Annual Review Procedure for Students in the Computer Science Doctoral Program

Overview

The purpose of the annual doctoral student review serves both the student and the department. The review provides advice and guidance to the student to ensure that satisfactory progress towards the degree is maintained and that the student will satisfy the program’s requirements and meet the department’s expectations. The review also plays a crucial role in the department’s charge to monitor and maintain the quality of the doctoral program. Accordingly, each student review shall be conducted by the department’s graduate faculty and will not depend only on the student’s dissertation committee members.

An annual review shall be conducted for each doctoral student every spring semester\(^1\) and consists of the following steps:

1. Annual Progress Report
2. Annual Evaluation (if advisor(s)/committee identified)
3. Faculty Review
4. Improvement Process (if necessary)
5. Dismissal Review Procedure (if necessary)

Throughout this document, instructions to email to a student shall be interpreted to mean using only the student’s university email address. Students are expected to regularly check their university email accounts.

1 Annual Progress Report

An annual progress report form shall be completed by the doctoral student and submitted electronically, along with other materials, as described in the form, to the department’s Director of Graduate Studies by the end of the fourth week in the spring semester.

If the student has identified dissertation advisor(s), then the same completed form and the same set of related materials must be submitted electronically to the dissertation advisor(s) also by the end of the fourth week of the spring semester.

Failure to appropriately submit all required material to all designated recipients by the specified deadline will result in an Unsatisfactory rating for the review year.

2 Annual Evaluation

Every doctoral student must form a dissertation committee no later than the end of the fourth semester (not counting the summer semesters) since entering the program. The student’s dissertation committee, if one exists, shall meet at least annually and during the spring semester with the student to assess the student’s progress, set future goals, and to provide advice and feedback to the student. The meeting shall take place no later than the end of the sixth week of the semester. The meeting shall not take place until after the student has submitted their annual progress report to the advisor(s) or before the deadline to receive the

\(^1\) In the timelines and deadlines presented in this document, the week of Spring Break does not count as one of the weeks in the spring semester. See Appendix A.
student’s progress report has expired, whichever is first. It is encouraged, but not required, to have a professor from the department who is not a member of the dissertation committee attend the review.

Prior to the meeting, the advisor(s) shall confer with the department’s Director of Graduate Studies to review the student’s record of courses taken since entering the program, including the courses in which the student is enrolled during the evaluation semester.

The following is a set of guidelines for the annual evaluation meeting’s format.

1. Prior to the meeting, the student should present to their committee a written summary not to exceed five pages of either their proposed research/dissertation topic or the status and future research plans of the ongoing project.

2. At the meeting, the student will give a short (i.e., 20-30 minutes) formal verbal presentation describing their proposed or ongoing research project.
   If an Improvement Plan was developed as a consequence of the student’s last annual review, then the student shall report progress and achievement(s) on each of the plan’s elements.

3. In the discussion of the research progress, the committee will evaluate:
   a. the appropriateness of the research plan and methodologies
   b. the degree to which satisfactory research progress is being made
   c. the student’s knowledge of the research discipline relative to their project
   d. the student’s independence of thought, creativity, and competence in the design and execution of the research project.

4. At the end of the meeting, the committee should provide verbal feedback to the student and advisor(s) regarding the degree to which the student is making satisfactory progress in their graduate studies and the degree to which the student’s written and verbal communication skills meet expectations appropriate to their graduate program. The committee should also provide suggestions for future research and/or educational and scholarly progress.
   If there was an Improvement Plan from the previous review, then the feedback shall include comments on the plan’s elements and the extent to which each element had been addressed. The substance of the verbal feedback shall be included as written comments and submitted, along with the annual evaluation form.

After the meeting, the dissertation committee shall complete the annual evaluation form, and each member of the committee shall sign the form. In completing the form, the committee shall recommend to the department’s graduate faculty that the student receive a Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, or Unsatisfactory rating. When recommending Needs Improvement or Unsatisfactory, the committee shall recommend actions the student must take in the following year to improve to Satisfactory performance at the next annual review.

