Columbian College of Arts and Sciences  
Graduate Committee  

Procedures for Ph.D. Examinations  
December 6, 2011

This document lays out requirements and best practices for Ph.D. examinations in Columbian College. **Bold** text indicates Columbian College requirements.

1. Construction of examination committee

Examination committees must be composed of at least six members, allocated in the following manner.

a. The dissertation committee—A director and two readers who have advised the student during the dissertation research process. It is permissible for the director to be drawn from outside of the academic unit in which the student is enrolled. **If the director is from outside of the academic unit, then the committee must also have a co-director from inside the unit.**

b. Two examiners—**Examiners cannot have had a direct role in the dissertation research process.** One examiner must be from within the academic unit, with the other examiner coming from outside of the academic unit.

c. The chair of the examination—The examination is chaired by a member of the academic unit in which the student is enrolled. **The chair cannot be drawn from the dissertation committee or examiners.** It is recommended that the director of graduate studies, if not an examiner or on the dissertation committee, serve as chair. The chair takes no part in the examination itself, except, if asked, to pose an introductory question to elicit an opening summary from the student.

2. Pre-examination preparation

The members of the examination committee should be chosen by the dissertation director, in consultation with the student. If there is a difference of opinion, then the director of graduate studies should get involved in the selection process.

**The version of the dissertation that is to be defended must be circulated to all examination committee members at least one month prior to the examination.**

Ph.D examinations should be announced in the academic unit at the time the dissertation is circulated to examination committee members, one month prior to the examination.

3. Examination procedures

a. The chair of the examination assembles members of the examination committee. While the student and any observers are outside of the room, the chair discusses examination procedures with committee members. Issues that are discussed should include the
number of rounds of questioning, the order of questioning, and the time allocated for questioning. Typical practices include two rounds of questioning, the outside examiner questioning the student first, and each committee member questioning the student for 10-15 minutes per round. **The dissertation director does not participate in the questioning.**

b. Opening the examination—The student, dissertation director, and examination chair all stand at head of table for the following introduction.

   Chair: *This is a final examination for the degree of doctor of philosophy. I call on the director of the candidate’s research to present the candidate.*

   Director: *It is my pleasure to present [student name], who has completed all of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy. [Student name] and her/his dissertation are before the committee for examination.*

c. The student, director, and chair are seated, and the examination begins. Typically, the student provides a brief (10 minute) summary of the research question, methodology, and main findings. This presentation can be omitted if the student has already made a presented the dissertation in the academic unit.

d. **When the questioning is completed, the student and any observers leave the room.** The dissertation director is called upon to make a case for the merits of the dissertation and the student’s performance at the examination.

e. Each examiner and dissertation committee member offers an evaluation of the dissertation and examination.

f. The examination committee must decide (1) whether the student has passed or failed the examination and (2) if the student has passed, what revisions to the dissertation, if any, are required? **The decision to pass the dissertation and defense is reached by a majority vote.**

g. In the event that revisions are required, the examination committee must decide which members wish to see and approve the revised dissertation, as well as the deadline by which revisions must be submitted. Ordinarily, only the dissertation director reviews the revisions, but other committee members can be involved if they wish. Regardless, the director should be given clear instructions to convey to the student regarding the nature and timing of expected revisions.

h. Once these matters have been decided, the student and any observers are invited back into the room. The student stands with the chair of the examination at the head of table. If the student has passed, all members of the examination committee should be standing when the student re-enters the room. The chair announces the results of the examination.

i. The dissertation director or chair of the examination reports the results of the examination to the director of graduate studies, who then completes the requisite paperwork and submits this paperwork to Columbian College.