

Instructions for assessing and defending dissertations

Faculty of Law – Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

March 2025

For supervisors, chairs of doctorate committee and PhD candidates

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Action plan for the supervisor

1. Before the information is entered in Hora Finita, a list of the proposed members of the doctorate committee should be sent to the dean by e-mail. This must include the name of the chair (ideally from within our Faculty). See Article 13 of the [VU Doctorate Regulations](#) for the requirements for the composition of the doctorate committee.
2. Providing the dean agrees, send an e-mail to the doctorate committee with brief details of the procedure (30-day deadline; individual assessment by committee members, based on an online form; the doctorate committee is also part of the opposition; defence to be conducted online or at the VU etc.).
3. As soon as the dissertation has been completed, it should be approved in Hora Finita.
4. Enter the committee members' names in Hora Finita. Make sure the correct titles, initials, first name, affiliations and gender are entered. Remember to enter the name of the chair before clicking on 'Submit for approval'.
5. Once the doctorate committee's composition has been approved by the dean and the Graduate School in Hora Finita, the dissertation will automatically be sent to the members of the doctorate committee, including a link to the assessment form. The supervisor/first supervisor will receive notification of this from Hora Finita. The e-mail to the committee will also contain some practical information, including the deadline (see [Annex 1](#) for an example).

As the supervisor, you are now recommended to send a more personal e-mail to the members of the doctorate committee. This should:

- state that they will have received an automatically generated e-mail containing a link to the dissertation;
- ask whether they would like to receive a printed copy of the dissertation (if so, the PhD candidate can send the copy by post);
- detail any non-standard agreements on the assessment period that may have been made beforehand;
- remind them that the assessment will not be disclosed to the PhD candidate or the supervisors, and that any suggestions for the PhD candidate should be given in a separate part of the form;
- remind them they are not allowed to contact the supervisor, co-supervisors or PhD candidate about the dissertation;
- state that they should contact the chair of the doctorate committee if they have any questions about the assessment.

6. The first supervisor and the PhD candidate will receive automatic notification from Hora Finita when the dissertation has been approved by the doctorate committee and the assessment has been approved by the dean. This will include any suggestions made by the doctorate committee. Please discuss any such suggestions with the PhD candidate. The manuscript may but does not necessarily have to be amended.
7. After a date for defending the dissertation has been set and recorded in Hora Finita,¹ the supervisor(s) and co-supervisor(s) will receive notification from Hora Finita. The first supervisor will be asked to enter a proposed list of the opposition members in Hora Finita. The composition of the opposition will normally be the same as the doctorate committee, but the dean may allow exceptions (see Article 13(2) [VU Doctorate Regulations](#)).
8. Once the composition of the opposition has been approved by the Graduate School and the dean, the opposition will receive an invitation from Hora Finita to attend the defending of the dissertation. This will also include practical information (see [Annex 2](#) for an example). As the supervisor, you are now recommended to send a more personal e-mail to the doctorate committee members. This should:
 - refer to the e-mail from the Beadle's Office: repeat the date, time and location;
 - remind them that everyone must arrive at the Forum conference centre (room 2D-02) at least half an hour beforehand and be dressed in accordance with the dress code;
 - state the language to be used during the ceremony;
 - ask each member of the doctorate committee to prepare at least two questions;
 - if applicable, include an invitation to drinks/lunch/dinner.
9. At least 2 weeks before the ceremony, the first supervisor will receive an e-mail from the Graduate School. This will include various practical questions about preparing for

¹ For details of the procedure for setting a date, see the information for the PhD candidate (page 5).

the ceremony:

1. Will the ceremony be in Dutch or English?
 2. List of the opposition, including their titles, first names, gender and affiliations.
 3. Will everyone be physically present?
 4. Will the defence include a PowerPoint presentation?
 5. Will the PhD candidate provide a 'lay talk' for non-specialists? If so, will it be in English?
 6. Who will be responsible for the laudation?
 7. Who will perform the ceremony?
-
10. About a week before the ceremony, the members of the opposition will receive an e-mail from Hora Finita. This will include a Zoom link. This link will automatically be sent to all members and supervisors, just in case anyone joins online at the last minute (see Annex 3).