The advisor(s) shall electronically submit the completed and signed form along with all additional written comments to the department’s Director of Graduate Studies by the end of the sixth week in the spring semester.

The dissertation advisor(s) shall also electronically submit to the student a copy of the completed and signed form along with all additional written comments by the end of the sixth week in the spring semester. The student may submit a written response to the Annual Evaluation. The response must be in the form of a letter to the department’s Director of Graduate Studies. The letter must be submitted electronically as an email attachment to the Director of Graduate Studies and must be sent no later than one week after the Annual Evaluation was sent to the student. The student’s letter must be in PDF format, include the student’s

Committee recommendations on areas of improvement are required, even if the committee’s rating recommendation may lead to dismissing the student from the program.
full name, and bear the student’s signature. The Director of Graduate Studies shall receive all properly submitted letters and share such letters with the Graduate Faculty during the Faculty Review.

3 Faculty Review

The Director of Graduate Studies shall electronically distribute to, or share with, the department’s graduate faculty by the end of the seventh week of the spring semester the following information regarding each doctoral student:

- the student’s degree plan,
- all material received from the student (i.e., progress report) and, if identified, the student’s committee (i.e., evaluation),
- the student’s full transcript,
- the list of courses (if any) in which the doctoral student is enrolled during the review semester, and
- all material from previous annual reviews, including all response letters received from the student.

The department’s graduate faculty shall convene and complete all doctoral student reviews by the end of the ninth week in the spring semester.

The evaluation by the faculty shall be based on the following information:
1. The student’s academic record. This shall include but is not limited to the student’s degree plan, completed coursework, grades earned, results of Qualifying and Candidacy Examinations, and the dissertation proposal.
2. Materials submitted by the student as part of the annual review process.
3. Materials submitted by the dissertation committee, if identified.
4. Faculty discussion. The discussion will presumably include direct knowledge on the faculty’s part regarding the student and the student’s performance compared to the faculty expectations.

3.1 Review Criteria

Minimum requirements are that students must comply with all academic rules, regulations, and timelines set forth by the University, the Graduate School, the College, and the Department. These include but are not limited to maintaining an acceptable degree plan and cumulative grade point average, the formation of a dissertation committee and filing with the department’s Director of Graduate Studies an acceptable degree plan, completing the required coursework, passing the Qualifying and Candidacy Examinations, and successfully defending the dissertation all within allowable time limits. These are all required actions.

In addition to meeting the minimum requirements, students must demonstrate Satisfactory performance based on faculty expectations. To guide students and faculty, descriptions of ranges of Satisfactory progress for students entering only with a bachelor’s degree, with a master’s degree in a related field without a Master’s Thesis approved by the department, or with a master’s degree in a related field with a Master’s Thesis approved by the department are provided in Appendix B. All applicants with Master’s Thesis shall have their thesis reviewed by the department’s Director of Graduate Studies and the member of the faculty identified as the student’s potential advisor when the student’s application was being reviewed. In the event that the director is also the potential advisor, then the department chair shall serve as the second reviewer. A unanimous decision to either approve or not approve the thesis from both reviewers shall be the final determination. In the event of a split decision, the thesis shall be reviewed by the department’s Graduate Studies Committee resecuing each of the original reviewers should either serve on the committee. A majority vote of the committee shall be the final determination. In the event of a tie vote, the department chair shall make the final determination.
A student will likely be rated Needs Improvement if they fall below those ranges, and likely be rated Unsatisfactory if they fall significantly below those ranges. However, it is important to note that the ranges provided are only guidelines and they should be adjusted accordingly by the department’s graduate faculty based on each student’s individual circumstances. For example, a student may join mid-year, a student may come with a different background and need additional foundation courses, a student may initially focus on research and defer coursework, or a student may go on an internship. The department’s evaluation shall take into account all the information available to the faculty.

When such adjustments to the ranges are made, the faculty shall record their decisions in the annual review, and it shall include a brief explanation of the rationale and record specific revised dates when changes to the ranges are made.

