

## Duties of Chair of Examination Committees for PhD at AVC

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Starting in July 2022 and until further notice, all PhD Thesis Defences will occur as in-person (primarily) gatherings, except for the external examiner who will usually join virtually. As such, a hybrid gathering will need to be accommodated.

The public presentation should be done through an **in-person presentation** with all audience members, including the Examination committee, attending in-person. However, in situations in which circumstances dictate (e.g., isolation of a committee member or the graduate student), it is acceptable that some members of the examination committee attend through electronic means (e.g., zoom). All attempts should be made to arrange the examination so that, except for the external examiner, all other Examiners attend in-person. For most of the examinations, there is an external examiner who will join virtually. A zoom meeting link will be provided by the AVC-GSR Office. Although it will not be advertised, individuals may contact the AVC-GSR Office ahead of the examination and join using the same link. The Exam Committee Chair will be informed of known individuals planning to join virtually.

For the virtual links, the public presentation and the oral Examination will be conducted through two distinct and separate gatherings and meeting links (to accommodate the fact that the oral presentation is in a larger room than typically reserved for the oral examination by the committee). Any virtual meeting links must not be shared on social media sites. The oral Examination link will be provided to only individuals on the student's Examination Committee (typically only the external examiner is connecting virtually). The oral examination is open to public guests, but they should attend for the entire examination and not enter late or exit early. Normally, there are very few, if any, attendees who are not directly related to the examination.

### **On day before defense**

Check with the AVC-GSR Office (i.e., Rosemary McIver) to make sure everything is set, and that there are no unanticipated issues. These issues normally relate to virtual attendance only, but this is also a time to ensure you are comfortable with the process. Check with the Candidate to make sure they have prepared a Certificate of Thesis Work, as this needs to be signed by the Examination Committee Chair when the thesis is deemed complete (i.e. after any revisions).

### **On the morning of defense**

Be sure you have the link for the electronic copy of the pamphlet. It will normally be on the website (<https://www.upei.ca/avc/graduatestudies/student-thesis-defences>) but you should take a copy to have as a reference at the public seminar and you have it ready for display during your introduction of the Candidate. The AVC-GSR Office no longer prints copies to distribute at the Candidate's seminar. Check with the Candidate immediately prior to the seminar to make sure they have everything they need, AV is working properly, and suggest they have ready access to a container of water. Remind them that their presentation would normally be 30-45 minutes in duration and should not exceed 50 minutes. Although Exam Committee Chairs have normally not been strict on timing, there can be issues with others reserving the room for the next hour. Discuss with the Candidate how you will indicate that time is running out. Briefly review the process with the Candidate in the lead up time prior to the seminar starting. Check that the visuals are appropriate for both the Candidate (e.g., lighting) and when they

share the screen with their presentation. Ask if any of the candidate's family is in attendance or planning to connect virtually. Ask the Candidate to not wander far from the microphone associated with the computer with the link. About 15 minutes before the presentation is set to start, connect to the meeting link and ensure that the external examiner can see and hear the Candidate and that the screen sharing works.

### **The Public Presentation**

The default setting for the meeting will require that the **Chair act as host** and may need to admit the external examiner and occasionally other exam committee members. Attendees to the Public Presentation may occasionally join virtually but the link will not be widely distributed (it will be available to those who contact AVC-GSR Office prior to the public seminar). Depending on the room used for the public presentation, it may be necessary to have both the room computer and a student laptop "join" the meeting to accommodate the webcam set up.

The Chair should announce that all guests joining virtually must identify themselves with their first and last names and keep their video and microphone off unless directed by the Chair for the purpose of a question, then they must have the microphone turned on (and preferably video on) for the question and answer by the candidate. The Chair should monitor the chat function in case there are any concerns raised by the external (or other) examination committee member(s) or questions arise from the audience. It is the Examination Committee Chair's responsibility to ensure respectful meeting etiquette is maintained.

The Examination Committee Chair should display the Graduate Student's pamphlet on the screen. At the designated start time, declare that the examination has begun and state the purpose to the audience, something along these lines:

Welcome to the seminar portion of the defense of the Doctor of Philosophy thesis of the [Candidate's name]. I would like to start by introducing the Supervisory Committee members, who are [names]. The Examination Committee members are [names] and include the external Examiner, [name], joining us virtually from their home institution, [named]. Thank you to both committees for contributing to this academic process.

The Chair will then give a brief background of the candidate by way of introduction, roughly based on their biography contained in the pamphlet (which should be on the screen), in addition to any other personal comments you might like to make. You can also acknowledge any visitors who are special to the candidate, such as family members, if attending. At this point, the Chair should also explain that the virtual audience must maintain video / audio silence during the presentation. The Chair can remind audience members that they can visit <https://www.upei.ca/avc/graduatestudies/student-thesis-defences> to obtain an electronic copy of the pamphlet.

