

June 2021

## **Memo: PSE Ph.D. Dissertation Procedure**

### **Introduction**

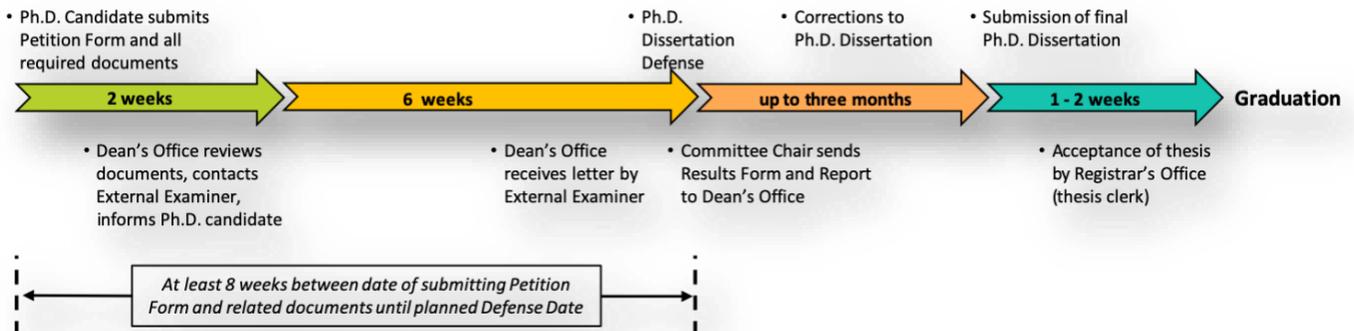
This memo clarifies the procedure and timeline for Ph.D. Dissertation defenses in the Division of Physical Science and Engineering (PSE) at KAUST. It summarizes the key steps to be undertaken by the Ph.D. candidate ('Ph.D. Student') and Academic Advisor ('Advisor') for submitting required documents and forms. The memo also describes the roles of the Chair of the Dissertation Committee ('Committee Chair') and the External Examiner.

This memo is an addendum to the Program Guide. More general information on the Ph.D. Program in terms of course requirements, qualifying examination, Ph.D. proposal defense, compositions of the Ph.D. committee are given in the Program Guide and not repeated here.

The Registrar's Office maintains and publishes the Academic Calendar that stipulates due dates for course registration, declaration for graduation, final exams, thesis defenses, and submission of final results. Given the University's Academic Calendar, the PSE Division adopts the Ph.D. Dissertation Defense Procedure and Timeline below to ensure timely submission and processing of all required dissertation documents and a successful Ph.D. Dissertation defense.

### **Ph.D. Dissertation Defense: Procedure & Timeline**

The graphical representation below provides an overview over the timeline for the processes from submitting the Ph.D. petition form (and required documents) to Graduation.



- The Ph.D. dissertation petition has to be completed using the online submission system: [https://kaustforms.formstack.com/workflows/petition\\_to\\_phd\\_dissertation](https://kaustforms.formstack.com/workflows/petition_to_phd_dissertation)
- Ph.D. Candidate submits Dissertation Petition Form at least two months prior to the planned defense date. Besides general student information, the Petition Form states the title of the dissertation, the planned defense date, and the names of the Committee members; all Committee Members will have to sign the Form electronically, and should have been contacted in advance to give their consent for being part of the Committee.
- When completing the online Dissertation Petition Form, the Ph.D. Candidate submits also
  - the Ph.D. dissertation
  - the CV and publication list of Ph.D. candidate
  - the CV of the External Examiner.

