Department of Communication Arts
Graduate Committee Policies on Dissertation Defenses

1. Composition of the Dissertation Committee

   The Graduate School requires a minimum of five members: up to four members may be from within the Department and at least one member must be from outside the Department. Four members must be ladder-track graduate faculty. At the discretion of the dissertation director, one of the five may be either emeritus faculty, a faculty member from another institution, or academic staff.

2. Dissertation Defense

   The Department considers the physical presence of all five committee members during the defense in the best interests of the student, since it allows for full scholarly interchange and the most conscientious and rigorous advising of dissertators. It should be noted that the Ph.D. degree is conferred by the Department as represented by the Dissertation Committee and not by the advisor alone. For this reason, the defense requires serious discussion and consensus among the committee members. The dissertator and the major professor are advised to plan the defense well in advance and to consult with all committee members before setting the date for the defense so that all can be present.

   It is expected that both the major professor and the dissertator will be physically present at the defense. Exceptions to this rule can be made only with application to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will consult with the Graduate Committee as a whole. Exceptions will not be made solely for pragmatic reasons (e.g., it is inconvenient for a student working elsewhere to return to Madison for the defense).

   In cases in which a committee member other than the major professor is away (for example, on sabbatical and out of the country) and can not be replaced, a mediated form of communication in live time is permitted. This is allowable for two members out of the five without consultation with the Graduate Committee.

   In cases in which a committee member agrees to come and then fails to show up, the defense can and should proceed, with additional consultation between the student, advisor and absent member at a later date as per Graduate School policy.