

The Doctoral Ceremony in the University of Oulu / University of Oulu Graduate School

The purpose and function of a public examination of a doctoral dissertation

A doctoral dissertation must undergo a public examination (Finnish law). A public examination has three functions:

- it provides an opportunity to establish publically, and in as reliable way as possible, that a doctoral candidate has her/himself produced the dissertation, and that it meets the academic standards generally required of a doctoral dissertation
- it provides an opportunity for the official Opponent and other interested parties to thoroughly look into the contents of the doctoral dissertation by listening, making remarks, asking questions and discussing with the candidate
- it offers an occasion which breaks away somewhat from the everyday work of the university, whereby research results can be presented in a highly visible manner

A public examination of a doctoral dissertation should represent high-level discussion between two (or three) researchers, who know their field well, on topics arising from the dissertation. Informed laypersons should be able to follow the discussion, and it should also inspire thought in them.

The Opponent and the discussion during the viva can no longer have an effect on the quality of the doctoral dissertation itself, but they may indeed affect the projected grade. During the public examination, measure is made of the researcher's ability to justify her/his choices and views, and the ability to consider the relationship of her/his work to the science in broader terms.

Language	The Kustos of the public examination makes any decision about the language of the viva in advance, after consultation with the doctoral candidate and the Opponent. The language used must be either Finnish, Swedish or the language of the doctoral dissertation. The viva can be conducted in some other language as well, if this meets with the candidate's approval. Upon agreement, the Opponent and candidate can also use a different language in the public examination.
Dress code	You should consult with the Kustos and the Opponent about the dress code both for the viva and the Karonkka.
Consideration towards the Opponent	<p>The doctoral candidate should submit the manuscript of the dissertation to the opponent as soon as it is ready. Normally the printing of the dissertation is left until so late that the Opponent has no time to work with the end product properly, beyond just glancing at the main points. It would be good to send an opponent from abroad an English language description of the progress and duration of the public examination, and a summary of your 20 minute introductory lecture.</p> <p>The doctoral candidate acts as the host/ess for the Opponent. The Opponent may need assistance with travel arrangements, e.g. booking flights, or transport from the airport. Also, you should establish which hotels have accommodation agreements with the University.</p> <p>It is a good idea to get to know the Opponent; this could be over dinner on the evening before the viva. On such an occasion, it is possible to go through the schedule for the public examination day, and agree on dress, and on how you will address each other (the Opponent should be addressed as respectfully as possible e.g. Professor xx, Doctor xx, Sir, unless agreed otherwise).</p>

	<p>Sometimes the Opponent may inform you beforehand what s/ he is going to ask in the viva.</p>
<p>Preparing yourself for the viva</p>	<p>Before your own public examination, it is a good idea to go to listen to other public doctoral examinations in your own department. You will get familiar with the flow of such an event, and you also get hints and clues about the contents and structure of the short introductory lecture. You can get an idea of what an opponent can pick up on, and how you can defend your work. It is advisable to go over the contents of your work, and know its strengths and weaknesses, and you should develop some counter-arguments. It would be good to rehearse for the occasion or at least practice answering questions. Some departments arrange mock defence occasions for post-graduate students, but you can organise a similar situation yourself by asking one or more of your colleagues to read your dissertation and pose questions in an opponent-like manner.</p> <p>might be worth to prepare some slides or transparencies of the most important diagrams and tables for the occasion. In your own special copy of the dissertation prepared for the occasion, you could even add ready-made answers to questions that you predict will come up, or have notes added. You should prepare your Lectio praecursoria in advance. This is a short lecture which gives an introduction in lay terms to the subject. Normally it is delivered in the candidate's mother tongue regardless of the language of the dissertation or the rest of the viva. Do remember that the introductory lecture might be the only section of the whole doctoral examination ceremony that is understandable for the whole audience.</p> <p>You should also be prepared for media interest in your research.</p>
<p>Just before the viva</p>	<p>It would be good to take a look at the lecture hall in advance, together with the Kustos and the Opponent, for example, in the morning of the day of the viva. Then you can also go over the movements and planned sequence of events, and check that the tables and the lectern etc. are appropriately located in the room. You should make sure that the equipment needed (overhead projector and any other possible aids) are all there, and that they function properly. If you need help with showing slides, you should arrange this with somebody beforehand. Check the decorations and drink. There should be enough copies of the dissertation for the audience in the lecture hall. Normally 40 -50 copies is a suitable amount. It is up to you to make sure that someone will deliver the books to the lecture hall on time.</p>
<p>Outfit/Dress code in the viva</p>	<p>Male doctoral candidate, Kustos and Opponents wear tails and a black waistcoat, or a dark suit. Females wear knee-length or longer black skirt or dress. A dress should not be too low-cut or otherwise revealing. A black coat can be worn over a dress or a blouse. Opponents who have been awarded their Doctoral degrees abroad wear their own academic outfit, which might include a gown, hood and cap. The Kustos and the opponent hold their doctoral hats in their hands when entering and leaving the lecture hall. For the duration of the viva, they place their hats on the table in front of them with the lyre emblem facing the audience.</p> <p>There is no clear code about what the audience is expected wear. It is quite acceptable to attend a public doctoral examination wearing every-day clothing.</p>