Action plan for the chair of the doctorate committee

1. Enter your own assessment in Hora Finita.
2. If requested by one or more members, arrange for a meeting to discuss matters (under Article 13(7) of the [VU Doctorate Regulations](#)).
3. After the deadline has passed, liaise with the Graduate School on sending any necessary reminders to the committee members.
4. If the dissertation is approved, prepare a brief summary of the assessment and enter it in Hora Finita. **N.B.:** This summary – but NOT the assessments themselves – can be shared with the supervisor and co-supervisors.
5. If one or more members reject the dissertation, the chair must convene a meeting of all members of the doctorate committee. For more information, see Article 23 of the [VU Doctorate Regulations](#).

The procedure to be followed if one or more members of the committee reject the dissertation will delay the process. Delay causes uncertainty and stress for the supervisor and PhD candidate. It is the chair's responsibility to ensure, therefore, that the process is not delayed unnecessarily. If the process is clearly going to take a lengthy time to complete, the chair may, very exceptionally (see Article 23(1) of the [VU Doctorate Regulations](#)), contact and notify the first supervisor of the delay, without discussing the reasons for the delay.

If, after matters have been discussed, one or more members still believe the dissertation should be rejected, the chair will contact the first supervisor (NOT the PhD candidate directly) and offer the candidate the opportunity to make changes to the dissertation within 60 days (Article 23(7) [VU Doctorate Regulations](#)). The chair must notify the dean if this is not feasible.

6. The dean must also be notified if all (or almost all) the members believe that the dissertation is among the top 5% of publications in the relevant field. In that case, the dean will appoint two external referees as soon as possible. **N.B.:** The PhD candidate will NOT be notified of this. For full details of the procedure for awarding the distinction of cum laude, see Articles 31 and 32 of the [VU Doctorate Regulations](#).
7. Before the dissertation is defended: ask whether committee members can e-mail their questions to the chair of the doctorate committee so as to avoid overlap (**N.B.:** Do not involve the supervisors in this aspect or send them a copy of the e-mail).

Action plan for the PhD candidate

1. Before you upload the manuscript in Hora Finita, the portfolio (30 EC) must be approved by the Graduate School.

For PhD trajectories started on or after 1 September 2022, a plagiarism check must also be performed within the first two years. A report of this check must be uploaded in Hora Finita.

2. Upload your manuscript in Hora Finita. **N.B.:** This must be the version approved by the supervisors. This manuscript will be sent to the doctorate committee. The title page and summary may be added later.
3. You will receive notification from Hora Finita when all the supervisors have approved the manuscript in Hora Finita.
4. The first supervisor will register the composition of the doctorate committee in Hora Finita. When the dean and the Graduate School have formally approved the composition, the members will automatically receive the manuscript and be given 30 days to assess it.

N.B.: Doctorate committee members regularly do not manage to complete their assessment by the deadline. They will be sent a reminder by Hora Finita a week before the deadline. The Graduate School monitors the process and will send a reminder, possibly in liaison with the committee chair.

5. After all the committee members have entered their assessment, the chair will be asked to recommend a final assessment. The dean then enters the final assessment, based on the doctorate committee chair's recommendation. If requested by the chair, the dean may start the procedure for awarding the distinction of cum laude.
6. After the dean enters the final assessment, you will receive an e-mail from Hora Finita stating that the doctorate committee has approved the manuscript (see [Annex 4](#) for an example,). This will include information about scheduling a date for defending your PhD. Any suggestions committee members may have made for improvements to the dissertation can be found on your dashboard under 'Graduation phase' / 'Assessment committee suggestions'. Consult your supervisor to decide on the extent to which these suggestions will be acted upon. To arrange a date to defend your PhD, you must (1) contact the Beadle's Office, (2) agree the reserved dates with your supervisors, and (3) agree the dates with the doctorate committee.
8. Once the date for defending the dissertation has been set, you will receive an e-mail from Hora Finita (see [Annex 5](#) for an example) containing instructions about the title page, the ceremony and digital publication.

