8. Appendix B: Dissertation Defense

There are extensive University regulations concerning the composition of the dissertation committee and the conduct of the exam. These are in the Graduate Catalog which is online. Students and their advisors should be familiar with these regulations. University deadlines for graduation are also posted on the University's website at www.gradschool.umd.edu/. The following deals mostly with departmental regulations which are in addition to University regulations.

Composition of the Committee

1. University Requirements:

1. A minimum of five members, ALL of whom must be members of the Graduate Faculty (see http://www.gradschool.umd.edu/catalog/grad_faculty_policies.htm) of the University of Maryland. Thus, department faculty who are not Graduate Faculty must be nominated as Adjunct Members of the Graduate Faculty, and persons who are not on the faculty at the University of Maryland must be nominated as Special Members of the Graduate Faculty. This requires documentation and an approval process (see below). The University requires a six week lead time for the nomination of the committee. It is prudent to heed this deadline. The department's front office staff can assist with any questions.

2. At least three members of the committee must be Full members of the Graduate Faculty. (In general, this means that they are from the tenure/tenure track faculty.)

3. A faculty member who will serve as a representative of the Dean of the Graduate School. This is a tenured member of the Graduate Faculty from another tenure home than the student's primary advisor, or co-advisor(s).

2. Department of Astronomy requirements:

1. Committee chair is a member of the faculty of Department of Astronomy and a Full member of the Graduate Faculty.

2. One or two External Examiners who are not members of the faculty of the University of Maryland. (Note: People who are based elsewhere, such as Goddard, are eligible even if they are UMD adjunct professors or are employed through UMD.)

3. Three members of the Department faculty. (Note: This can include Research Associates or Research Scientists.)

4. The Chair of the Department of Astronomy is an ex officio member of all dissertation committees.

Please note that one person can satisfy more than one of the above requirements. This should help in keeping the size of the committee manageable.

Obtaining Approval for the Committee Membership

The student is responsible for giving the Nomination of Dissertation Committee form to the Chair at least eight weeks prior to the defense. The form should include the advisor's signature (but not the Graduate Director's). In a separate email to the Chair (cc-ing the department's front office staff and the advisor), the student should send: 1) the thesis title, 2) the proposed defense date, and 3) a list of proposed committee members. For each committee member who is not already a member of the UMD Graduate Faculty (see above), the student must also provide the member's CV and a brief justification for including the member on the committee. The Department Chair then provides this information to the
faculty, who must approve the committee membership. The Department Chair will then sign the form and give it to the front office, who will submit it to the Registrar's Office.

A Nomination to the Graduate Faculty Form must also be completed for each committee member not on the Graduate Faculty. The student must complete as much information as they can, obtain the Graduate Director's signature and provide the form(s) to the department's front office at least six weeks prior to the defense. The Department Chair will craft letters to the Dean of the Graduate School seeking approval for appointments to the Graduate Faculty.

The department's front office staff can assist with any questions relating to these forms.

**Scheduling and Conduct of the Dissertation**

The scheduling of the date of the exam and the selecting of the composition of the committee shall be the responsibility of the candidate and his or her advisor subject to the approval of the Director of the Program. The faculty examiners must normally be given ten working days to read the dissertation. The defense time and place must be announced to all members of the Graduate Faculty and graduate students at least five working days in advance, and a copy of the dissertation must be placed in the library at this time as well.

A member of the committee may participate remotely by video teleconference if the chair of the dissertation committee obtains permission from the Assistant Dean/Chief of Staff of the Graduate School. See the Graduate Catalog for details.

The committee having convened, it meets briefly in private to agree on procedures; e.g., length of time for the initial presentation by the candidate if one is given; maximum time interval allowed to an individual examiner on the first round of questioning.

The usual examination procedure will be for the candidate to make a short presentation which will be followed by questioning by the Committee.

**Dissertation Standards**

It is expected that the material or major results in an acceptable dissertation will be equivalent to that in a paper published in a major journal. The dissertation will contain a statement by the candidate saying which part of the work has been carried out by the candidate and which part by other people.

**Conclusion of the Examination**

After the examination is concluded, the candidate withdraws and the committee deliberates in private on the performance of the candidate. At this point the committee should proceed deliberately but expeditiously to a conclusion. Appropriately, the Chairman might ask each examiner in turn to comment on his part of the examination; after these comments, he might ask each member to comment on his view of the entire examination. Following this, the members should be polled for their vote. The various possible outcomes are as outlined in the University regulations.