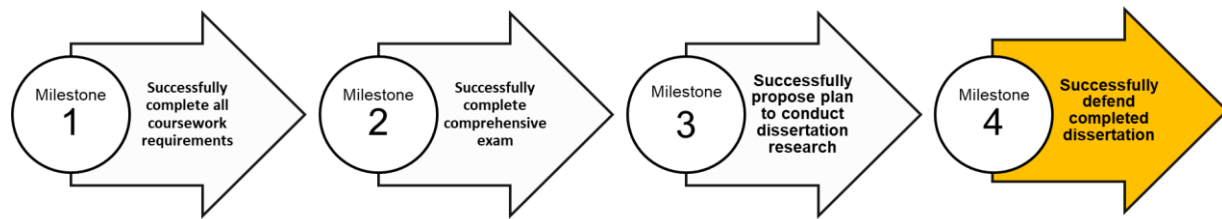


## MILESTONE CHECKLIST 4: FINISHING YOUR DISSERTATION



### Step 1: Institutional Review Board Approval

After completing any necessary edits/revisions following your proposal meeting, you should submit your completed application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). You cannot begin data collection until after approval from the IRB. Some things to consider:

- You must use the forms posted on the IRB website ([here](#)). This will include submitting consent forms and all materials to be used for recruitment and in data collection.
- ANYTHING you do that involves human participants must receive IRB approval, including secondary data, surveys, etc.
- All forms must be submitted via PACS using your BU UserID and password. You may need to request an account to access PACS (information on the IRB website).

### Step 2: Data Collection & Analysis

After receiving approval from the IRB office, it's time to do the work. Hopefully you crafted a clear plan in your proposal for how you'll gain access to participants and what research procedures you'll follow. Stick to the script- your committee approved the plan so that's what you should do.

Oftentimes data collection and analysis can take longer than doctoral students anticipate, so please plan accordingly. Make a timeline for yourself, with estimates for how it will take to conduct the research (i.e., recruit participants, do the interviews, surveys, etc.), analyze the data, and write up the results. Keep in mind that writing chapters 4 and 5 (assuming you're doing a "traditional" dissertation) can go pretty fast, but getting feedback from your chair and other committee members can take several weeks.

### Step 3: Preparing the Final Chapters

If you haven't already, make sure to **review closely** the Dissertation formatting standards **CLOSELY** ([here](#)) on the Graduate School website. You should follow APA Standards for things like the reference list, tables, and internal citations; however, you will need to follow the Graduate School formatting guide for margins, headers, and the table of contents. **START THIS PROCESS EARLY!** There are no exceptions to the formatting guidelines.

#### **Step 4: Identify an Outside Examiner**

In addition to the three members who participated in the proposal meeting, you will need a fourth person who is designated as the Outside Examiner (please read closely the guidelines in the Graduate School Manual [here](#)). **This individual serves as a representative for the Dean of the Graduate School and therefore MUST be approved by the Graduate School at least 30 days PRIOR to your defense.** Please discuss who an appropriate person would be with your dissertation chair. Again, make sure to read the policies set forth by the Graduate School closely.

After identifying an Outside Examiner who agrees to serve in this capacity, email the director of the CRA Doctoral Program with their name, department/college, and email address. If the individual you requested is not on the pre-approved list posted on the Graduate School website, you will also need to complete a nomination form and share their CV. The director will then determine if the individual is appropriate and if so, then seek official approval from the Graduate School.

#### **Step 5: Complete the Graduate Application for Degree**

Once you get to the point where it looks likely you will be able to set a Defense Meeting, you should complete the **Graduate Application for Degree** (GAFD) form in BU Brain (directions for completing this form [here](#)). This form requires you provide your name as you would like it printed on your diploma and to providing a mailing address. If you'd like your name to be included in the Commencement booklet, you **MUST** submit this by the date identified online. Otherwise, plan to submit it prior to your defense date.

After completing the GAFD, you will receive an email from the Graduate School to complete the **Recommendation for Award** (this step often gets overlooked- please make sure to check your Spam folder if you don't see this). **Please complete this form ASAP.** It will ask you to submit information about your degree (Doctor of Philosophy) and major (Community Research and Action), as well as the:

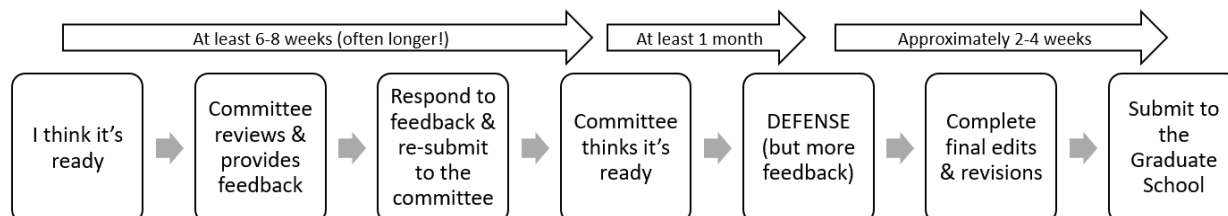
- Title of your dissertation;
- Name of the Graduate Director (currently Loretta Mason-Williams); and
- Name of your advisor and your doctoral committee (FYI- in our program, typically your principal advisor is the same as your graduate committee chair), including the outside examiner.

