

Earning a Ph.D can take anywhere from three to six or nine years or more, depending on what you're studying and how well you can put time and effort towards your dissertation, and whether you have funding for that period of time. Completing a PhD can be so time-consuming that many candidates cannot work full-time and often live on stipends and fellowships to make ends meet while they haunt the research labs and libraries. It is perhaps the most rigorous educational experience you can have, but when it's complete, you will be considered an individual who adds intellectual and scholarly value to your field.

Earning a doctoral degree

By the time you decide to go after a doctoral degree, you may have managed to collect a Master's degree — if you've not applied to a PhD program straight out of college. Earning your PhD may bear some resemblance to earning your Master's, although you'll find that the bar has risen in every area. During your first year, you'll discover that two or three courses coupled with teaching classes barely leaves you time to breathe and eat, because your spare hours will probably be spent reading, or occasionally sleeping.

Expect to keep up this pace for a few years, at which point you will be rewarded with the opportunity to take your comprehensive exams. Often called "orals," they are graded by a small group of faculty members from your department. You'll probably dread these exams as much as all the graduate students before you have. However, their inevitability should keep you motivated to dive into your studies and work closely with your professors. You'll probably need to spend anywhere from a few months to a couple of years preparing for your comprehensive exams.

Your dissertation

After you make it through the comprehensive exams, it's time to move on to your dissertation. With all those years of coursework behind you, you've had ample opportunity to identify an area of interest that needs further defining or solving and this may serve as the theme for your thesis. Unlike a Master's thesis, a Ph.D dissertation involves original research and is usually much longer. It will be judged for its originality, the value and the accuracy of the contribution it makes to the body of knowledge in your field.

Researching and writing a dissertation will probably require several years. A faculty committee will help guide your process and keep you on the right track. You may end up knowing your area of specialization better than any of them, but they will offer general advice, if not specific advice when they're able to do so. One of these professors will be your primary adviser and will hopefully become your mentor, offering you the benefit of years of experience and the opportunity to meet other professionals in the field. Your adviser will be your advocate and can mediate amongst the other members of the committee, if necessary. Your relationship with your adviser is vital for your success in your PhD program. Even with your adviser to serve in the role of mentor, you'll be on your own most of the time, thinking, studying, and working independently. Self-discipline is absolutely non-negotiable.

Your defense

Finally, if you have remained energized throughout this process and have kept the gears of your inner motivation machine well-oiled, then you'll be ready to present your dissertation, in draft form, to your committee. It will be reviewed and suggestions will be offered. After submitting your final draft, the time has come to defend it before your committee. A thesis defense is an interactive process where you'll respond to questions and comments about your research, thesis, arguments, and conclusions. Although this is a moment where a panic attack may feel inevitable, failure is rare at this point since the professors who have been supervising all your work are the same people who will critique it. They want you to succeed. When all is said and done, you will have accomplished a monumental task that very few people manage to do. It is estimated that only about 1 percent of the US population has a PhD, and is it any wonder, given the amount of work — and brains — that must go into it?

United States – India Educational Foundation

12 Hailey Road, New Delhi 110 001

Tel : +91 11 4209 0909; Email : info@usief.org.in

Web: www.usief.org.in