

## PhD Examination Committee Selection (Guidelines for AVC-GSR Office)

### PhD Examination Committee membership

The Final Oral Examination is devoted chiefly to the defence of the doctoral thesis. It is a Faculty level examination, for which the arrangements are the responsibility of the Office of the Associate Dean of AVC Graduate Studies and Research. The Final Oral Examination is conducted by an Examining Committee consisting of five members, as follows:

- a member of the graduate faculty who is not a member of the Supervisory Committee appointed to act as Chair by the Associate Dean of AVC Graduate Studies and Research in consultation with the Department Chair;
- the External Examiner;
- a member of the graduate faculty who is not a member of the Supervisory Committee, appointed by the Associate Dean of AVC Graduate Studies and Research in consultation with the Department Chair;
- two members of the student's Supervisory Committee, proposed by the Supervisory Committee and appointed by the Associate Dean of AVC Graduate Studies and Research. One Supervisor or Co-Supervisor may fill the role of the one from the Supervisory Committee, but not both. Normally, one member shall be from a Department other than that in which the student is registered.

### Selection of Supervisory Committee member from another department:

Many PhD supervisory committees include members external to AVC and often external to UPEI, each of whom has been appointed to graduate faculty (and as an adjunct if external to UPEI). When constituting the Examination Committee, adjunct members who are primarily employed external to UPEI will be considered external to the department even if they are appointed as an adjunct / graduate faculty in that department. Adjunct graduate faculty primarily employed by UPEI will be considered internal to the department in which they are employed.

### Selection of Co-Supervisor:

As has been an accepted practice at AVC, many graduate students have two co-supervisors, one of whom is referred to as the *Primary Supervisor* and the other is a *Co-Supervisor* (in many cases, the co-supervisor in this situation is a more experienced faculty member who is providing mentorship of the supervisory process to a less experienced Primary Supervisor). Normally, the Examination Committee membership would include the Primary Supervisor, and the co-supervisor will only participate if the committee membership cannot be constituted otherwise.

## **External Examiner Selection**

PHD examinations at AVC are the responsibility of the AVC-GSR office. For each doctoral thesis, an External Examiner from outside the University is appointed by the AVC Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research in consultation with the Supervisor and the Department Chair. The department chair, in consultation with the student's supervisory committee, will propose to the AVC-GSR Office three names of potential external examiners, in order of preference, with a brief justification of the expertise the external examiner will bring to the examination. The justification must also include a statement of any collaborations between the supervisor / co-supervisor or student and the proposed external examiner candidate, including the dates of that collaboration. Normally, an external examiner will not be selected if there were collaborations, such as joint projects, co-authorship on publications, or joint supervision of trainees, in the previous 5 years. There should be no existing plans for future collaboration. Any individual who serves as an external examiner at AVC would normally not serve again in this capacity for another 24 months. For the exceptional situation in which there are few candidates in the field or a supervisor has extensive international collaborations, adjustments to these criteria may be considered by the Associate Dean of GSR.

The candidate's supervisor / co-supervisor should not contact the potential external examiner *except* to discern their schedule availability and their willingness to be proposed as an external examiner. It is *not* the prerogative of the supervisor or the department chair to invite this individual to sit on the committee, this is the responsibility of the AVC-GSR Office. The suggested wording for the supervisor when contacting the potential external examiner to discern willingness and availability is the following:

*"I supervise a PhD student who is approaching completion and whose thesis title is [ ], the thesis abstract is attached. We are proposing the student presentation and oral examination to occur on one of these suggested three dates: [ ], [ ], or [ ]. As a Faculty of Veterinary Medicine examination, the arrangements, including the appointment of the external examiner, are the responsibility of the AVC Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research (AVC-GSR) Office. This email is to ask if you agree to be nominated to fill this role.*

*If you are available and willing, our department will nominate you as an external examiner in our list of three suggestions. We need to include a brief justification (paragraph or less) of your relevant expertise. Please read over this justification to confirm that it appropriately describes your relevance to this examination. Note that the Associate Dean's Office normally invites external examiners to participate through a virtual connection (e.g. Zoom or Teams) but those details will be communicated through the AVC-GSR Office.*

*Thank you for considering this request. According to the process, once we nominate you for this role, we should not be in communication again until the examination is complete.”*

The External Examiner is expected to attend the Final Oral Examination and the list of potential examiners should consider the cost of travel to UPEI. Normally, travel costs will only be provided for an external examiner who is from Atlantic Canada. In some situations, an examiner with unique expertise from eastern North American veterinary colleges would be considered for in-person attendance, but normally not from greater distances. When an External Examiner is unable to attend, due to distance or personal constraints, the Final Oral Examination, the AVC Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, in consultation with the Chair of the Examination Committee and the Chair of the Department, may permit examination via videoconference. Honoraria and expenses are paid as per university policy in relation to the duties involved.

Prior to the exam, the External Examiner will submit a written appraisal of the thesis to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. This brief report (normally three pages or less) will summarize their evaluation of the thesis and normally include a discussion of the scientific significance of the thesis with comments regarding its theoretical framework, methodology, findings, and interpretations. The report will consider its academic standard and quality, reflecting that the candidate meets the minimum requirements to qualify as a researcher, considering the candidate’s formulation of research questions, logical and original approaches to testing stated hypotheses, and understanding of current methods and their limitations.

Reimbursement of travel costs for other Examination Committee members will not be covered by the AVC-GSR Office but may be covered by the supervisor’s department.

### **Oral Examination Process**

Normally, the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research or his/her designate will attend the Examination. The Examination is normally open to the public, but members of the audience may question the candidate only upon invitation of the Chair of the Committee. Normally the Examination is preceded by a public presentation of the research results. The public seminar presented by the student should include an opportunity for respectful questioning by the audience. Examination Committee members should reserve their questions for the oral examination that will follow (after a brief break) the public presentation. The Examination Committee and student will gather for a question-and-answer session usually in a smaller meeting room but it can resume in the presentation room to accommodate audiovisual equipment. Any audience members for the oral examination portion should remain quiet and

unobtrusive, normally only attending if they stay for the entire examination (not exiting part way through).

The Examination Committee Chair will direct the order of questions and the length of time each examiner takes. The external examiner would normally be given the first, and longest, opportunity to ask questions, the supervisor would be given the last and shortest opportunity. The series of questioners would usually go around the Examination Committee at least twice. The examination does not have a time limit but is expected to be at least 90 minutes and not usually more than three hours. The Chair will restrict questions to the members of the Examination Committee only.

Immediately following the oral examination, the student will be asked to leave the room (or temporarily disconnect, if virtual) while the Examination Committee deliberates. The members of the Examination Committee, including the External Examiner, report individually on both the defence and the thesis, the candidate being deemed to have passed if not more than one of the five Examiners votes negatively. An abstention is regarded as a negative vote. The deliberation process will be directed by the Examination Committee Chair, normally starting with a secret ballot process to indicate satisfactory or unsatisfactory followed by discussion on the merits of the thesis, the seminar, and the responses during the oral examination.

Concurrently, the members sign the Certificate of Approval, to be submitted with the approved thesis in its final form to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. The report to the Associate Dean will record the decision as “unsatisfactory,” or “satisfactory.” If “unsatisfactory,” the candidate may be given the opportunity of a second attempt. A second “unsatisfactory” will terminate candidacy at this University.

*Revised as per calendar update (July 2024)*