

The Dissertation Proposal and Defense

After advancement to candidacy and after the student has made sufficient progress in research to begin formulating a possible dissertation project, the student, in consultation with the advisor, organizes a dissertation committee. The role of this committee is 3-fold: (1) To aid the student in developing a dissertation proposal, (2) To be the examining body for the presentation and defense of the dissertation proposal, and (3) To serve as the examining body for the presentation and defense of the completed dissertation. The philosophy of the Neuroscience Graduate Program is to organize these committees early and have them meet with the students often. The dissertation committee should be comprised of one member of the executive committee and four faculty members including the student's mentor. Of those three remaining faculty choices, it is recommended that two are from the NGP but the last one may be from another department or from outside UVa. The faculty members may not all be from the same department. **The dissertation committee may be comprised of the members of the faculty advisory committee that the student assembled for advancement to candidacy, but need not be.** In general, meetings with the dissertation committee take place at least once each semester.

The dissertation proposal itself has two parts. The first part should represent an introduction to the research area, a presentation of the outstanding problems, and an historical perspective indicating the importance of the work. It should in fact represent the first chapter of the dissertation. This introduction may represent a part of the document prepared for advancement to candidacy if appropriate, or may evolve from that document. The second portion of the dissertation proposal should describe in detail the specific experiments to be carried out, anticipated results, and possible interpretations. The defense of the proposal will involve an evaluation of the student's grasp of the problem area, their research methodology, and their understanding of the possible interpretations of any data that may be obtained.

In general, the dissertation proposal is written in much the same format as a research grant. The introduction consists of (1) A statement of overall objective of the research, (2) A review of the previous significant work and the current status of the research in the area, (3) The rationale for the proposed research plan, including the assumptions which are made in carrying out a given series of studies, and (4) Any preliminary studies relating to the problem.

The second portion of the proposal should (1) List the specific aims of the research, (2) Describe in detail the methods of procedure including experimental protocols, and the methods of data analysis, and a realistic schedule for the study, and (3) Provide a consideration of the possible interpretations and significance of the study.

The Dissertation and Defense

The student must complete an independent research project under the close supervision of the primary mentor, and with regular consultation with the dissertation committee. The student should meet at least once per semester with members of the dissertation committee. This research must constitute an original and significant contribution to the field and is to be fully presented in the candidate's dissertation. **The work must be of a quality acceptable for publication in a recognized scientific journal.** The formal defense of the thesis is attended by the members of the dissertation committee and is open to all members of the faculty of the NGP and the faculty of the University of Virginia as a whole. **Notice of the dissertation defense seminar must be given at least two weeks in advance of the public seminar.** This notification must originate from the Program Coordinator so that all individuals involved in the program are properly notified.

GSAS Graduation requirements

<http://www.virginia.edu/artsandsciences/grad/deadline.htm> This web page provides important deadlines regarding graduation. In order to graduate, there are several forms that need to be completed. The Graduate School of Arts & Sciences office in Cabell Hall will provide a packet of information and the necessary forms. Please see the Program Coordinator with questions about completing all the necessary paperwork.

Prior to Dissertation Defense

Blue form: (Application to Graduate included in packet from GSAS) is to be signed by your mentor, Graduate Program Coordinator and the Program Director. Please list all the graduate courses that have been completed. ISIS can be used to print off an unofficial transcript. It is important that the Graduate Program Coordinator receives a copy of this form.

Post Dissertation Defense

Green form: Certifies that you have passed your dissertation defense examination and that you have fulfilled the requirements for your degree. This form should be signed by the committee members after your dissertation defense and secondly by the Program Director. It should be submitted to the Graduate Office in Cabell Hall. It is important that the Program Coordinator receives a copy of this form.

Thesis

For guidelines on the format of your thesis please see the following web page: <http://www.virginia.edu/artsandsciences/grad/thesis.html> When your Thesis has been approved and signed, take it over to 438 Cabell Hall (include a photocopy of title page and abstract). Go to Alderman Library to order your copies. The Neuroscience Graduate Program will reimburse the student for the copy of the thesis that is required to be submitted to the program.