of the oral defense, the student is asked to leave. The committee members then vote on approval and discuss any further changes in final written product. The advisor shares these changes with the student in writing, copying the members of the committee. It is presumed that committee discussion at the orals will result in the need for additional revisions and clarifications in the final document. It is expected, however, that any such proposed revisions will be minor, that the forms indicating approval of the dissertation can be signed at the meeting, and that the committee can assign to the advisor the responsibility of verifying that appropriate final revisions have been made. In the event that major revisions are requested, no vote is taken at the time of the orals or forms signed. The advisor shares the changes requested by the committee in writing, copying members of the committee. The student is allowed one revision cycle to address the concerns of the committee.

6. Upon completion of the final changes a vote is taken if still necessary and the signed forms are submitted using the date of the oral defense as the date of completion.