- The GPSA reviews all documents for completeness, and evaluates if they are consistent with the divisional guidelines. The GPSA also reviews the transcripts to ensure the Ph.D. Candidate fulfills the University requirements for graduation.
- The GPSA forwards the documents to the Associate Dean for review and approval. Once approved by the Associate Dean, the Ph.D. Candidate and Advisor will be informed to proceed with planning the Dissertation Defense. At this point, the GPSA
  - requests information for public announcement of the Ph.D. dissertation defense (abstract, short bio, date, time, location); this information must be sent to the GPSA two weeks prior to the defense date
  - if needed, communicates with the External Examiner to request the evaluation report (see Appendix 1 for a template; report two weeks prior to the planned Dissertation Defense date); the report will be shared with the Associate Dean, and the Committee Chair.
- The Ph.D. Candidate is responsible for room reservation and any other related logistics (possibly involving video-streaming of the defense to off-campus committee members). It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the technical (AV) setup in the room is tested and is working properly, and that all Committee Members are present (or connected via the video-streaming).
- The Ph.D. Dissertation Defense is chaired by the Committee Chair who welcomes the audience, introduces the Committee and the Ph.D. Candidate, and oversees the procedures of the Dissertation defense (duties of the Committee Chair are further clarified in Appendix 2).
- After the Ph.D. Dissertation Defense, the Committee Chair writes a short report (sample in Appendix 3), to be submitted to the PSE Dean's Office.
- The signed form 'Results of the Ph.D. Dissertation Defense Examination' and the report of the Committee Chair **have to be submitted to Dean's Office (GPSA) within three working days after the Ph.D. dissertation defense.**
- Once the Ph.D. Candidate has implemented corrections (if any) requested by the Committee, the final version of the Ph.D. dissertation, the Copyright Form, the Final Results Form (including approval from the thesis check and advisor, plus the Turn-It-In check), as well as a Word-document with thesis title and abstract have to be submitted to the GPSA for final submission to the University Library.

## Additional Notes

- The above Ph.D. dissertation timeline is meant to complete the Ph.D. graduation process (from filing the Petition Form to the official graduation date) in a single semester. This is recommended, but not required.
- Ph.D. Students may defend any time during the semester, given that the proper time intervals after submission of the Petition Form are met. In case the Ph.D. Dissertation Result Form and Final Dissertation are not submitted according to the dates set by the Registrar's Office, the student will graduate officially the next semester.
- While the Program Guide states that the Committee Chair "*must be affiliated with the student's degree program*", we note that this condition severely limits the choices for committee chairs, in particular for smaller programs. Therefore, Committee Chairs may be proposed from any degree program in PSE.
- Ph.D. Students have at most three months after the Ph.D. Dissertation Defense to incorporate any changes and additions into their thesis, if requested by the Committee.

**Appendix 1:** External Examiner Form

**Appendix 2:** Ph.D. Dissertation Committee Chair – Role and Duties

**Appendix 3:** Sample report of Committee Chair

## **Appendix 1: External Examiner Evaluation Form**

After reading the Ph.D. thesis, please complete this form and submit it, with your written report, to the PSE Dean's Office via the GPSA of the degree program from which the Ph.D. Candidate graduates. Please include

- general information on the Ph.D. Candidate and the dissertation (Section A).
- brief evaluation of the dissertation according to five criteria (Section B).
- written report to support your recommendation of the outcome of the examination (Section C).

### **Section A: General information on the dissertation**

- Name of Ph.D. Student:
- Degree Program:
- Title of Ph.D. Thesis:
- Academic Advisor:

### **Section B: Brief evaluation**

CRITERIA	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
<b>Contribution to knowledge in subject area:</b> Originality, quality, quantity				
<b>Research:</b> Adequacy, thoroughness, technical skills (based on internal evidence given by the Dissertation)				
<b>Understanding of the subject:</b> Adequacy of review of previous work, choice of project, evaluation of results, validity of conclusions				
<b>Presentation:</b> Organization of material, presentation of results (tables, figures), grammar, style, bibliography.				
<b>Quality of Typescript:</b> Makeup, neatness, freedom from errors				

### **Section C: Your written report (not to exceed 2 pages)**

For your report, please use official (institutional) letter head and include your (electronic) signature). Provide information on the criteria below

- highlight strengths, achievements, innovative findings, scientific breakthroughs;
- mention limitations, short-comings;
- state how this Ph.D. dissertation would be evaluated at your institution;
- include your Final Recommendation (options stated below)

#### **Options for Final Recommendation**

- I. I recommend acceptance of the thesis in its present form.
- II. I recommend acceptance of thesis. However, I would like the candidate to incorporate corrections indicated in the report, but the corrected thesis does not need to be sent to me prior to the Dissertation Defense.
- III. I am unable to make my recommendation at this stage. Before I send my recommendation, I kindly ask the candidate to furnish the clarifications to the queries in my report and the thesis to be sent back with suggested modifications prior to the Dissertation Defense.
- IV. I do not recommend acceptance of this thesis for the reasons set out in detail in my report.