Let the audience know that questions will be welcome after the seminar, from those members of the audience who are NOT Examiners. Examiners will reserve their questions for the Oral Examination.

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After the Candidate finishes the presentation of their thesis work, applaud, thank the speaker, and state that members of the audience may raise their hands and be invited to ask questions. You should also check the chat for questions arising from the virtual guests. The Chair will also ensure that a respectful manner is part of all proceedings. Try to wrap up all question and answers by one hour, or earlier if possible.

To conclude the presentation, let the audience know that, after a 10–15-minute break, the oral examination will occur with Examiners and Candidate meeting in a different room and different electronic meeting for the external examiner. The public are welcome to join this in-person meeting. There will be no virtual public guests at the oral examination. Questions from non-examiners will only be permitted if there is time at the end of the exam as decided by the Chair of the Examination Committee (there rarely is time). Anyone joining the oral examination portion must commit to staying for the entire examination.

Discuss with the external examiner the process so that they know to join the next meeting link. Exchange email or phone contacts with the external examiner so that if there are connection issues, there is an alternative communication pathway. Finalize the time for the external examiner to join (i.e. within 10 minutes) the oral exam meeting link. Then close the presentations and projectors and proceed to the oral examination meeting room.

#### **The Oral Examination – before the Candidate arrives**

The Oral Examination will be an in-person gathering except for the external examiner who will join through a **virtual meeting** link (e.g., zoom). All other Examiners (and public attendees) must attend in-person. In the rare event of more than one examination committee member needing to join virtually (e.g., due to isolating or illness), this will be previously arranged and they will be given the meeting link and accommodated similar to the external examiner.

The link for the Examination meeting should not be provided to anyone outside of the Examination Committee. The virtual setting for the meeting will require that the Chair act as host and will need to admit individually the host computer, and the external examiner. All attendees to the Oral Examination must commit to attend for the *entire* Examination and will not be permitted entry into the Examination if they arrive after the announced starting time. Attendees who are not part of the Examination Committee will not be permitted access to the electronic meeting.

Most oral examinations will occur in the AVC Dean's Board Room which has a computer, microphone, camera, and screen to connect to the meeting (i.e., the external examiner). The Chair should logon and open the new meeting link (be sure to have access to that link sent by the AVC-GSR office). Test that the external examiner can see / hear the Chair. Explain to the external examiner that they should always maintain their video link, but mute when not interacting with the Candidate or other committee members, unless the connection is unstable and then video can be turned off at the discretion of the examiner.

The Examination Committee Chair should consult with all Examination Committee members prior to the

**Examination** (i.e. in the presence of only the Examination Committee) and agree upon the order for questioning (usually the External Examiner would go first). At the same time, the Chair should review the important aspects of the examination with the examiners, particularly the following:

- the criteria to be used (see the chart below, the points are for general weighting, but otherwise they are unimportant. It is advisable that each Examiner have a copy of this guideline)
- the general length of the oral exam (around 2-3 hours is routine for a PhD defense, but this is only a guideline)
- the questioning process and order
  - usually 2 rounds of questions, each 15-20 minutes per person per round, with more generous allocation for the External Examiner. Follow-up questions from anyone if needed after that, but try to keep total time to less than 2 hours.
  - Both the Supervisor and the Chair may ask questions of the Candidate, but usually the Chair refrains from any technical questions. The supervisor of the candidate's research, although a member of the Examination Committee, may wish to refrain from asking direct questions of the candidate. The Chair should establish this with the supervisor prior to the Examination.

### **The Oral Examination – with the Candidate in the room**

Once the Exam Committee is comfortable with the process, The Candidate can be admitted to the room, as well as any non-examiners. The Chair will **start the Oral Examination session** by describing the process for the student (as agreed upon by the committee just prior to this). After a period of questioning (e.g., one round of examiners), ask the Candidate if they require a break. Both general knowledge questions about the area of study and specific questions about the thesis research should be part of the examination. Questions and comments about specific typographical, grammatical, and spelling errors should not be part of the oral examination but should be given to the candidate in writing prior to and/or after the examination.

Once questioning is completed by the Examiners, the Chair of the Examination Committee may choose to solicit questions from members of the audience but only if there is sufficient time. Questions from non-examiners should be kept to a minimum and always asked respectfully. Following the end of the examination, the candidate and all guests are asked to leave the meeting. The Candidate should be close by and have a communication link (e.g., mobile phone) so that the Chair can contact the candidate when it is time to rejoin the meeting following deliberations).