	<p>Guests who have received a formal invitation from the doctoral candidate often wear a smart outfit.</p>
<p>Process/Progress of the ceremony</p>	<p>A public examination ceremony starts 15 minutes past the full hour, by which time the audience should have arrived in the lecture hall. On arrival for the public examination, the doctoral candidate enters the lecture hall first, followed by the Kustos and finally the opponent. The audience stands up as they enter the room.</p>
<p>The opening of the public examination</p>	<p>After they have reached their places (the doctoral candidate on the left of the Kustos), the Kustos declares the public examination opened by saying: "...as the Kustos nominated by the University of Oulu Graduate School, I declare the public examination to have begun". The Kustos and the Opponent(s) sit down.</p>
<p>The doctoral candidate's introductory lecture (lectio praecursoria)</p>	<p>The doctoral candidate remains standing to give the introductory lecture, in which he explains the background of his research, and the points of contact with scientific and practical life problems. This lectio praecursoria may last 20 minutes at the most. It is normally given in Finnish and an Opponent from abroad is provided with a translation. The lectio begins with: "Honourable Kustos, honourable Opponent, ladies and gentlemen." After the lecture is finished, the doctoral candidate says: "I now request, honourable Professor (Doctor etc.)... as the Opponent nominated by the University of Oulu Graduate School, to offer any criticism, to which my doctoral dissertation, in your opinion, gives rise".</p>
<p>The Opponent's background presentation</p>	<p>The Opponent stands up to offer a short background presentation from her/his perspective about the piece of research which is under review. Finally, he informs the listeners that he will begin the detailed examination of the research. After the Opponent's presentation, the Opponent and the doctoral candidate sit down. When there is more than just one Opponent, they must agree mutually on how they will share the duties, and inform about the division in their own background presentations.</p>
<p>Examination of the doctoral dissertation</p>	<p>After this, the Opponent examines the doctoral dissertation, beginning by looking at general questions such as the research topic, methods of the research and the choice of research data; then s/he moves on to a detailed examination. At the end of the examination, the Opponent is expected to give a summary, in which there is an assessment of the significance to the discipline of the results presented in the doctoral dissertation. The Opponent is allowed a maximum of four (4) hours to spend on his examination, so that there remains enough time for possible further opponents to come forward. If the examination becomes prolonged, it is possible to have a break, which is announced by the Kustos. The public examination may last a maximum of six hours.</p>

