

Guidelines for Chairs of Graduate Examining Committees

In the case of Master's thesis or PhD oral examinations, the chair of the examining committee is the Graduate Program Director or his/her designate.

Once the thesis has been deemed ready for examination, the chair of the examining committee is responsible for ensuring that all necessary arrangements are made including: the thesis is sent to the thesis/external/university examiners by SGPS or the program office, the examination date is set, and all relevant documents needed at the time of the examination are prepared.

If a member of the examining committee finds that he or she is unable to attend the oral examination, the chair of the examining committee should secure a suitable replacement. Should a suitable replacement not be found, the member is asked to submit his or her questions or concerns, to be read by the examining committee chair at the defence. In extraordinary circumstances, the examination will be rescheduled if one or more members of the examining committee are unable to attend.

The chair presides over the oral presentation and examination. He/she also chairs the proceedings of the in camera deliberation of the examining committee as a non-voting member. The chair verifies that the student and all the members of the examining committee are present. Chairs are requested to ensure that the exams proceed with minimal interruptions to the presenters. Interruptions occur especially when people walk in after the presentations have started. Committee chairs can use their discretion to see the available seats are not near the presenter. They may also arrange for a note to be posted outside the room to indicate that a presentation is in progress.

There are three main phases to the thesis defence.

1. The presentation phase is the oral presentation by the candidate. This short presentation, (approximately 20 minutes) summarizes the main arguments and findings of the work. Normally, the presentation is an open event that can be attended by all interested parties, although extraordinarily it may be closed to a restricted audience or no audience for reasons of confidentiality, safety or intellectual property. In some cases committee and audience members may be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement. The chair of the examining committee, in consultation with the graduate program director and the research supervisor, will determine whether the defence is open or closed. The reasons for closing a defence are to be provided in the chair's report to Graduate Studies.
2. The question phase is the second component of the defence. In all cases the candidate must answer questions from the examining committee. The chair will determine whether the audience is allowed to stay for the question phase of the examination and, if they do stay, whether they are permitted to participate in questioning the candidate. The chair shall limit the amount of time for questions from the audience if applicable and may

continue with questions from the examining committee after the audience has left the room. Questions must be related to the work done by the student for the thesis and be

based on knowledge directly related to the material. Only speakers recognized by the chair may ask questions and the chair controls the order and flow of questioning. The chair can also ask questions.

3. The deliberation phase is the third major part of the defence. When the question phase is over, the student is asked to leave the room and members of the examining committee determine the outcome of the oral examination. All decisions of the examining committee are made by majority vote. The chair of the examining committee is a non-voting member, unless the chair's vote is needed to break a tie.

The chair calls the meeting to order and clearly explains the procedure:

1. Introduction of the student;
2. Introduction of the examining committee;
3. The three main phases to the thesis defence;
 - 3.1. Presentation Phase
 - 3.2. Question Phase: questioning by the thesis examiner (Master's students), or external examiner and university examiner (PhD students); questioning by the other member(s) of the examining committee; questioning by the supervisor; further questions from the examining committee;
 - 3.3. Deliberation Phase: members of the examining committee vote on the quality of the written thesis and the oral presentation/ability to answer questions.

As a non-voting member, the chair presides over the deliberation by the examining committee but does not take part in the proceedings unless his/her vote is needed to break a tie. The decision is taken by majority vote only by the members of the examining committee. The committee will come to one of four conclusions for the written thesis: "Acceptable without Required Revisions"; "Acceptable with Minor Revisions "; "Major Revisions Required "; "Not Acceptable." The committee will come to one of two conclusions for the presentation/question phase: "Acceptable"; "Not Acceptable".

If changes to the thesis are required, the examining committee will designate certain members as referee(s) to assure that all the concerns of the committee have been addressed in the corrected thesis. Normally the research supervisor will be the referee or one of the referees.

If the presentation/question phase is found to be 'not acceptable', the examining committee must indicate specifically what requirements are being put in place to address this (e.g. full re-examination, or question session with examining committee, etc...).

The chair invites the student into the room, announces the recommendation of the committee to the student and invites him/her to address relevant questions or comments to the committee.

Instructions on the Possible Results of an Oral Thesis Defence and Written Thesis

The following is taken from the Thesis, project or major paper section of the Graduate Academic Calendar (*approved at the Graduate Studies Committee meeting in May 2019 and is currently in effect, but will not be reflected in the Graduate Academic Calendar until 2020/2021).

The examining committee will render one of the following two decisions about the **presentation/questions phase***:

1. Acceptable
2. Not acceptable

Acceptable

An evaluation by the committee of Acceptable means that the student's oral presentation and ability to answer questions is acceptable.