FYI- if you plan to participate in Commencement (highly recommended!), you will need to sign up for that too! Make sure to visit the Commencement website ([here](#)) often for details about purchasing regalia, reserving tickets, etc.

#### **Step 6: Plan Ahead**

Make sure to consider the Graduate School deadline for the final submission of your dissertation and then plan backward (the deadline is *typically* the last week of classes). Prior to this FINAL submission and the defense, you will need to allow time for your Chair and other committee members to provide feedback, which typically takes at least 2-3 weeks (it's really challenging for a faculty member to find 3-4 hours to read a chapter thoroughly). According to the CRA Handbook, committee members should

receive the dissertation at least a month before the defense and should unanimously approve the dissertation draft before the defense is scheduled. Work closely with your chair to make sure you can meet this deadline. Similarly, you will need to allow time for final revisions required by your committee **AFTER** your defense. All that said, if you plan to graduate in mid-May, you likely need to have your completed dissertation to your committee by mid-March for a defense in mid-April. Again, work with your chair to establish a plan and do-able timeline.



### Step 7: Schedule a Date

Once you've got an **ALMOST** completed dissertation, work with your chair and committee members to select a Defense Date and Time. Some things to consider:

- Virtual defenses are still permissible according to Graduate School Policy. This could include all members being virtual or just select members. You should discuss with the chair and the committee members their preference (and follow **THEIR** lead. If they prefer to do it in person then that's what should happen).
- The defense should be scheduled for a 2-hour window.
- **ALL** members must be present (whether in-person or virtual).
- Make sure important people are also available- your parents, a partner/spouse, colleagues, and friends. Most of the Oral Examination/Defense is a public event and your supporters will be excited to participate!

### Step 8: Submit Necessary Dissertation Defense Information

Once you have a defense date set, please use the Word template posted in Brightspace to provide CRA Program Administrative Assistant, Lee Belknap, with all the necessary information. **Submit the form to Brightspace at least one month in advance of the Defense to allow time for publishing the announcement and reserving a space.**

According to Graduate School policy, the Dissertation Defense must be a public examination and open to anyone interested. Therefore, once the date is set it must be shared broadly via email on CCPA listservs. On the provided form, please make sure to include:

- Date and time of the defense
- If the defense will be virtual or in-person
- Committee members, including the Outside Examiner, and their email addresses
- Dissertation title and abstract

### **Step 9: Spread the News!**

In addition to your peers and faculty and staff members in CCPA who may want to attend, you may also want to invite family members and friends to attend the defense. You should encourage them to come to see this important milestone (but forewarn them that the defense typically takes 2 hours). In addition to the parts that are open to the public, there is typically a portion of time devoted for only the committee members. If your family and friends attend in person, they can spend this time in the lobby area if they desire.

### **Step 10: Prepare for the Defense**

At the start of your defense, you will be asked to share a SHORT (approximately 20 minutes) presentation on the purpose, research questions, methods, findings, and results. Keep in mind that your committee members have read your chapters (some of them MANY times) so it really does not need to be a long presentation- just enough to provide public members a bit of background and to highlight key findings. Make sure the presentation is prepared in a professional manner!!!

### **Step 11: DEFEND YOUR DISSERTATION!**

Keep in mind the key functions of the defense: to serve as an opportunity “to respond to examiners' questions concerning the dissertation and to defend the validity of the dissertation.” During the examination, anyone attending may ask questions about your choices, your analysis, the findings, and your conclusions based on the findings. Committee members will likely also ask questions about your future research aims based on your results- now that you know what you know, what will you do next? The Chair of the committee is responsible for leading the meeting, typically following this format:

- Committee member introductions, along with possible introductions of public members/guests
- Presentation by doctoral candidate
- Questions from the public
- Questions from committee members
- Doctoral candidate asked to leave so the committee may deliberate
- Doctoral candidate asked to return to share the decision

The decision of the committee must be unanimous and is documented using forms completed online. Please keep in mind that the decision may be that the committee requires additional revisions prior to approval - your Chair will assist with coordinating that final approval and submission of the form.

### **Step 12: Finalize your dissertation and submit it to the Graduate School**

Hopefully, you paid attention to Step 3 and followed the guidelines for formatting. Still, there may be additional edits, revisions, and additions required by your Committee. Work with your Chair, pay attention to deadlines, and get this done! FYI- if you have already accepted a position following graduation, completing this and the next step may be a requirement for starting the position or may impact your salary.

Submitting your dissertation is done via ProQuest, which allows it to be registered in the U.S. Library of Congress. You will be asked questions about copyright, purchasing bound copies, etc. If possible, I recommend purchasing at least one bound copy for yourself and one for your advisor.

**Step 13: Just a few more forms!**

After you submit your dissertation via ProQuest, you will be emailed a link to complete the Survey of Earned Doctorates and pay a dissertation fee. Both are required in order to have your degree conferred.

**Step 14: Celebrate!**

You worked really hard to get to this point and you had a lot of support from many people in your life. Commencement is an opportunity to celebrate the joy, passion, and determination that it took to get to this point. While I know it can be expensive to participate in commencement, the experience is priceless.