Dissertation Defense and Final Copy

1.58 Scheduling the Defense: After you complete the dissertation and your committee has approved it, you should arrange for the defense. Contact the members of your committee and get all to agree on a day and time; be sure to clear this time with the Department Assistant. Once everything is arranged, the Department Assistant notifies the department faculty.

You should present one copy of the dissertation and an abstract to the Department at least three weeks prior to the scheduled oral defense. For a period of two weeks or more a copy of the dissertation must be made available for the Art History Department faculty’s inspection and approval. A copy of the abstract will be sent to the Dean of Students.

Observe that arranging the defense takes time and that if you are trying to schedule it before having actually finished the dissertation, you face a potentially tricky situation. Faculty may be quite reluctant to agree to a defense before approving the dissertation in its entirety. A defense cannot be scheduled with the Dean of Students unless the dissertation is complete. Especially if you will have to fly in for the defense, your best strategy is to plan to finish the dissertation and to submit an entire copy to each committee member at least three months before you hope to defend it. If the faculty takes six weeks to review and approve the text (not an unreasonable amount of time), you’ll then have four weeks to make final plans for the defense. (Remember that everything must be settled three weeks before the actual date.)

If you are under considerable pressure to finish the dissertation (because of the demands of your newly secured employment, for example), be sure to discuss the situation carefully with your committee and be aware of the considerable difficulties you face in trying to accelerate the last stages of your graduate career.

1.59 The Defense: The entire Art History faculty is invited to attend the defense. You have the option of opening the defense to your fellow students at the University, and you should inform the Department Chair of your decision about whether the defense will be open or closed well in advance of the date. Your committee is required to be present. At least one committee member must be physically present at the defense; other members must be virtually present by Skype if they cannot be physically present. Note that neither the Department nor the University has funds to bring readers to the campus for dissertation defenses. In addition to the committee, the Dean of Students sends one faculty member from another department, who is called the "Dean's Representative."

The primary advisor usually opens and concludes the proceedings. During the defense, you will be examined about the dissertation and closely related matters. You should be prepared to summarize and evaluate your conclusions, and to position your achievements within the scholarship of your fields of inquiry. All faculty present may ask questions, but students are only present as observers. Defenses usually last from one and one-half to two hours.

Possibly the greatest value of the defense for the student is the opportunity to have your work critiqued and evaluated from different perspectives, and to defend and clarify your ideas accordingly. This process should help to show you the sorts of research and revision that will be required to turn your dissertation into a book or series of publications. Thus, while the defense is the culmination of your graduate career, it should also serve to prepare you for your future work.

At the end of the defense, you (and any students who have attended) will be asked to step outside. The faculty will discuss the defense and with the approval of a majority of the examiners, you will be recommended for the PhD degree. In the event that the faculty should vote not to award the degree, the Chair and dissertation committee will consult with the Dean of Students to consider the possibility of a second oral examination.

1.60 Annual Dissertation Prize: The Department awards an annual Feitler Prize of $2000 each spring for the best dissertation defended in the previous calendar year. (For example, dissertations defended during the calendar year 2012 are eligible for the prize awarded in the spring of 2013.) The award is recorded by the University Registrar and is included in the list of student awards on the department website. The process works as follows: faculty members nominate exceptional dissertations for consideration by letter; nominated dissertations are read by a faculty committee; and the committee’s recommendation is presented, discussed, and voted on at a faculty meeting.

1.61 Final Copies: You must submit your completed, properly formatted dissertation electronically to the University’s Dissertation Office in Regenstein Library no later than the deadline distributed by the Dean of Students office in the quarter in which you expect to graduate. Students who submit their final, approved version by the first Friday of the quarter in which they plan to graduate do not have to register as a student in that quarter and thus will not pay the associated tuition and fees. The Dissertation Office will send this copy to ProQuest to place in its database, limited by any embargo for which you have received permission. The University Library does not retain a copy independent of ProQuest’s electronic service. Well in advance of filing, familiarize yourself with the Dissertation Office’s formatting requirements, most of which concern legibility and reproducibility. (The office no longer prescribes the academic style for aspects like citing references; those are decided by you and your committee.) Attend especially to all comments on images and copyright permissions, to avoid last-minute surprises. See https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/research/scholar/phd/students/copyright-issues/.

