

Closing seminar

– short instructions for commentator and doctoral student

Purpose

The purpose of the closing seminar is to scientifically evaluate the dissertation and to give the doctoral student the opportunity to improve its quality. The examiner, who is present at the closing seminar, should be able to form an opinion whether the planned date for disputation is realistic. Another purpose is to give the doctoral student an experience similar to the disputation act. The closing seminar should give the doctoral student an idea/understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation. Therefore all the critique that is relevant for the dissertation defence should be presented, and in doing so the commentator should put forth the critique in a constructive and positive way.

Procedure

The commentator begins with a “program declaration” that includes what will be discussed, what will not be discussed, and how the time will be disposed. The commentator thereafter gives a brief (10–20 minutes) description of the dissertation’s research questions, design, and results and thereafter, together with the doctoral student, a 50–60 minute overview of the dissertation with critical and constructive (view)points. The seminar is ended with a discussion (20–30 minutes) between the doctoral student, the commentator and the audience. At the seminar, the commentator provides the doctoral student with a written summary of his/her comments.

The commentator should consider what purpose the comments have before they are given and (should) consider what is relevant to discuss openly at the seminar and what is appropriate (to include) in the written summary. It is important that critique is presented in a balanced way and that the commentator acts in a way that shows respect for the doctoral student’s work. The commentator should dispose his/her presentation so that the more important critique, for example disposition, method and reasoning, is brought up first and less important critique is brought up last. The critique will become more constructive if it is clear, well grounded, concrete, and descriptive as well as combined with suggestions of how the manuscript can be improved.

It is important that a dialog develops between the commentator and doctoral student during the seminar. This requires that the doctoral student has the opportunity to respond or that the doctoral student takes the opportunity to develop a discussion and come to clarity regarding questions about the comments. The doctoral student should listen with an open mind and try to take in what the commentator suggests. The commentator initiating feedback will be a valuable help during an important phase in the process of working with the doctoral thesis in its finishing stage. Critique from the commentator not should be disregarded or approved in an uncritical way. As an expert in his/her field, the doctoral student should be able to contribute to the seminar so (that) a constructive dialog between two reflecting parties develops.

Finally, it should be pointed out that both parties have a responsibility towards the audience. It is important that the commentator strives to make the the presentation of the thesis understandable and interesting for the audience, and that both the commentator and doctoral student act in a way so the audience easily can understand what is (being) discussed