

Recommended Protocols for PhD Student Dissertation Proposal Defense

Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering (CEE)

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The **Dissertation Proposal Defense** must be administered under the leadership of the Major Professor (MP). In the case of a committee that has a Co-Major Professor, the Co-Major Professor should equally share responsibility in the administration of the examinations. Communication amongst the MP and the Committee and between the MP and the student should be documented for future reference. These protocols have been approved by the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering (CEE) Graduate Program Advisory Committee (GPAC) and are strongly recommended for implementation by all CEE full-time regular faculty members in their role as Major Professors or Graduate Faculty serving on dissertation committees. The protocols supplement all applicable University Graduate School (UGS) policies and procedures; they focus on operational aspects of proposal defense.

1. Timing

Once the PhD student has processed the Candidacy (D-2) form, he/she can enroll in dissertation credits, but can take any additional needed coursework in support of his/her research and dissertation. The MP and the PhD student should plan to hold the proposal defense on a day, at least, one year prior to the expected graduation date.

2. Defense Planning

The proposal defense should be scheduled at least two weeks prior to the UGS deadline for submission of the proposal defense (D3) form (<https://gradschool.fiu.edu/calendar-deadlines/#doctoral>).

The student should prepare a detailed proposal that contains, at a minimum, background information, problem statements, objectives, literature review, methodology, work plan, and schedule. This proposal, once approved by the MP, should be submitted to each one of the committee members, at least two weeks in advance to the scheduled day of the defense.

The student should prepare a quality MS Power Point presentation or equivalent based on the detailed proposal developed. The student should send the presentation file, CV, and transcripts to the committee at least three business days prior to the defense date.

3. Proposal Defense

The student should make a room reservation, with equipment that supports the audio-visual needs of the presentation. The presentation should be scheduled for a two-hour period (or else depending on MP's or Committee's expectations).

The presentation should be announced, at least, throughout the FIU Engineering Center, and open to anyone interested. Faculty and students are especially welcome and encouraged to attend it.

The dissertation proposal defense should follow a structured process coordinated by the MP to ensure fairness, clarity, and effective evaluation. The MP introduces the candidate, manages the presentation and question-and-answer session, and ensures that audience and committee questions occur in an orderly manner. After the presentation and discussion, the committee meets privately to evaluate the proposal and oral performance and determine the outcome. The committee's decision and feedback are then communicated to the candidate by the MP, who also provides guidance on next steps if revisions or a second and final defense are required. Committee members complete the required evaluation documentation, and the MP is responsible for collecting and submitting these materials to the departmental office for official recordkeeping.

4. Form Submission

Based on the approved detailed proposal, the student should produce a proposal document to be also shared with the Committee members for their input; this proposal document is required by the UGS and is presented with the D-3 form.

The Dissertation Proposal Form contains two sections as shown below. The student should follow the instructions and prepare succinct document with sufficient details for each category of the form. The document should be reviewed and approved by the MP, then shared with the Committee. Upon approval from the Committee, the student then submit the dissertation proposal defense form through their myFIU portal.

The online form required by the UGS is shown below as a reference.

Dissertation Proposal Defense (D3) Form

Section I

- **Dissertation Proposal Title**
- **Introduction/Statement of Problem and Aims. In no more than 250 words:** Provide a brief summary of the significance of the project in non-specialist language.
- **Research Question(s)/Objectives/Hypothesis. In no more than 250 words:** Describe your research objective, questions, and/or hypotheses.
- **Methods/Experimental Design/Techniques for Research Question(s)/Objective/Hypothesis. (Most significant section and biggest component part of the dissertation proposal.)**
 - 1) Describe in detail your planned research design and analysis,
 - 2) Include what type of data will be collected,
 - 3) How they will be collected, and
 - 4) Any field, laboratory and/or data analysis methodology to be conducted.

- **Timeline to degree completion/Schedule of work.** Include milestones such as data collection, chapter writing, editing, and defense timeline. Make sure to include months/year for each milestone.

Section II - Compliance Attachments

- Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) certification is required. Make sure to register for your RCR course to obtain your RCR certification.
- If your proposed research requires approval for IRB, IACUC, IBC, please do attach the Office of Research Integrity approval memo that includes your name. These memos must be current and valid for at least one year.