Annex 1: Invitation to assess a PhD thesis

Dear Prof. xxx,

As dean of the Faculty of Law, I thank you for your affirmation to be one of the members of the doctorate committee concerning the dissertation of:

PhD candidate:

xxx

Title of thesis:

xxx

Supervisor(s):

xxx

Co-supervisor(s), if present, then indicated below:

xxx

Members Doctorate Committee:

xxx

Chairman: xxx

Please click on the link below to download the thesis:

xxx

According to the doctorate regulations of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, we would like to ask you to send us your evaluation regarding the dissertation within 30 days after you have received the dissertation.

Please send us your (justified) assessment of the thesis via the link before 5 August 2024, stating whether the PhD student qualifies for the degree. It's open to each member of the doctorate committee to provide further recommendations regarding the dissertation. Please submit your comments for the PhD candidate or supervisor in the field '**Suggestions for PhD candidate / supervisor**'. Your assessment will not be shared with the PhD candidate and supervisor. Your suggestions will not be shared with the chair of the committee. So please fill in both fields (if any suggestions are made) and do not use referrals to these separate fields.

The supervisors will ask the doctoral student to take these recommendations into consideration and adjust the dissertation accordingly. Please note that when you have granted permission to uphold the dissertation, your permission is not directly related to the changes made by the PhD candidate. If the Doctoral candidate has demonstrated outstanding competence in the dissertation, then the distinction Cum laude may be awarded.

The supervisor will be able to fully inform you on all matters regarding the graduation ceremony at the Vrije Universiteit.

We would like to welcome you as a member of the doctorate committee on the day that the candidate will uphold the dissertation. You will be asked to act as an opponent and the candidate a question in reference to the dissertation. Your time schedule, as well as preferences, will be taken into account when scheduling the exact date of the graduation.

Yours sincerely,
Dean of the Faculty of Law
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Annex 2: Confirmation of PhD ceremony

Dear prof. xxx,

We would like to inform you about the following PhD ceremony.

PhD candidate:

xxx

Title of the dissertation:

xxx

Date and location:

Date: xxx

Time: xxx

Location: xxx

The PhD examining committee members:

name first name affiliation profile

xxx

Chair: xxx

We would like to thank you for your involvement in the review of this thesis. The manuscript has been approved for defense and you are hereby invited to attend the PhD ceremony in the role of opponent.

For the protocol of a hybrid defense at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam see:

<https://tinyurl.com/vu-fysiek-hybride-promoveren> and the information below.

For the protocol of a complete online defense see: <https://tinyurl.com/vu-online-promotie>

The Beadle's Office will send a Zoom invitation by email one week prior to the defense date, containing link and password, for both the online and hybrid defense. The latter in case someone is unexpectedly unable to attend the ceremony in person.

Location of the defense

The PhD defense will take place in our main building, De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV, Amsterdam. 30 minutes prior to the public defense, the members of the examining committee and the supervisors will meet in a closed meeting with the (deputy) Rector Magnificus, in the Forum Room (room 2D-02, 2nd floor, D wing) in the same building.

Accessibility and parking

The VU buildings surround a central campus square. Due to the nearby station Amsterdam Zuid and various metro, tram and bus lines, the VU campus is easily accessible. Information on parking can be found at: www.parkerenbijvu.nl

Dress code and changing room

Every professor on the examining committee is kindly requested to wear a gown. If you are unable to bring your own, a gown from the VU can be provided. Under the gown, you should wear a white shirt and a dark tie or dark (formal) clothing. A changing room is located on the first floor next to the entrance to the auditorium. In this room, our hosts will be happy to show you where you can change and where the lockers for your bag are located. You cannot leave your coat, bag or other personal belongings in the Forum Room (where the examining committee meets).

We look forward to this gathering and the discussions that will take place.

