

VI. DISSERTATION PROCESS AND COLLOQUIA

Doctoral theses generally require the equivalent of at least one full-time year of academic research. Writing a dissertation usually takes a substantially longer time. Each doctoral candidate is expected to register on a resident or non-resident basis for thesis in all periods during which he or she is actually working on the thesis, and this work must be carried out under the supervision of a department faculty member.

A. Thesis Committee

After completing general exams students are expected to ask faculty to be on their thesis committee and work with them throughout the research and writing stages of their dissertation, normally by the end of their fifth semester. The chair of the committee submits a grade each semester on the student's progress (see 7 below). The chair and at least one other member of the three-person committee are normally active faculty members within the Political Science Department at MIT. The third member may be from another department or another institution. Exceptions to this rule may be made by the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee. In every case the **thesis committee must include at least two members of the Political Science faculty**, even if this requires a thesis committee of four. **The committee must be formed before presentation of the first dissertation colloquium.** Students may change dissertation advisors at their discretion without affecting their department funding. You are encouraged to consult with the Director of Graduate Studies and/or the department's Transition Support Coordinator (TSC), Susan Twarog, if you are considering changing advisors. More information on the TSC program can be found at this [website](#).

B. First Dissertation Colloquium*

By the end of the spring semester of the third year, students must prepare a written dissertation proposal and give an oral presentation to the thesis committee and other interested faculty and students at a First Dissertation Colloquium.

The first colloquium is intended to shape a research strategy which (a) meets the standards of the Department, and (b) represents a feasible and appropriate attack on the problem. The student's presentation should be designed to facilitate probing criticism of the proposed theoretical and methodological approaches. It is intended as a collective work session, not simply a presentation to an audience. First colloquia are scheduled for two hours, but the public portion should normally not last more than an hour and a half, with at least half an hour at the end reserved for discussion among the thesis committee members and the student. **If the committee does not approve the dissertation proposal as presented, it may require that the colloquium be repeated (as, for example, in the case of a new or substantially revised topic) or agree on the need for a revised proposal to be prepared, reviewed, and approved by the committee.**

Students who have not had a successful first colloquium by the end of the spring semester of their third year will be given a U (unsatisfactory) grade for their thesis work that term.

C. Second Dissertation Colloquium*

The second colloquium is intended to provide an opportunity for detailed substantive interaction between the writer and the thesis committee at a time when a significant portion of the empirical research has been carried out and a substantial amount of writing has been done. The dissertation project as a whole should be about half completed, with two or three chapters drafted and ready for the committee to read. The basic findings or results of the dissertation research should be clear by this point. The second colloquium should not be scheduled so late that, in effect, it replaces the thesis defense; rather, it should provide the opportunity, if necessary, for a mid- course correction.

Second colloquia are scheduled for up to two hours, but student presentations should be limited to about 40 minutes. The presenter should prepare and distribute tables of major results, theoretical diagrams, and summary conclusions in printed form. The oral presentation should give an overview, with the written supplements designed to allow questioners to probe in depth.

Since students, for good reasons, proceed at different rates through the dissertation writing process, it is difficult to impose rigid deadlines for the second colloquium. The departmental norm is that the second colloquium should be held no later than the end of the fourth term after the successful completion of the first colloquium. Most students, particularly those who have been working full-time on their dissertations, complete much of their research and some of their writing during this two-year period.

***Colloquia announcements and summary statements must be distributed to the Department by email <ps-all> at least one week in advance of the event. Please see the colloquia guidelines below. Colloquia must be held during regular term time (Fall and Spring).**

D. Colloquia Procedures and Announcements

- a. **All** requirement forms (including second year paper) must be completed and submitted to the Graduate Administrator **before** a student can hold a first colloquium.
- b. Students must have a complete thesis committee and indicate the chair. If any member is outside the department, their affiliation must be specified (see below).
- c. Announcements of both First and Second Colloquia of up to two pages (single spaced) must be distributed seven days in advance of the event to <ps-all>
- d. A format such as the following is appropriate:

1. Statement of Problem

The statement should include both specific details and conceptualization of the broader theoretical issues involved (e.g. diffusion of innovation, decision making, effects of government domestic interventions considered as experiments, bargaining theory, theory of

meaning and symbolic interaction, theory of conflict resolution, theory of mass movements and voluntary actions, etc.)