### 3.2 Notification and Student Response Process

The faculty shall assign each student an annual summary rating of Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, or Unsatisfactory. The rating, feedback regarding degree progress, and the criteria used for evaluation, shall be communicated in a letter to the student from the department’s Director of Graduate Studies. The Director of Graduate Studies shall email the letter to the student and the student’s advisor(s), if identified, by the end of the tenth week of the spring semester.

In the case of a rating of Needs Improvement or Unsatisfactory (that is not a second consecutive Unsatisfactory rating), the notification letter will include specific feedback explaining the evaluation and what actions the student must take in the following year to improve to Satisfactory performance at the next annual review.

If a student disagrees with their rating, the student may provide a written response in the form of a letter to the Director of Graduate Studies. This statement may include whatever justification or explanation of extenuating circumstances that the student may wish to provide. The letter must be submitted electronically as an email attachment to the Director of Graduate Studies and must be sent no later than one week after the notification letter was sent to the student. The student’s letter must be in PDF format, include the student’s full name, and bear the student’s signature.

All letters that satisfy the criteria shall be received by the Director of Graduate Studies and become part of the departmental record. The letters will be available during future annual reviews and in any dismissal proceedings.

### 4 Improvement Process

Any student who is rated Needs Improvement or Unsatisfactory that is not a second consecutive Unsatisfactory rating must complete the following improvement planning process within four weeks of the date the doctoral review results were sent to the student. This deadline applies even if the student is away from campus (e.g., on an internship or not registered for classes).

Students for whom an improvement plan is required shall develop a plan with a mentor. If the student has a dissertation advisor, then their mentor will be their advisor. If the student has more than one dissertation advisor, then the mentor will be one of their advisors. Students who do not have an advisor, or are in the process of changing their advisor, shall have one assigned from the department’s graduate faculty, with the professor’s consent, by the Director of Graduate Studies. The mentor’s responsibility is to lead the student through the improvement planning process in an appropriate and timely manner. Accordingly, the mentor
shall be vigilant and react if a student’s actions require the mentor to take a more proactive role in shepherding the student through the process.

The following steps describe the improvement planning process. Steps may be conducted remotely (e.g., email or phone) as necessary or convenient. All improvement planning process materials must be submitted electronically to the Director of Graduate Studies.

1. The student shall develop a performance improvement plan in consultation with a mentor. The plan must address each element from the student’s last evaluation. It must include specific actions and a timeline, all designed to achieve a Satisfactory rating at the student’s next annual review. Accordingly, the plan’s timeline shall have all actions completed before the student’s next Annual Progress Report is due. Students who received an Unsatisfactory rating must develop a timeline that completes all the plan’s actions by the end of the July that immediately follows the review to be eligible for department support. The student will electronically submit the performance improvement plan to their mentor for review and approval. The mentor’s approval of the plan is required. If the plan is not approved, the mentor will provide written feedback via email to the student within two business days of the student’s email being sent. The student must revise the plan according to the mentor’s feedback and resubmit to the mentor for approval.

2. The mentor shall email the approved improvement plan to the Director of Graduate Studies and the student no later than the latter of the end of twelfth week in the spring semester and two weeks from when the annual notification letter was sent to the student. For those students who received an annual summary rating of Needs Improvement that year, failure to meet this submission deadline as, in the mentor’s judgement, principally caused by student (e.g., insufficient effort or cooperation on the part of the student) will change the student’s rating that year to Unsatisfactory. In this case, the Director of Graduate Studies shall notify the student via a letter regarding the student’s rating change. The Director shall email the letter to the student. The Director shall also email the letter to the student’s doctoral advisor(s) if they have been identified. If Needs Improvement rating is changed to Unsatisfactory and this Unsatisfactory rating is the second consecutive rating for the student, then the Improvement Procedure for this student shall be suspended and the Dismissal Procedure shall be initiated. The Director’s letter shall also inform the student and the student’s advisor(s) (if identified) that the dismissal process has been initiated. The Improvement Procedure may resume pending the outcome (e.g., a decision permitting the student to continue in the program) of the Dismissal Procedure.

