

Guidelines for Dissertation Outside Examiners

Claremont Graduate University
School of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences

The Psychology Ph.D. program normally adds one outside examiner to the dissertation committee to review each Ph.D. candidate's dissertation work at the final examination. The role of the outside examiner is to provide an outside perspective and to assure that high academic standards are maintained in our students' research. Therefore, the outside examiner may not be a close professional colleague, friend, or supervisor of the candidate.

A complete dissertation that has been reviewed by the CGU committee and deemed ready for outside review should be sent to the outside examiner about two weeks before the examination. The outsider examiner is expected to review the dissertation and to take part actively in questioning and discussion. It is helpful to the candidate if examiners provide written feedback on the dissertation.

The examination normally lasts about two hours, including deliberation and debriefing. At the beginning of the period, the dissertation committee chair will excuse the student briefly while the examiners decide about the order and focus of their questions. The topics may include the review of background research, hypotheses, methodology, findings, interpretations, and recommendations. Each committee member normally takes a turn at leading the questioning for a period.

When the examination is completed, the candidate is briefly excused, and the committee decides by majority vote whether the performance is passing. It is common at this point for minor changes to specific sections of the dissertation to be required or recommended, and occasionally more major changes are specified as necessary before the committee members sign their approval of the dissertation. A common decision is for all committee members except the chair to sign the approval forms, but for the chair to sign only after all requested changes are made.

The CGU Psychology Faculty is very appreciative of the involvement and conscientious efforts of outside examiners, and our students often comment that the outside examiner made important contributions to the value of their research, and helped them start on their professional careers.