

DDes Guidelines for the Dissertation

The Dissertation Committee

The dissertation committee normally consists of three, but occasionally of more individuals, two of which have to be GSD faculty. The committee is officially established at/after the successful passing of the prospectus. The following are requirements for the members of the committee:

- The primary advisor is chair of the committee, he/she must be GSD ladder faculty, including tenured full professors with or without doctoral degrees as well as tenure-track assistant and associate professors who themselves hold a doctoral degree. Tenure-track assistant and associate professors who themselves hold a doctoral degree can chair a committee along with another tenured full professor as a second member. (revised 19-May-2022)
- The second member of the dissertation committee must be a GSD faculty member at any rank, with or without a doctoral degree.
- Other members of the dissertation committee can be faculty members from another school, or individuals from the private or government sector with relevant expertise.

Committee members are obliged to meet at least once each semester as a group with the student, but individual interactions between DDes candidates and the advisors are expected beyond these group meetings.

Changes to the Composition of the Committee

If the student wishes to change the Chair of the dissertation committee, the DDes program director must be notified and approve of the change, in consultation with the current chair and proposed chair. Please submit the [Change of Dissertation Committee Chair Form](#) for signatures. If the student wishes to change a member of the committee, he/she must consult with the chair and notify, in writing, any member of the committee who will no longer serve on the committee.

Timeline for the Dissertation Defense

The student should coordinate with the committee on a date to submit the final dissertation to read before the defense. Allow at least two weeks for the committee to read and respond before the defense. The dissertation defense date should be at least 2-3 weeks before the degree vote as the student may be asked to incorporate changes into the dissertation, which in turn need to be reviewed before the committee signs off.

It is the student's responsibility to find an acceptable date and time for the defense. The ASP office will assist with booking a room once the date is scheduled. The DDes program does not pay for the travel expenses of out-of-town committee members. Typically, those committee members participate in the defense via Zoom or other teleconference.

Once a room is confirmed, the student may craft an announcement, which the ASP office can share with the GSD community and anyone else as requested.

Dissertation Acceptance Certificate

The ASP office will prepare a dissertation acceptance certificate (DAC). Please provide the information below via email to [Melissa Hulett](#):

- Student name (Please note, this information is used for the listing in the commencement bulletin).
- Dissertation title.
- Names and titles of all members of the committee.
- Please double check spellings, especially for committee members who are not part of the GSD community.

The DAC must be signed by all committee members. Often this is at the defense; occasionally it may be signed after the edits to the dissertation are finalized. This is at the discretion of the committee. The scanned DAC is uploaded with the dissertation. The original signed copy remains in GSD records. Contact [Melissa Hulett](#) (617-998-1961) with questions regarding the DAC.

The Defense

The ASP office will share an announcement of the defense via email to the GSD community. The defense is generally a public event.

At the defense:

- The student presents for 25-30 minutes,
- Committee members offer commentary, ask questions, and engage in discussion (30-40 minutes),
- The audience can ask questions.
- The candidate leaves the room and committee members deliberate the outcome.
- The candidate comes back in the room and the committee communicates the outcome. In the case of success, (even if minor changes are required to the written dissertation) all committee members sign the Dissertation Acceptance Certificate (DAC), which has been prepared ahead of time.
- The whole event should take approximately 2 hours.

If changes to the written dissertation are required, the student and committee chair will agree on a deadline for the submission of the revised document. Once the requested changes and revisions to the written dissertation have been made and approved, the student uploads the final dissertation, with the signed DAC incorporated, to Harvard's [Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Submission System](#).

Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Submission

The final dissertation must be uploaded into Harvard's [ProQuest/ETD](#) system least two days prior to the degree vote, with a Dissertation Acceptance Certificate (DAC) signed by the committee.

This upload makes the dissertation available to the public in ProQuest, in DASH - [Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard](#), and through [HOLLIS](#).

Questions about the publication and processing of dissertations can be addressed to Harvard's [Office for Scholarly Communication](#). Students that wish for their dissertation to remain private for up to two years can embargo the availability of the dissertation document to the public.

Form of the Dissertation

DDes candidates are required to complete and submit a dissertation to qualify for degree conferral. This guide, [The Form of the DDes Dissertation](#), provides general information on formatting, submission, publishing, and distribution options.

Degree Periods

Each academic year, degrees are granted in three periods. Graduates participate in the Commencement festivities in May regardless of which degree timeline they choose to follow.

In order to graduate in a given time period, the following must be completed:

- The Dissertation Acceptance Certificate (DAC) must be signed by the committee.
- The dissertation must be uploaded and approved.

November

- Degree Vote is generally mid-October.
- Dissertation upload must be completed two business days prior.
- November degree candidates are not charged fall tuition. However, if students do not complete the dissertation and defense in time for the fall degree vote, they will be retroactively charged fall tuition.

March

- Degree Vote is generally early February.
- Dissertation upload must be completed two business days prior.
- March degree candidates are not charged spring tuition. However, if students do not complete the dissertation and defense in time for the degree vote, they will be retroactively charged spring tuition.

May

- Degree Vote is generally mid-May.
- Dissertation upload must be completed two business days prior.

*In the event of extenuating circumstances, the program director or advisor may request that the degree be voted on conditionally with the DDes committee, pending the remaining materials. The deadline would then be extended to two business days before the Full Faculty degree vote meeting (which occurs 1-2 weeks later, except in May when it occurs the following Monday).