## **Appendix 2: Ph.D. Dissertation Committee Chair – Role and Duties**

### *The Role of the Committee Chair:*

- The Committee Chair oversees the Ph.D. dissertation defense and moderates the discussions and question-and-answer (Q & A) sessions.
- The role of the Committee Chair guarantees a fair academic process to the Ph.D. Candidate, in a cordial and respectful environment.
- The Committee Chair ensures that the process remains focused on the Ph.D. Candidate and the topic of the Dissertation; the Chair may limit the Q & A time of an individual committee member if the impression arises the discussion is off-topic or becomes too time consuming.
- The Committee Chair is allowed to participate in discussions, to examine the Ph.D. Student, and to cast an opinion on the performance.

### *Procedure:*

- The Chair convenes the meeting, introduces the Ph.D. Candidate and all Committee Members.
- The Chair invites the Ph.D. Candidate to present the dissertation in the allocated time (generally 40-45 minutes). The Chair monitors time, and discourages interruptions.
- The Chair invites questions from the General Audience (not yet the Committee) for a reasonable period of time, not to exceed 15 minutes.
- The Chair calls for a 5-minute break. Non-committee members depart.
- The Chair reconvenes the Dissertation Defense and invites questions by the Committee Members. The order in which questions are asked is at the discretion of the Chair, but it is recommended to start with the External Faculty, and to close with the Academic Advisor. A second round of questions may follow, based on answers given by the Ph.D. Candidate and the ensuing scientific discourse.
- After the second round of questions is completed, and if no significant technical issue remains to be discussed with the Ph.D. Candidate, the Chair asks the Ph.D. Candidate to leave the room.
- The Chair then solicits comments from all Committee Members, seeking consensus.
- When a decision is reached, the Chair calls the Ph.D. Candidate back into the room and reports the Committee's decisions to the Ph.D. Candidate, in the presence of all Committee Members.
- The Chair then ensures that the form 'Results of Ph.D. Dissertation Defense' is signed, the Committee's decision (Pass, Pass with Conditions, Retake, Fail) is stated, and conditions and timeline for required corrections (or retake) are summarized.
- Finally, the Chair's write a short report to the Dean (Appendix 3) to summarize the Ph.D. Dissertation Defense, stating the decision of the Committee and required corrections/changes (if any) to the dissertations as well as the timeline for their implementation. **The report is due within 3 working days after the oral defense along with the signed form 'Results of Ph.D. Dissertation Defense'.**

### **Appendix 3 Sample report of Committee Chair**

**To:** Associate Dean (Students), Division of Physical Sciences and Engineering

**Date of Report:** XYZ

**Subject:** Report on Ph.D. Dissertation Defense of STUDENT NAME

**Title of Ph.D. Dissertation:** XYZ

**Date & Time of Dissertation Defense:** XYZ

**Duration of Dissertation:** start time of presentation; end of presentation; start & end of public question & answer session; start & end of closed-door question & answer session

**Committee Members:** Names, Titles, Affiliations, roles, present in person or remotely

**Approximate number of people in the audience:** XYZ

One to two paragraphs on the style, content and quality of the presentation and the Ph.D. Candidate's "performance on stage" during the presentation

One paragraph on the public question & answer session and how the Ph.D. Candidate handled the questions.

One to two paragraphs on the closed-door question & answer session and how the Ph.D. Candidate handled the questions by the Committee Members. Here, some details on the quality of the scientific work, the depth and breadth of knowledge of the Ph.D. Candidate as demonstrated in the dissertation defense, and a potential scientific discussion between the Committee Members and the Ph.D. candidate could be provided.

If needed/desired, any further comments on the dissertation defense, the Q & A sessions, and noteworthy achievements or events.

One paragraph on the final outcome of the Ph.D. dissertation and the vote of the Committee

Name & Signature of Ph.D. Dissertation Committee Chair

*(Please use official KAUST letterhead for this letter)*