### **Deliberation**

Once the Examination Committee Chair is satisfied that only the Examination Committee is present (in-person or virtually), they should agree on the manner in which they will deliberate the outcome. Normally, to start deliberations, each Examination committee member (the Chair moderates but does not factor into the decision) would decide independently if the candidate met the criteria for satisfactory or unsatisfactory, then divulge to the other committee members their opinion without influence by the other's opinions. Then discussion can occur about the merits of overall assessment.

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The assessment should be based upon each member's evaluation of:

- a. the written thesis,
- b. the student's presentation and defense of the thesis and,
- c. the student's knowledge of the discipline.

The Chair will then lead a discussion toward the final outcome in which the student's performance is provided a grade of satisfactory or unsatisfactory to appear as a thesis grade on the transcript. All three criteria should be deemed satisfactory before a grade of satisfactory is assigned. A member of the Examination Committee may assign a grade of satisfactory even though revisions to the thesis may be required. However, these revisions should be relatively minor and only be required to clarify the presentation of the material or the conclusions drawn. A thesis requiring extensive revision would normally be deemed unsatisfactory.

The Candidate is deemed to have passed the PhD examination if no more than one member of the Committee, excluding the Chair (who does not vote), assigns a grade of unsatisfactory (an abstention constitutes a negative vote).

If a grade of Satisfactory is assigned, changes and corrections to the thesis may be requested by the Examination Committee. The Chair of the Examination Committee should keep a record of the list of required changes, and the Committee should agree on a mechanism to oversee these changes and a time frame for their completion (normally within two weeks). It is preferable that the Chair, in consultation with the student's supervisor, be the Examination Committee member responsible to verify that all revisions to the thesis were addressed satisfactorily. If the changes are not made to the satisfaction of the Examination Committee Chair within the time frame specified, the grade will be switched to unsatisfactory and this grade will be forwarded to the Registrar.

If the result is "unsatisfactory," the Candidate may be given the opportunity by the Examination Committee of a second attempt of a complete Examination. The Examination Committee should consider if a result of satisfactory is possible if the opportunity for a second attempt is provided. If it is deemed impossible, then the second attempt opportunity should not be offered. This second attempt will normally include all three components – review of thesis, public presentation and oral Examination, however individual elements of the Examination may be waived with the unanimous consent of the Examination Committee. A second "unsatisfactory" result will terminate the candidacy for the degree at this University.

A decision is made how corrections will be overseen – while it is the Chair's responsibility, that responsibility is usually delegated to the Supervisor to oversee. Examiners are asked if they need to review the corrected thesis or not. The Supervisor and Chair are usually entrusted to oversee the corrections unless MAJOR revisions are required. Any annotated hard copies and notes on required and suggested corrections from the examiners will be sent by the Committee member to the Examination Committee Chair or Supervisor.

### **Communication of decision and revisions requested**

Following deliberation, the candidate is contacted and asked to rejoin the meeting. The Chair will then provide the candidate with the conclusion (i.e. satisfactory or unsatisfactory) and any requirements regarding completion of remaining tasks and timelines, such as thesis revisions or the need for a second Examination.

The Candidate is informed that there are major / minor / no corrections required, how they will be overseen, and a date is proposed for their completion (usually 2-3 weeks, but negotiable).

The Supervisor and Candidate often agree on a time and process to discuss the corrections. The Chair can usually defer much of the correction process to the supervisor but takes responsibility to verify that the Examination Committee's revisions are carried out.

The Examination is adjourned. Following the Examination, The Examination Committee Chair should email (as soon as feasible) the conclusion to the Associate Dean of AVC Graduate Studies and Research and copied to the Department Chair and AVC-GSR administrative assistant (mciver@upei.ca). The email should also include who will be responsible to ensure all revisions are completed and the expected timeline.

Following completion of all revisions required by the Examination Committee, the Chair of the Examination Committee notifies the AVC-GSR office by email of this completion and copies each member of the Examination Committee. Each Examination Committee member must then reply to AVC-GSR office to electronically approve their satisfaction and this will be logged as the official record (in the absence of signatures).

The Chair withholds their signature on the Certificate of Thesis Work until they are satisfied the corrections have been completed and the final thesis is ready for submission to the library. This original Certificate with the Chair's signature signifying "on behalf of the entire Examination Committee", once completed, forms part of the thesis and should be provided to the AVC GSR Office as soon as it is signed.

### **After Corrections are Completed**

Once the Supervisor and Chair are satisfied that corrections have (in general) been made in accordance with the requirements of the examiners, the Chair signs the Certificate of Thesis Work, informs the Associate Dean AVC-GSR, via email or memo, that the requirements for examination have been completed and a grade of Satisfactory has been awarded (cc. Dept Chair and Admin Assistants). A note to the Examiners is also appropriate, informing them that the corrections were completed, and thanking them for their role in the examination. The official role of the Chair ends at this point.