

Guidelines for Chairs of Graduate Examining Committees September 2022

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Guidelines for Chairs of Graduate Examining Committees

In the case of Master's thesis or PhD final oral examinations, the Chair of the Examining Committee is the Graduate Program Director or their designate. The following is taken directly from Sections 9 and 10 of the [Thesis Oral Examination for Master's and Doctoral Candidates Policy](#).

Responsibilities of the Chair of the Examining Committee:

1. Ensure that all necessary arrangements are made for the oral examination;
2. Ensure the thesis is sent to the master's thesis examiner, or university examiner and doctoral external examiner;
3. Ensure the examination date is set; and,
4. Ensure the relevant documents needed at the time of the examination are prepared.

Examining Committee Attendance at the Defence

1. Normally, all examining committee members must attend the defence.
2. The chair of the examining committee must be physically present during the oral examination.
3. At least one member of the supervisory committee must be physically present.
4. Normally, no more than two members of the examining committee, including the master's thesis examiner and doctoral external examiner, may attend the defence remotely.
5. If a member of the examining committee finds that they are unable to attend the oral examination in person or remotely via synchronous participation, the Graduate Program Director should secure a suitable replacement.
6. Should a suitable replacement not be found, the member is asked to submit their questions or concerns to be read by the examining committee chair at the defence and they will not be permitted to vote in the deliberation phase. Doctoral and external examiners are not permitted to submit questions in lieu of participating at the defence.
7. If an examining committee member is late to the defence, the Chair of the Examining Committee has the authority to delay the start of the exam for up to 30 minutes before cancelling the defence.
8. In extraordinary circumstances, the examination will be rescheduled if one or more members of the examining committee are unable to attend.
9. In the case of online Programs, alternate arrangements will be permitted.
10. In extenuating circumstances, the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies may approve alternate arrangements.

Ultimately, the chair presides over the oral presentation and examination. They also chair 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.

Defence procedures/phases

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

1. Introduction of the student;
2. Introduction of the examining committee;
3. Explanation of set up (in-person/virtual/hybrid, questions from audience members etc.)
4. The three main phases to the thesis defence;

There are three main phases to the thesis defence (The following is taken directly from Section 11 of the [Thesis Oral Examination for Master's and Doctoral Candidates Policy](#)).

1. **The Presentation Phase:** This is the oral presentation by the candidate. This short presentation of approximately 20 minutes, summarizes the main arguments and findings of the work.
 - a. Normally, the presentation is an open event that can be attended by all interested parties; however, extraordinarily, the presentation may be closed to a restricted audience, or no audience, for reasons of confidentiality, safety or intellectual property.
 - b. In some cases, committee and audience members may be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement.
 - c. 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.
 - d. The reasons for closing a defence are to be provided in the chair's report to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
2. **The Question Phase:** This is the second component of the defence. In all cases, the candidate must answer questions from the examining committee.
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. Questions must be related to the work done by the student for the thesis and be based on knowledge directly related to the material.
 - d. Only speakers recognized by the chair may ask questions, and the chair controls the order and flow of questioning.
 - e. The chair can also ask questions.
3. **The Deliberation Phase:** This is the third major part of the defence.
 - a. 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.
 - b. All decisions of the examining committee are made by majority vote.
 - c. In the case of co-supervision, co-supervisors collectively have one vote.
 - d. A non-voting advisor is not permitted to vote.
 - e. The chair of the examining committee is a non-voting member, unless the chair's vote is needed to break a tie.

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

The following is taken from Section 12 of the [Thesis Oral Examination for Master's and Doctoral Candidates Policy](#).

As a non-voting member, the chair presides over the deliberation by the examining committee but does not take part in the proceedings unless their vote is needed to break a tie. The decision is taken by majority vote only by the members of the examining committee.

Presentation/questions

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

- Acceptable
- 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.

Written thesis document

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

- Acceptable without Required Revisions;
- Acceptable with Minor Revisions;
- Major Revisions Required; or
- 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. The Chair will enter this information into an online form. They can access the form by using their banner ID and password.

- Link: [Form 4 - Chair's Report on Thesis Examination](#)

Distribution of Completed and Signed Forms

The Chair of the Examining Committee will submit the online Chair's Report on Thesis and a copy will be automatically sent to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the GPS.

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