

PhD Candidacy Handbook

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Introduction

Each student in a doctoral program is required to prepare a written research proposal and pass a candidacy exam. Full-time students are expected to do so within 18 months of their initial registration in the program. The examination is to determine whether the candidate has the appropriate knowledge and expertise to undertake a thesis in the selected field of study. A candidacy committee conducts the examination.

This handbook has been designed to serve as a PhD candidacy exam guide for doctoral students, master's students transferring to a doctoral program, graduate program staff, graduate faculty and members of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS). It aims to:

- Clarify the procedures to be followed for a PhD candidacy examination.
- Provide and explain the purpose of forms required as part of the process.
- Clarify the roles of SGPS, the student and the individual program/faculty offices

We welcome your questions, feedback and recommendations and look forward to working with you to establish 'best practices' in this area of Graduate Studies operation.

The Players

Personnel Related to the Candidacy Process

Title	Acronym	Comments/Descriptions **Roles and responsibilities are outlined in the Graduate Academic Calendar .
Student		<p>Consult with their research supervisor(s)/supervisory committee about guidelines for preparation of the written research proposal and the oral examination.</p> <p>Solicit regular feedback from the research supervisor(s)/supervisory committee during the preparation of the thesis proposal.</p> <p>Students can consult the supervisor-student conversation starter's document to help align expectations with their supervisors.</p> <p>Provide the required number of copies of the written research proposal to the graduate program staff member (GPS) at least four weeks before the scheduled exam date.</p>
Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies	DGPS	<p>Approves the nominee for external examiner.</p> <p>Approves a Master's transfer to PhD after a successful candidacy examination</p>
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies	SGPS	<p>Once Candidacy Committee Decision form received, register the student in candidacy exam course in term in which the exam is scheduled.</p> <p>Files Decision form and Candidacy Committee Member's Reports</p>
Graduate Program Director	GPD	<p>Consult with student's supervisory committee to appoint the candidacy committee and nominates the external examiner.</p> <p>In consultation with the student and committee members, schedule a date, time and location for the exam and inform all parties.</p>

		<p>Distribute copies of the student's proposal to all members of the candidacy committee at least four weeks before the scheduled exam date.</p> <p>Inform candidacy committee members of their responsibilities and provide a copy of the form they are required to complete to prepare for the exam (PhD Candidacy Examination – Committee Member's Report form).</p>
Research Supervisor(s) and Supervisory Committee	RS/SC	<p>Provide guidelines for the student for the written report, expectations about the oral presentation and offer guidance/feedback as required during their preparation.</p> <p>Inform GPD that student is ready to proceed to the candidacy exam and collaborate with student and GPD to establish date for exam.</p>
Candidacy Committee Members		<p>Review the student's materials thoroughly.</p> <p>Using the PhD Candidacy Examination – Committee Member's Report form, prepare in advance a detailed written report which addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the student's written work, makes recommendations for improvement and suggests resources which may support the student's work.</p> <p>Provide a copy of the report to the student at the time of the examination.</p> <p>Prepare questions to determine the student's knowledge of the thesis topic and readiness to conduct the proposed research.</p>

Candidacy Procedures- Before the Oral Exam

1. Appointment of PhD Candidacy Committee

Each student in a doctoral program is required to prepare a written research proposal and pass a candidacy exam. The student and the RS(s) inform the GPD when they wish to initiate the exam procedure.

The GPD confirms the student's eligibility for the candidacy examination. In consultation with the student and the RS(s)/supervisory committee, the GPD lists members of the candidacy committee, and nominates an external examiner. This committee consists of the following members:

- The student's RS(s).
- At least two additional members from the student's supervisory committee (the student's supervisory committee must be established prior to the oral examination).
- GPD (or delegate) as chair. The chair cannot be a member of the student's supervisory committee.
- An external examiner from outside the program who is not involved with the student's course of study.

The RS and/or the GPD contact the external examiner nominee to confirm they are interested. If the nominee is not a member of the university's graduate faculty, an up-to-date curriculum vitae (CV) is obtained. The Appointment of PhD Candidacy Committee form is completed, signed and sent to SGPS (with CV if applicable).

SGPS ensures that the form is reviewed by the DGPS and notifies the GPD if there are any questions/issues. Conflicts of interest must be avoided for all examiners. Policies related to candidacy examiners are found in the [Graduate Academic Calendar](#).

The DGPS ensures there are no conflicts of interest. If the nominee is deemed acceptable, the DGPS approves the nomination. The signed form is scanned and sent to the GPD. The GPS and RS(s) are copied.

The Appointment of PhD Candidacy Committee form should be submitted to SGPS **no less than five weeks** before the exam date.

Link to website/form:

- Form: [Appointment of PhD Candidacy Committee](#)

2. Preparation and Submission of Materials by Student

The supervisory committee provides the candidate with guidelines for the written report and outlines expectations for the oral presentation.

The student should submit their proposal document to the program office for distribution **no less than four weeks** before the exam date.

3. Scheduling of Candidacy Examination and Distribution of Materials

Four weeks in advance of the exam, GPS confirms the date and location of the exam for all parties and distributes the materials to the committee members, including copies of PhD Candidacy Examination – Committee Member’s Report form and the student’s written proposal.