Yours sincerely,

Beadle's Office

Annex 3. Zoom-invitation hybrid PhD-defense > committee members-supervisors

Dear All,

Thank you for your willingness to take part in the Examining Committee for the doctoral defense of xxx

This defense will take place in the aula of the Vrije Universiteit. For an up to date protocol, please see:

If you choose not to attend in person, please see the information below and attached to participate online via the conference programme ZOOM.
Excluded for online participation are the candidate, chair and the first supervisor, because of their role in the ceremony.

Recording and livestream

There will be a livestream to ensure public access. A recording for own use of the candidate is available.

The recording and the livestream will not be saved by Zoom or YouTube.

If you object to the recording, please let us know no later than two working days prior to the defense.

Invitation:

Bureau Pedel VU is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

PhD candidate:	xxx
Faculty:	xxx
Date:	xxx
Defense time (NL):	xxx
• Opponents / supervisors log in :	

Join Zoom Meeting

xxx

Meeting xxx

Passcode: xxx

!! ATTENTION: Please do NOT share this link and password with others

After clicking the link, fill in the passcode and the host admits you to the meeting.

Follow the instructions on the screen.

Please make sure that you use a non-confusing personalized username in Zoom, as it is visible in public.

A Zoom account is not required, yet it is possible/recommended to

check <https://zoom.us> and sign up for free to try out your audio- and video settings in advance.

Instructions:

- Clothing; gown or formal attire / clothing in keeping with the occasion.

- The private committee meeting prior to the defense starts 30 minutes **(xxx)** before the actual defense
 - Please be on time.
 - You will participate online in the private meeting of chair and supervisor who are in the 'Forumzaal' at the VU.
- You will automatically participate in the public meeting as soon as the private meeting has ended
- Put yourself to 'mute' if you're not speaking, you can do this on the bottom bar in your Zoom-screen.
- See attachment for instructions to the 'Breakout Room', to participate the private meeting *after* the defense.

- The opposition should start with the following sentence:

On the authority of the Rector and by virtue of my right ...

If in Dutch:

- De leden dienen de oppositie te beginnen met de zin:

Op gezag van de rector magnificus en krachtens mijn recht ...

Link to the livestream: <http://www.youtube.com/VUBeadlesOffice>

Please do not follow this link if you participate in an online defense yourself.

Met vriendelijke groet / Kind regards,

Bureau Pedel, Bestuurszaken

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

T +31 20 59 85309 | pedel@vu.nl | WERKDAGEN: ma, di, wo, do, vr

POSTADRES: De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam

BEZOEKADRES: HG 2D-05 | [Disclaimer](#)

Twitter: [@VUamsterdam](https://twitter.com/VUamsterdam)

Annex 4: Approval of dissertation by the Committee

Dear xxx,

We are delighted to inform you that the Doctorate Committee has approved your dissertation.

Arrange date for your PhD ceremony

You may now contact the Beadle's Office: pedel@vu.nl to arrange a date for your PhD ceremony. You receive a maximum of two options, which will remain valid for one week. Please contact in advance the supervisors for their availability.

After consulting the supervisors and Committee members, you can set the date. Once confirmed, it's not possible to reschedule the defense date.

PhD ceremonies take place at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. A 100% online ceremony is possible by exception and allowed under conditions. The Beadle's Office decides whether the conditions of an online ceremony are met.

For more information, see the protocols via:

- on campus/hybrid: <https://tinyurl.com/vu-fysiek-hybride-promoveren>
- online: <https://tinyurl.com/vu-online-promotie>

Suggestions by the committee

If committee members have made suggestions for improvements to the thesis, you will find them on your dashboard under 'Graduation phase'/ 'Assessment committee suggestions'. Consult your supervisor to what extent these suggestions will be acted upon.

List your Digital Object Identifier in your thesis

Most publishers, databases and search engines display the Digital Object Identifier links to papers or e-books on their websites. It is recommended to list your DOI in your thesis.