The final the statement of the Opponent	Upon completion of the examination, the opponent stands up to deliver his final statement, during in which the doctoral candidate stands too. After this, the Opponent sits down.
The closing speech by the doctoral candidate	The doctoral candidate will then thank the opponent, and then turning to the audience will deliver the following invitation: "I would now like to invite those members of the distinguished audience who have anything to ask or remarks to make about my dissertation to ask the Kustos to be given the floor." The Kustos acts as the Chair, giving the floor in turns, making sure that the doctoral candidate has an opportunity to respond to each remark immediately; and the Kustos is the guardian of the relevance of the questions. Generally nobody asks to be given the floor. According to convention any extra opponents that have come forward are invited to the evening party (the Karonkka), but, again in keeping with convention, they do not attend.
Closing of the public examination	The Kustos stands up to close the public examination saying: " I declare this public examination closed". Before the audience leaves the lecture hall, the doctoral candidate invites everybody to attend a coffee or sparkling wine reception. The Kustos and the opponent carry their doctoral hats in their hands when leaving the lecture hall, and they leave in the same order they entered: the doctoral candidate leaves first, then the Kustos and finally the Opponent. The audience is not expected to applaud nor show any signs of approval during the examination. When the doctoral candidate is outside the lecture hall, and has had an opportunity to thank the Opponent and the Kustos, the guests and audience can offer congratulations to the candidate.
After the examination	It is customary to congratulate the doctoral candidate, and give flowers after the public examination in front of the lecture hall where the examination took place. According to the general custom, the doctoral candidate invites everyone who attended the public examination for either coffee and cakes or sparkling wine after the ceremony. At this reception, it is customary to address speeches to the doctoral candidate, and presents are given by the Faculty, department or the unit. The official speeches are given later on in the examination day at the evening celebration, the Karonkka.

The evening celebration or the 'Karonkka'

The Karonkka is held in the evening of the examination day, at six, seven, or eight o'clock, depending on the schedule of the doctoral candidate and the Opponent. The Karonkka is arranged in honour of the Opponent, and the doctoral candidate acts as the host/ess. It is normally held in a restaurant, but it is possible to organize one at home.

The expenses of the traditional Karonkka are met by the doctoral candidate her/himself. It is also possible that you only pay for the Opponent and the Kustos' meal, whereas the other visitors pay for themselves, either in full or partially; this can happen with the guests buying a ticket for the dinner. It is quite commonplace that after the more official part of the Karonkka, other people are invited to the party at this later stage, depending on the doctoral candidate and her/his ability to pay, or then people move on to continue the party somewhere else, where everybody takes care of their own drinks.

Karonkka dress code	Normally a male doctoral candidate wears tails with a white waistcoat, and a female doctoral candidate wears an ankle-length black dress or some other plain coloured long dress, as does a female companion of a man wearing tails. Instructions on dress given in the invitation should be respected. The Karonkka tends today to be not quite as formal as it used to be, although there is a great deal of variation between universities and departments, and the individual tastes of the candidates. It is worth asking at your department for hints from colleagues and those who have attended a Karonkka.
Seating arrangement in the Karonkka	The seating arrangement is rather important. The doctoral candidate reserves a place for himself in the middle of the table. The doctoral candidate never sits at the head of the table. The Opponent is seated on the right of the doctoral candidate, in the place of honour, or if there are two Opponents, then the Senior Opponent takes this place. The Kustos of the public examination is seated on the left of the doctoral candidate. If there are two opponents, the Junior Opponent is seated in this place, and the Kustos is moved one seat further to the left. (Read more here (in Finnish): http://www.hallinto.oulu.fi/viestin/vaittelyperinteet.html)
Speeches	During the dinner, after the dessert and before coffee or tea, it is customary to deliver official speeches. The first one is given by the doctoral candidate, who directs the beginning of his speech to the Opponent, thanking her/him for examining his doctoral dissertation, and for the valuable remarks about it. After that, the doctoral candidate directs his/her speech towards the Kustos of the public examination. Then the doctoral candidate is free to direct the speech to people of his/her own choosing, such as the supervisor, other people who have contributed to the creation of the doctoral dissertation, the spouse, parents etc.

The next speaker is the Opponent, who directs his/her speech only to the doctoral candidate. The Kustos takes the floor next, particularly directing what he says towards the doctoral candidate, speaking about various stages in his life, having him as a student and the significance of his achievements.