Changes may be suggested at or immediately after the defense. Dissertations requiring extensive revisions must be approved by a dissertation committee member via departmental form (available in the department office) before submitting the final version to the Dissertation Office. ProQuest processes dissertations for the University and notifies the Dissertation Office once it has received all required materials, which include a PDF of the dissertation text, a separate PDF of your illustrations or other supplemental materials, a publication agreement, copyright permissions where applicable, an abstract meeting ProQuest's strict formatting demands, and a dissertation processing fee. It is imperative that submitted dissertations are formatted according to the Dissertation Office formatting guidelines, which can be found on their website. Following final submission of the dissertation, the Department Coordinator submits a departmental approval form to the Dissertation Office.

1.62 ProQuest: The University requires submission of the dissertation to ProQuest/UMI Dissertation Publishing in order to confer the PhD degree, thus making dissertations available to the scholarly community at the University of Chicago and elsewhere. However, you may choose to “embargo,” i.e. block access to, your dissertation with ProQuest for up to two years without special permission. The policy is outlined at https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/research/scholar/phd/students/embargo-procedures/. You will still submit your dissertation to ProQuest as outlined in section 1.61, selecting the embargo option as part of your electronic submission, and the Dissertation Office will process the embargo with ProQuest on your behalf. If you embargo your dissertation, ProQuest will still include an abstract in its database. For information on how ProQuest may publish and sell your dissertation after the period of the embargo, see https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/research/scholar/phd/policies/embargo-policy/. To embargo your dissertation after submission or to request an extension, contact the Dissertation Office.
1.63 Illustrations and Copyrights: Images and unpublished source materials may form an essential and original component of your dissertation, but they are subject to complex national and international laws governing their use. For a basic summary of copyright laws in the United States, you may turn to the guidelines provided by ProQuest/UMI at http://www.proquest.com/blog/2013/copyright-when-its-yours-its-yours-with-apologies-to-attorneys.html.

You must submit illustrations essential to an understanding of your dissertation to your committee members, but you may choose to omit some or all of these in the copy you submit to the Dissertation Office/ProQuest, especially if you have not secured permission in writing (as required by ProQuest) to publish them. To remove only a few illustrations but include others, you should substitute insert blank boxes for the deleted images where they originally appeared on your pages but retain their captions below the boxes. To remove all illustrations, include the original list of illustrations but add a note stating that illustrations are not included for copyright reasons; in this case, omit the entire section of pages with illustrations. Likewise, in the case of unpublished source materials such as manuscripts, correspondence, or other archival papers, you may choose not to quote from them directly for a variety of reasons, including that publication permission in writing (required by ProQuest) has not been secured for their citation.

You should carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of including illustrations and/or unpublished source material for publication with ProQuest and consult your advisor for advice where applicable. The main advantage of inclusion may be that your dissertation will not lack essential evidence and will carry more scholarly weight. The main disadvantage may be that obtaining written copyrights for many or all of your images and/or unpublished source material before submitting your dissertation to ProQuest can be an expensive and time-intensive process. Please note that neither the Department nor the University provides funds for these expenses at this time.

1.64 Graduation: Typically, you will need to file an application to graduate in the first week of the quarter in which you plan to receive your degree. Students who also submit the final, approved version of their dissertation to the Dissertation Office by the first Friday of the quarter in which they plan to graduate do not have to register as a student in that quarter and thus will not pay the associated tuition and fees. Otherwise, final submission of the dissertation typically must be completed by 4:30 p.m. on the Friday that falls 4 weeks before convocation. Check with the Humanities Dean of Students office before the quarter in which you plan to graduate to get the specific deadlines for that quarter.