Not acceptable

An evaluation by the committee of Not Acceptable means that the student's oral presentation and ability to answer questions is not acceptable. The examining committee must determine specifically what requirements are being put in place to address this (e.g. full re-examination, or question session with examining committee, etc...).

The examining committee will determine specifically what requirements are being put in place to address the identified deficiencies. Requirements may include, but are not limited to: a full re-examination; and/or question session with examining committee; and/or other reasonable means of demonstrating the student's ability to present material and answer questions.

In order to receive a grade of pass, the examining committee must also be satisfied with the written thesis as outlined below and that the student has demonstrated their ability to present the material and answer questions.

The examining committee will also render one of the following four decisions about the **written thesis document**:

1. Acceptable without Required Revisions;
2. Acceptable with Minor Revisions;
3. Major Revisions Required; or
4. Not Acceptable.

Acceptable without Required Revisions

An evaluation by the committee of Acceptable without Required Revisions means that the thesis is acceptable without any further editorial work. A thesis that is so evaluated is given a grade of Pass, providing that the decision rendered on the oral presentation is acceptable and that the reproduction of the thesis and is submitted to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Any minor discretionary edits (e.g., spelling, grammar, table numbering) that are made before the final thesis is submitted must be approved by the research supervisor and cannot alter the thesis in any substantial way.

Acceptable with Minor Revisions

An evaluation by the committee of Acceptable with Minor Revisions means that there are no fundamental changes to the thesis required by the committee. Minor revision requirements are changes or additions that normally should be able to be accomplished within four weeks. The supervisor will normally be tasked with approving these revisions, but the chair may designate other member(s) of the committee to supervise the edit if this will expedite the process. A maximum of two examiners can supervise minor revisions.

A thesis that is Acceptable with Minor Revisions will be given a grade of Pass when once:

- the revisions to the written thesis have been approved;
- the oral presentation is deemed either acceptable or any noted deficiencies have been addressed; and
- when the completed thesis is reproduced and submitted to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Major Revisions Required

A thesis that has the potential to be acceptable after major revisions will be evaluated as Major Revisions Required. Any revisions so mandated must be able to be completed within a maximum of six months. A thesis can be evaluated as Major Revisions Required only once. The committee shall decide how the revised thesis will be examined.

Re-examination options include the following: a full repeat of the oral exam; an oral defence without an audience in front of the examining committee, or a subset of the examining committee; or editorial supervision by the supervisor and a second reader.

The decision on re-examination should factor in the examining committee's decision regarding the oral presentation. In the case of a re-examination, there must always be two examiners at minimum (normally including the supervisor) for major revisions. Although a subset of the examining committee can approve major revisions, a full examining committee (optionally including a master's thesis examiner and doctoral external examiner) must determine that a revised thesis is not acceptable and receives a grade of Fail.

Not Acceptable

The examining committee may evaluate a thesis as Not Acceptable if it does not meet the standards for the discipline or the area of study. A thesis can be evaluated as Not Acceptable in the first attempt at a defence if it is found to be fundamentally flawed and beyond revision in six months. In this type of case, the outcome of the oral presentation does not impact the overall evaluation, as the committee will have decided that there is no reasonable prospect of success with a revision of the written thesis.

Detailed reasons for failure must be submitted by the chair of the examining committee to the Dean of Graduate Studies, the graduate program director and the candidate within two weeks. The thesis is given a final grade of Fail.

Instructions Re: Committee Members' Signatures

If the decision is “Acceptable without Required Revisions”, the chair ensures that all members of the examining committee have signed the **Certificate of Approval** form and delivers the signed form to the graduate program staff (GPS).

If the decision is “Acceptable with Minor Revisions”, all members of the examining committee sign the **Certificate of Approval** form. A member, usually the student’s supervisor, is assigned to make sure that all required revisions are made. This individual signs off on the **Certificate of Approval** form when s/he is satisfied that the student’s work is complete and s/he returns the signed form to the GPS.

If the decision is ‘Major Revisions Required’, any members of the Committee with responsibilities to ensure that all or part of the thesis is revised as required do NOT sign the **Certificate of Approval** form until the revisions have been made; other members not so involved may sign immediately after the examination

OR

None of the committee members sign the **Certificate of Approval** form until the revised document has been returned for the examining committee’s final approval (no additional oral defence).

In either case, the student’s supervisor ensures that the final signed form is returned to the GPS.

Chair’s Report on Thesis

The Chair of the examining committee prepares a report for the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies of the examiners’ assessment of the thesis and the candidate’s oral performance.

Distribution of Completed and Signed Forms

The Chair of the examining committee sends a copy of the Chair’s report on thesis to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies following the exam.

Once the student’s supervisor has signed off on the **Certificate of Approval** form and given it to the GPS, the GPS gives a copy to the student and sends the ORIGINAL form to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.