

Instructions for DocuSign Committee Forms

Please read the instructions below carefully to ensure prompt processing of your committee form.

1. Please email your committee members and inform that you are starting the DocuSign form and ask them to watch for email from DocuSign. The email will come from the “**Viterbi Office of Doctoral Programs via DocuSign.**” If they do not see it, they should check their spam folder.
2. Click on the link for the appropriate form below. Once you reach the DocuSign form, please fill in your personal information, your Committee Members, Graduate Academic Advisor (see list below), Department Chair, and emails of each. **Do not duplicate committee members or put the same person as the Committee Chair and as a committee member.** Asterisked fields are required and must be filled in before the form will allow you to continue. Once you have completed all required fields, please double-check that you have entered all information accurately, and click “Begin Signing” at the bottom of the page.
3. On the next page click to accept the agreement, and then click “Continue.” You will then see the committee form with the information you filled in on the previous page. **Please Note:** Your committee members will not show. This is normal. Their information will appear when they sign the form.
4. Next, please fill in your USC ID#, USC email address, your major and then e-sign the form. You can either adopt the DocuSign standard signature (recommended) or set your own. Once you have finished signing, please click “Finish” at the top of the page. You may then download a PDF copy of the document and keep for your records.
5. The form will then email itself to the Committee Chair for their signature, and then to each of your committee members for theirs. Once all committee members have signed the form, your form will route to your Graduate Academic Advisor and then to the Department Chair. Please follow up with your committee members to ensure they have received and signed the form.
6. Once the Department Chair signs, the form will route to the VASE Office for approval before routing to the Dean for signature.
7. Once the Dean has signed your form, you and your Graduate Academic Advisor will receive an email from DocuSign with the signed form attached. Please contact your Graduate Academic Advisor for the next steps for your dissertation defense or qualifying exam.
8. If you would like to check on the status of your form, please email servicedesk.doctoralprograms.vsoe.usc.edu. Do **not** start a duplicate form. This will slow or halt the signing process.

Graduate Academic Advisors

If the incorrect Graduate Academic Advisor is used on your form, it will delay and possibly void your form.

Review your Graduate Academic department advisors name and email address under [“Academic Department Advisors”](#) under the “Doctoral Students” tab.

For any inquires in regard to the forms, please email phd@vase.usc.edu for assistance.

Detail Guidelines of the qualifying exam committee and the dissertation committee can be found in the [USC Catalogue](#) and below.

Qualifying Exam Committee

The PhD student’s program of study is supervised by the qualifying exam committee, which is formed immediately after passing the screening examination. The committee consists of five members, composed of the following: at least three USC faculty members (the committee chair plus at least two others) with appointments in the student’s major department, of which at least one must be tenured; and at least one USC faculty member—denoted the “outside member”—with primary appointment outside the major department. These four committee members must have, and the fifth committee member usually has, a USC appointment (tenured/tenure-track faculty or approved research faculty) that makes them eligible to chair a PhD committee. Upon written request of the committee chair, and with a curricula vita that demonstrates a professional profile suitable for supervising PhD research, the fifth member may be a USC researcher or an “external member” from outside USC. The forms to appoint the committee are obtainable from the [VASE website](#).

Qualifying Examinations

The qualifying examinations are taken during the last semester of the second year of graduate study or, at the latest, in the fifth semester or equivalent. The request to take the Qualifying Examinations must be filed in the semester prior to taking the examinations and at least 30 days before beginning the examinations. The examinations are intended to determine the extent of the student’s knowledge in basic science and engineering areas as well as the ability to do original and scholarly research. The qualifying exam committee decides the nature of the qualifying examinations (both oral and written portions) according to the policies applicable in each department.

If not otherwise enrolled, a student must enroll in [GRSC 800](#) during the semester in which the qualifying examination is to be taken. Students are strongly encouraged to take the qualifying examination during the first semester in which they are enrolled in Studies for the Qualifying Examination, and may not enroll in more than two semesters of Studies for the Qualifying Examination before taking the qualifying examination.

The examinations may be scheduled at any time during the semester provided that all members of the committee are available to administer them. All portions of the examinations must be completed within 60 days. After passing the qualifying examinations the PhD student is admitted to candidacy by the

Graduate School and the dissertation committee is established. After this step, students will normally engage in at least one year of full-time graduate study and research on campus.

Doctoral Dissertation

An acceptable dissertation based on original investigation and supervised directly by the dissertation committee is required. The dissertation must show mastery of a special field, capacity for independent research and a scholarly result. Candidates are expected to keep all members of the dissertation committee informed of their progress at all stages of the dissertation.

Dissertation Committee

The dissertation committee must include: at least two USC faculty members (the committee chair plus one other) with appointments in the student's major department, of which at least one must be tenured; and at least one USC faculty member—called the “outside member”—with primary appointment outside the major department. These three committee members must have a USC appointment (tenured/tenure-track faculty or approved research faculty) that makes them eligible to chair a PhD committee. Additional committee members who do not meet that criterion (other USC faculty or researcher, or an external member from outside USC) may be included, upon written request of the committee chair and with a curricula vita that demonstrates a professional profile suitable for supervising PhD research. The dissertation committee may include the same five members as the PhD qualifying exam committee.