Your DOI: xxx

Kind regards,

Hora Finita

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

N.B. This message has been automatically generated by Hora Finita, the registration and tracking system for PhD candidates at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Annex 5: Instructions for PhD ceremony + date and location

Dear xxx,

Attention: If your defense takes place online, please read the additional online defense information per item '>> Online defense'.

Date of PhD ceremony and delivery of thesis

Your PhD ceremony has been confirmed. It will take place at xxx hours on xxx in: xxx. The location in which the ceremony takes place, is based on availability. No correspondence will be entered into. The Beadle's Office should receive 5 printed copies of your thesis by xxx (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Bureau Pedel, HG 2D-05, De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam). If, for any reason, this is not possible, the Beadle reserves the right to postpone the ceremony to another date. The Beadle will make sure that a copy of the thesis will be received by the faculty and the University Library. The PhD candidate will provide the supervisors and committee members with a copy. For reimbursement of printing costs, please contact the secretary of your faculty.

Degree Doctor of Philosophy / Doctor

After the defense of your thesis, the degree of 'Doctor of Philosophy' will be granted to you. Should you prefer the alternative 'Doctor' instead, please indicate this on the title page (see below). After the approval of your title page, this cannot be changed. Please also change this choice in Hora Finita at the time you submit the title page for approval, Hora Finita and the title page should match.

Title page, thesis and summary

The title page needs to be approved by the Rector Magnificus before the thesis is printed. Please send your proof to the Beadle in PDF format by your [Dashboard of Hora Finita](#). Hora Finita provides an automatically generated copy for you to download. Please use it. *Please note* that the words "promotor" and "copromotor" (or plural if applicable) should be shown in lower case. On the downloadable and partially auto-completed example, these words begin with capitals for technical reasons. We request you to adjust this. The members of the Doctorate Committee (promotiecommissie) are filled in automatically. The mentioned 'promotiecommissie' contains the committee members who have assessed the thesis. Any substitute committee members who only participate in the opposition during the defense are not listed on the title page. Please check all information yourself; title, initials and last name. No affiliations. The title prof.dr. should be listed without a space and in lower case, also the title dr. should be listed in lower case.

Please send the proof within 7 days. The title page must comply with the concept title page that has been provided in your Dashboard. Pay attention to capital letters and punctuation. The supervising professor(s) and any co-supervisors must be listed on the back of the title page. Other than the prescribed text, no other text may be included on this page. Please consult Section 06 and the Procedural Regulations of the Doctorate Regulations. Once the Rector Magnificus has approved, you will receive a confirmation e-mail from the Beadle via Hora Finita. The approved title page must be included in the thesis, adjustments after approval are not allowed. If you decide to print your thesis without meeting the above conditions, it will be done at your own risk.

Do not forget to add a summary to your thesis. A thesis should always include a summary in the language it is written in, as well as a summary and a translation of the title in English. Section 06 of the Doctorate Regulations is applicable.

Digital publication of the thesis

If you are obtaining your doctorate/PhD at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, you are obliged -on the basis of a license agreement- to provide a digital version of your thesis to the VU. You can do this via Hora Finita, after your title page has been approved by the Rector Magnificus. The VU University Library (UBVU) will then publish your digital thesis online in the VU Research Portal (Pure).

The license agreement must be in possession of the UBVU at least six weeks prior to the graduation date. Further information can be found on the information page of the [UBVU](#). Information about embargo policy can be found on the site of [Sherpa / Romeo](#).

To submit your thesis electronically, click on the link in the email you will receive after your title page has been approved. This link will lead you to the right place on your dashboard in Hora Finita, where you can fill in a digital form, upload the thesis and approve and download the license agreement.

The license agreement is automatically adapted on the situation that applies to you based on the information you have entered on the form.

The PhD award ceremony

The PhD award ceremony will take place in: auditorium. The (on campus) ceremony is open to anyone aged eight and above. You are advised to mention this age limit on any invitations you may send out. All defenses will be streamed live via the YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/VUBeadlesOffice>

The Livestream will not be saved/stored on YouTube. You will receive a link to the recording afterwards. The link will remain valid for two days, after which the recording will be deleted. In addition you are free to have your own photo/video recording. Photographers should announce themselves to the host of the beadle prior to the defense.