3. No later than the latter of the end of fourteenth week and two weeks after the approved performance improvement plan was sent to the Director of Graduate Studies, the Director shall represent the department’s graduate faculty in leading a meeting with the mentor and the student. If the Director of Graduate Studies is the mentor, then the Department Chair, or designee, shall lead the meeting with the Director/mentor and student. The meeting’s purpose is to develop a plan on which the student, mentor, and meeting leader agree. During the meeting, the meeting’s leader will provide feedback to the mentor and student regarding the improvement plan’s ability to satisfactorily address all the concerns presented to the student in the annual evaluation letter. The proposed improvement plan may be changed during this meeting. After the meeting, the meeting’s leader shall email the student and the student’s mentor the final draft of the improvement plan. If no agreement regarding the improvement plan can be reached among the meeting’s leader, the mentor, and the student, then the Department Chair, or designee, shall determine the final improvement plan. In this case the Chair or designee shall solicit input from the meeting’s leader, the mentor and the student.

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3 See step 6 of the Dismissal Review Procedure.
The meeting’s leader shall email the final improvement plan to the student and the student’s advisor(s) (if identified) before the end of the fifteenth week.

4.1 Departmental Support

Students who receive an Unsatisfactory rating in their annual evaluation letter and whose mentor submits an approved improvement plan will not be eligible for departmental support until the student has made satisfactory progress on the elements in the improvement plan. In this case, the Department Chair shall decide whether satisfactory progress has been made. If the Department Chair is also the mentor, then the Director of Graduate Studies shall make those decisions instead. In either case, the student’s improvement-planning mentor’s recommendation will be taken into account for this decision. If it is determined that the student has made satisfactory progress has been made, then the student will be eligible for departmental support.

Students who received an Unsatisfactory rating and for whom a mentor-approved improvement plan is not submitted on time are not eligible for departmental support.

5 Dismissal Review Procedure

Two consecutive Unsatisfactory ratings from the annual doctoral review, from an original Unsatisfactory rating or a Needs Improvement rating converted to an Unsatisfactory rating, or any combination thereof, constitute unsatisfactory progress towards the doctoral degree and lead to the dismissal review procedure as follows:

1. A student who receives two consecutive Unsatisfactory ratings will be informed in the annual review notification letter that the dismissal review process has been initiated. If they have been identified, the student’s doctoral advisor(s) will also be notified in their copy of the same letter to the student.

2. The student may submit a written statement and supporting materials appealing the decision to initiate the dismissal review procedure. The student may include written statements and materials from the advisory committee. All statements (i.e., from the student or committee members) must be in the form of a letter to the Director of Graduate Studies. Each letter must be in PDF format, include the student’s full name, and bear the author’s signature. All material (i.e., all letters and all supportive material) must be submitted electronically as an email attachment to the Director of Graduate Studies and must be sent no later than the latter of the end of eleventh week in the spring semester and one week after the dismissal review procedure notification letter to the student was sent.

3. All appellate material that satisfies the criteria shall be received by the Director of Graduate Studies and become part of the departmental record. All appellate material received by the Director of Graduate Studies will be available during dismissal review proceedings.

4. The department’s graduate faculty will then consider the case taking the student’s record, statements, and materials into consideration, and will submit a written recommendation to the Department Chair before the end of the thirteenth week. A quorum of fifty percent of the department’s graduate faculty plus one, rounding any fractional component up to the next integer, is required for the meeting. If the student’s doctoral advisor(s) serve on the Graduate Studies Committee, the advisor(s) must recuse themselves from this decision. The Committee’s recommendation may take whatever form is appropriate for the case, but the substance should recommend either dismissal or continuation. If a dismissal is recommended, then the committee should also recommend a dismissal date. Normally, the dismissal date will be scheduled at the end of the semester when the dismissal recommendation was made. The recommended dismissal date
may not be before the end of the semester and should only be extended beyond the end of the semester if there are extreme circumstances.