Each candidacy committee member completes the PhD Candidacy Examination Committee Member’s Report prior to the exam. The report requires the committee member to provide an overall evaluation of the written proposal document, address strengths and weaknesses of the student’s written work, make recommendations for improvement and suggest resources which may support the student’s work.

Committee members submit their report to the chair of the candidacy committee **by the time of the exam**. The chair submits the reports to SGPS for record keeping after the exam.

Link to website/form:

- Form: [PhD Candidacy Examination Committee Member’s Report](#)

Candidacy Procedures- the Day of the Oral Exam

1. Preparation of Room and Documents

The chair of the candidacy committee/GPS ensures the space is properly arranged and that the necessary documents are ready at the time of the exam.

2. Conduct of Candidacy Exam

The candidacy exam is conducted as outlined in the [Graduate Academic Calendar](#).

The student makes an oral presentation (preferably 20 minutes and not to exceed 30 minutes). The presentation will summarize those parts of the student's written report that they feel to be most significant. This will be followed by open questioning of the student by committee members.

The student is asked to leave and the committee meets in closed session. The committee deliberates and evaluates the student's work as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. All decisions of the examining committee are made by majority vote. All members of the committee are voting members. In the case of co-supervision, co-supervisors collectively have one vote. The chair of the examining committee is a non-voting member, unless the chair's vote is needed to break a tie.

The student is invited to return and the chair informs the student of the committee's decision and, if required, any follow-up actions.

3. Completion and Distribution of Candidacy Decision Form

The chair oversees the preparation of a written report using the PhD Candidacy Examination – Summary of Committee Decision form and ensures that it is signed by all examining committee members.

Link to website/form:

- Form: [PhD Candidacy Committee Decision](#)

4. Summary of Possible Outcomes of Candidacy Exam

A judgment of satisfactory allows the student to proceed with PhD studies.

If the judgment is unsatisfactory, the student is required to retake the exam within four months. For a second exam, the examination team must include an additional member of the graduate faculty who was not involved in the original examination.

A judgment of satisfactory in a second exam allows the student to proceed with their studies. If a student receives an unsatisfactory judgment in a second attempt at a candidacy exam, or if a student does not retake the candidacy exam within four months after an unsatisfactory first attempt, the student shall receive a grade of Fail and be dismissed from the PhD program.

Candidacy Procedures- After the Exam

The chair of the candidacy committee scans and submits the decision form and each committee member's report to SGPS with copies to the members of the candidacy committee, the student and the GPD following the examination.

If the judgement was successful, SGPS registers the student into the candidacy exam course. The student's RS(s) or GPD/GPS enters the student's mark (pass or fail) for the candidacy exam course in the program.

If the candidacy exam was unsatisfactory, SGPS will work with the program office to reschedule the exam within four months. The second examination will follow the same procedures as the first examination.

Candidacy Exam Procedures – Deadlines

Each term there are set deadlines for the submission of required documentation in the candidacy exam process; they are available on the [SGPS website](#). Please note that students **transferring** from a Master's to a PhD **must strictly adhere** to these deadlines, so if successful, they can officially apply to the PhD program in the next available intake.

The deadlines specify the last day in a given term for documentation to be submitted so the candidacy exam can be scheduled with the given term. Documentation may be submitted at any time **prior** to these deadlines.

Candidacy Exam Procedures – Example Timeline

A PhD student looking ahead to a candidacy examination may use the example [Candidacy Timeline](#) found on the SGPS website to help effectively plan for the candidacy exam.

Transfer from Thesis-Based Master's to a PhD Program

This transfer option is for exceptional students who have demonstrated superior academic credentials and outstanding research potential in their master's degree program. Admission to the PhD program is conditional upon satisfactory completion of the program's PhD Candidacy Exam and approval from the DGPS.

Applicants are considered on a case-by-case basis and may not be considered in some programs. If a transfer from a master's degree to a PhD degree is allowed in a program, the following criteria must be met before a transfer from a master's to a PhD program:

1. Completion of a full master's program of coursework with at least an A- average.
2. Significant progress in the student's master's research project.
3. Strong evidence of ability for advanced independent research.
4. Approval of the transfer by the RS(s), supervisory committee, GPD and DGPS.
5. Satisfactory completion of the PhD candidacy exam.

A judgment of satisfactory in the candidacy exam allows the student to transfer from a master's to a PhD program. The student will be required to apply to the PhD program for the next available intake. Students are only required to submit an application and a fee; they are not required to submit any letters of recommendation or transcripts. Upon transferring, the student must fulfill all other requirements for the PhD.

If the judgment is unsatisfactory, the student will continue in the master's program. There will be only one examination allowed for the transfer from a master's to a PhD.

Additional Steps for Transferring into a PhD Program

The PhD candidacy exam procedures for a Master's transfer student are the same as if the student was enrolled in the PhD program except for 2 additional steps.

1. First, the student and their RS(s) must inform the GPD that they would like to transfer from the Master's program to the PhD program. The Supervisory Committee and GPD fill out the Approval to Transfer from Master's to PhD form.
2. When SGPS receives the PhD Candidacy Examination – Summary of Committee Decision form, the DGPS must approve the transfer. Once the transfer is approved, SGPS sends the signed form to the chair of the candidacy committee, the RS(s) and the GPS.

Link to website/form:

- Form: [Recommendation to Transfer from Master's to PhD](#)