NOTES. Livestream and recording are additional services provided by the Beadle's Office and the AVC free of charge. No rights can be derived from this.

Ceremony and PhD protocol

45 Minutes prior to the PhD defense you are expected in room 1C-21, 'Promovenduskamer'. You and your ceremonial assistants can change there. So please be on time. Thirty minutes prior to the start of the ceremony, the Beadle and the audio technician will come to this room to take you through the protocol and the presentation. See for protocol: <https://tinyurl.com/vu-fysiek-hybride-promoveren>

>> Online defense: at least one week prior to the defense date, the candidate and committee members will receive an invitation to the online meeting. See online protocol: <https://tinyurl.com/vu-online-promotie>

Dress code

The PhD candidates and the ceremonial assistants are required to wear a full dress suit or other clothing in keeping with the occasion. Appropriate clothing can also be traditional clothing of the native land of the PhD candidate. The PhD candidate conforms to the judgement of the Beadle whether certain clothing is appropriate for the occasion.

>> Online defense: Clothing in keeping with the occasion.

PhD candidates at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam should be assisted by two ceremonial assistants.

>> Online defense: ceremonial assistants not mandatory. If ceremonial assistants are present, please send their names by email to the Beadle.

Defense

During the defense, you address the opponents with:

learned opponent (no distinction is made in regard to academic hierarchy)

You should start the presentation (see below for more details) with 'Dear rector, dear audience'.

Presentation/Audiovisual support

In consultation with your supervising professor, you present a general explanation of the research which forms the basis of the thesis. This presentation should last no longer than ten minutes. During this presentation, you can use the hall's standard audiovisual facilities, which include a projector, laptop and pointer. The use of these facilities is free of charge. For further information, special requests and quotations, please contact the Audio-Visual Centre information desk on +31 (0)20 598 9161 or send an email to evenementen.avc@vu.nl.

>> Online defense: Layman's talk is online (screen can be shared).

Reception

Following the ceremony, those present will have an opportunity to congratulate the young doctor at a reception. All costs are at the expense of the young doctor. We kindly ask you to indicate via [this form](#) whether you would like to make use of a reception area. You do not need to make a reservation for the aula / auditorium, we have already done that for you. The reception is organized by catering company EUREST. Possibly different from what is stated in the above form, you can indicate your reception requirements via the links below:

With VUnetID: [Overzicht losse catering - Serviceportal \(vu.nl\)](#)

External: <https://www.bestellenbijeurest.nl/vu>

Reception requests should be received no later than one month prior to the defense date, to allow time for orders to be prepared.

>> Online defense: No reception afterwards. It is, of course, allowed to independently organize an online meeting for a digital reception afterwards.

Publicity

The VU press officers inform the media and anyone who is interested in your research, by announcing the PhD defense on the VU website and in the (Dutch) newsletter of VU Amsterdam, which is sent to the press once every two weeks. The VU press officers draw up in cooperation with you a short, readable summary of the research results. Input can be submitted digitally, preferably in Dutch, via www.vu.nl/promoveren, no later than five weeks prior to your defense date. On the [website](#) you find conditions to which your contribution should meet. For more information and filling in the form, you can contact the press officers: tel. (020) 598 5666, e-mail: pers@vu.nl. PhD candidates of the Faculty of

Medicine can contact Amsterdam UMC, location VUmc for publicity: tel (020) 444 3444 or e mail: communicatie@amsterdamumc.nl.

Academic integrity

During the ceremony, particular attention will be paid to the implementation of Section 01 of the Doctorate Regulations, which concerns academic integrity**. The PhD candidate will be asked to sign the doctorate register to endorse the terms of this article.

**You can find the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice here.

Kind regards,

The Beadle's Office

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Please note: This message has been automatically generated by Hora Finita