2. Hypotheses

Major hypotheses and research questions should be stated explicitly and systematically.

3. Methods

Multi-method approaches, experimental designs, sample designs, scheme for content analysis, etc., should be stated explicitly and briefly. Operationalizations for all major dependent and independent variables should be described.

4. Problems Anticipated (First Colloquium)

5. Results and Major Findings

E. Thesis Defense

A final oral examination on the thesis is held after it has been submitted and evaluated by the thesis committee. This defense is usually held at least one month prior to the date the thesis is due in Department Headquarters. Final approval of the thesis is given after any required changes have been made and the thesis has met all established requirements stipulated by the Graduate Students Office. Students ought to plan their defenses well in advance. Defenses are generally private, and their timing and nature is determined by the chair.

Students should consult the MIT *Specifications for Thesis Preparation* <<http://libraries.mit.edu/archives/thesis-specs/>> booklet, as well as the Department's guidelines, for rules governing the format for submitting the PhD thesis. These rules will be enforced.

F. Multi-paper Dissertations

One paper of a three-paper dissertation can be co-authored. Co-authorship of dissertation chapters with other students is not permitted. Nor can the dissertation chair serve as a co-author, except under special circumstances as determined by the thesis committee.

G. Satisfactory Progress

The grade of J (satisfactory) for thesis will be given when there is demonstrated evidence of progress. In the specified semesters, colloquia are sufficient evidence of progress. In other semesters evidence may include any of the following:

- a) draft chapters
- b) extensive outlines
- c) a written progress report
- d) language study, if such study is required for the thesis
- e) improvement of particular analytic techniques or skills required for the

- thesis
- f) write-ups of interviews
- g) semi-processed research, such as summaries of, or guides to, archival materials, or government documents
- h) literature review of the state of the field, as it bears on the thesis topic

H. Unsatisfactory Progress

The U grade is one of the Department's mechanisms to alert the student of thesis performance problems. Faculty may employ the U grade in any semester in which they judge that the student is not making progress on the dissertation. The Department as a whole may request a "Dean's Warning Letter" in the event of a single U, and will likely do so in the event of two consecutive U's. A third U would, in all probability, lead to the student's dismissal from the program. The thesis committee chair, may, at their discretion, change a U grade to a J, should new facts warrant such an action.

Students are advised to maintain regular contact with their thesis committee every semester.

Time Limit for Completion of the Dissertation

Graduate students are normally expected to complete their dissertation within six years after entering the program. A student who has not submitted the dissertation within that time is responsible for formally requesting an extension of the time limit.

Extensions are normally granted to students who, in the judgement of their thesis chair and the Department Head, are making reasonable progress toward completion of their dissertation. Extenuating circumstances (e.g., employment, maternity, family obligations, illness) are taken into account. Students who are able to anticipate that particular circumstances will prevent them from making substantial progress on the dissertation during a given period of time are advised to inform the thesis chair and request that this time period not be counted as part of the six-year limit.

The Department is responsible for reminding graduate students in writing of this deadline at least one year before it takes effect. A student who does not expect to complete the dissertation by the end of the six-year period must request in writing for an extension of the time limit, explaining the circumstances causing the delay and indicating the progress being made on the dissertation and the expected date of completion. The Department Head and the thesis chair then jointly

decide whether the time limit shall be extended and for how long, taking into account all extenuating circumstances.

If either the Department Head or the thesis chair believes that the circumstances do not warrant an extension or renewal of a previous extension, the entire faculty is consulted before a student is dropped from the Department's rolls. The faculty may also impose particular requirements on individual cases, e.g., that the time limit may not be extended beyond a certain date.

A student dropped from the rolls through this procedure may subsequently apply for readmission to the Department. The faculty as a whole considers such cases and may impose special requirements as it sees fit.