5. The Department Chair will make the final decision about the dismissal of the student from the doctoral program. If the Department Chair is the student’s doctoral advisor or one of the student’s doctoral advisors, then the decision will be made by the Department Assistant Chair. If the Department Assistant Chair is one of the student’s co-advisors, then the decision will be made by the Director of Graduate Studies. If the Director of Graduate Studies is a co-advisor alongside the Department Chair and the Department Assistant Chair, then the recommendation from the graduate faculty shall be adopted as the final decision.

The Department Chair shall communicate the decision in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies before the end of the fourteenth week.

6. Any decision other than dismissal shall require an Improvement Plan for the student. In this case, the plan shall be developed by a mentor and meeting leader as defined in the Improvement Process and shall consider any recommendation from the student’s committee as expressed in their annual evaluation. The Improvement Plan must be approved following the procedure in the Improvement Process.

7. The final decision shall be communicated in a letter from the Director of Graduate Studies to the student. If the decision is dismissal, the letter shall include the dismissal date, otherwise the letter shall include the Improvement Plan. The Director of Graduate Studies shall email the student and the student’s advisor(s), if identified, the letter as an attachment before the end of the fifteenth week.
Appendix A

The annual review shall be conducted each spring semester as per the following timeline. The week of Spring Break does not count as one of the weeks in the semester. Each element in the table below is due 5:00 pm on the Friday of the week corresponding to the row in which it appears.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
<th>Progress Report, Evaluation, and Review</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Dismissal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Submit progress report to DGS and advisor(s)*.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dissertation advisor(s)*</td>
<td>Prior to meeting with student, meet with DGS to review courses student has taken/is taking.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dissertation advisor(s)*</td>
<td>Submit evaluation to DGS and student.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>[optional] Submit letter to DGS in response to evaluation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DGS</td>
<td>Distribute student files to graduate faculty.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Graduate faculty</td>
<td>Complete annual reviews.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>DGS</td>
<td>Distribute review letter with rating to student and advisor(s)*.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>[optional] Submit appellate letter and material to DGS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Submit improvement plan or report student non-compliance to DGS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DGS</td>
<td>If student is non-compliant, letter to student and advisor(s)* notifying change in rating to Unsatisfactory.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Graduate faculty</td>
<td>Submit dismissal recommendations to chair.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Student, mentor, and DGS</td>
<td>Finalize improvement plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Dismissal decisions communicated to DGS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mentor and DGS</td>
<td>If decision is other than dismissal, create an improvement plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DGS</td>
<td>Distribute improvement plan to student and advisor(s)*.</td>
<td>Distribute letter to student and advisor(s)*.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If dissertation advisor(s) has/have been identified.
Appendix B

Below are the recommended guidelines and schedule for judging the progress of a full-time Ph.D. student admitted directly to the Ph.D. program with a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree, a Master of Science (M.S.) degree without a thesis, or an M.S. degree with a thesis. Note there may be significant variation from these depending on the student’s individual circumstances, and in such case, the schedule below should be adjusted accordingly. For example, a student may join at the mid-year point, may initially focus on research and defer course work, or may take an internship. Another possibility is that a student’s academic background may necessitate additional foundation courses. The expectations for part-time Ph.D. students shall be scaled appropriately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>B.S. or M.S. w/o thesis</th>
<th>M.S. w/ thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>File program of study with the department’s Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)</td>
<td>Year 1, spring week 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework</td>
<td>Complete major core courses</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Year 1 (some by transfer credit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finish all courses except Adv Spec &amp; electives</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete all non-dissertation coursework</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.S. thesis</td>
<td>Find advisor</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Select topic and begin work on M.S. thesis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defend M.S. thesis</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tangible results published from M.S. thesis</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td>Find advisor and committee</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature review (50 references) or paper</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First draft of dissertation proposal approved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>File scope of candidacy examination with DGS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tangible results published from proposal</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Successful proposal defense</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Substantial progress on dissertation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tangible results published from dissertation</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Successful dissertation defense</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely successful dissertation defense</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>