

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

GUIDE FOR CHAIRING A PHD THESIS EXAMINATION

Graduate Studies Office

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Conduct of Examination	Successful completion of the PhD examination ensures that the student has achieved and is able to demonstrate qualities consistent with scholarly endeavours in her/his particular area of specialization at the doctoral level. As such, the occasion of a PhD thesis examination demands as much formality, courtesy and decorum as any university exam (e.g., no interruptions due to discussions within or comments from the audience except when invited to participate by the Chair). It is within the power of the Chair to ensure that the highest standards of conduct are exercised by those in attendance. This is best communicated in a brief introductory statement at the beginning of the examination.
Powers of the Chair	The Chair, appointed by the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies Office, is responsible for the proper conduct of the examination and for ensuring that the exam begins on time (the Chair will use her/his discretion in the event of difficulties). The examination is public, but the Chair has the authority to exclude persons whose conduct disturbs the examination.
Use of Cell Phones, Video Cameras, etc.	Recording of the formal examination process is not allowed, nor is the use of cell phones, blackberries, video cameras, cameras or tape recorders unless used for the purpose of the examination presentation.
Participation By Teleconference/ Electronic Media	Any member of the Examining Committee, including the external examiner, participating by telephone/electronic connection must make allowances for the possibility of a failed connection by submitting a written report clearly identifying one of the four categories pertaining to acceptability of the thesis to the Faculty, Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) at least one week before the examination. If the connection fails during or before the examination, the report will be read by the Chair and the right of the member participating through telephone/electronic connection to vote will be nullified. Participation through electronic media will be limited to one member of the Examining Committee. The Chair will sign the form on behalf of committee member(s) participating by telephone/electronic connection.
Closed PhD Examinations	PhD Thesis Examinations without Public Disclosure: In rare cases, the contents of a PhD thesis may be withheld from public display in order for the student and other involved parties to seek intellectual property protection. In this case, members of the University community who wish to attend the PhD thesis examination will be asked by the student and/or supervisor(s) to sign a non-disclosure agreement. It is not the responsibility of the Chair to ask attendees to sign this agreement, but the Chair should ensure that, in such cases, only those who have signed such an agreement are permitted to remain in the examination once it has begun. Complete details regarding the handling of such theses and their subsequent examination is provided at: http://www.grad.uwaterloo.ca/students/Guidelinescloseddefense.html

Absent External Examiner	In the rare case that an external examiner is not in attendance at the examination, the external examiner's questions to the candidate shall be presented by the Chair. The Chair must have a copy of the external examiner's written report at least one week before the examination and the written report must identify one of the four categories pertaining to acceptability of the thesis. The Examining Committee will consider the report of the external examiner during the deliberation of the outcome, however, only the vote from the attending members will be counted.
Absent Committee Member	Any member of the Examining Committee, except the external examiner, who cannot attend the examination, must submit a written report on the thesis to the Faculty Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) at least one week before the examination. The Faculty Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) will then appoint a delegate, who cannot be an existing member of the Examining Committee, to carry the absent member's report to the examination. No more than two members (including participation by electronic medium) may be absent from the examination. The Supervisor(s) must attend the exam. A delegate has the status of a Committee member, and her/his vote substitutes for that of the absent Committee member. If any Committee member is absent and has not been replaced by a delegate, the Examination may proceed only with the approval of the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies or her/his delegate by calling ext. 32657.
Oral Presentation	The examination begins with an oral presentation of the thesis by the candidate using whatever aids are required to make an effective presentation. This presentation should be limited to no more than 30 minutes, with the focus being on the main contributions and conclusions of the scholarly work.
Order of Questions	The presentation is followed by questioning. The Chair will give priority to questions from members of the Examining Committee. Usually, the external examiner's questions are presented first (by the Chair in the absence of the examiner), followed by those of the Committee with those of the Supervisor(s) last. Members of the University who have previously submitted written criticisms may then address questions to the candidate, and subsequent questions may be allowed from the audience, if time permits.
Relevance of Questions	If the Chair is unsure regarding the appropriateness or relevance of a particular question, the Committee members will be asked if they wish to have the candidate answer that particular question.
Questions from Absentees	The Chair must ascertain that all of the questions from an absent Committee member have been adequately presented by the delegate who may also pose any additional questions deemed necessary. A delegate has the status of a Committee member, and her/his vote substitutes for that of the absent Committee member.
Termination of Questioning and Deliberations	The Chair, with the concurrence of the Committee, decides that further questioning is unnecessary. The candidate and audience are asked to leave the room and the examining committee will then deliberate in a closed session. Candidate is then invited back into the room and informed by the Chair of the decision.

Attendance by Non-Committee Members During Deliberations	The Departmental Graduate Officer, the Departmental Chair, the Faculty Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) and the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies are permitted to attend the <u>in camera</u> deliberations of the Examining Committee. They have no vote unless they are members of the Committee. They do not participate in the discussions of the Examining Committee except by invitation.
External Examiner's Report	If the external examiner is absent, the deliberations commence by having the Chair read the external examiner's full report of the thesis. If the external examiner is present, there is no need for the examiner's full report on the thesis to be read. It is left to the external examiner to refer to the written report.
Criteria for Acceptance	The decision of the Examining Committee should be based on the thesis and on the candidate's ability to defend it.

The following four decisions are open to the Examining Committee:

(A) Accepted

Thesis may require typographical and/or minor editorial corrections to be made to the satisfaction of the Supervisor(s) (normally within one month).

(B) Accepted Conditionally

Thesis is acceptable but requires some changes (in substance or editorial changes). The Examining Committee's report must include an outline of the nature of the changes required and must indicate the time by which the changes are to be completed. Changes must be completed to the Committee's/designates satisfaction within one calendar year of the date of the examination or the student must withdraw from the program.

(C) Decision Deferred

Thesis requires modifications of a substantial nature the need for which makes the acceptability of the thesis questionable. The Examining Committee's report must contain a brief outline of the modifications expected and should indicate the time by which the changes are to be completed. The revised thesis must be re-submitted to the Faculty Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) for re-examination. Normally, the re-examination will follow the same procedures as for the initial submission, except that the display period may be reduced or eliminated at the discretion of the Faculty Associate Dean (Graduate Studies). Normally, the same Examining Committee will serve. A decision to defer is open only once for each candidate.

(D) Rejected

Thesis is rejected. The Examining Committee shall report the reasons for rejection. A student whose PhD thesis has been rejected will be required to withdraw from the PhD program. The Department Graduate Officer/Associate Chair will confirm in writing the decision of the Examining Committee to the student and the requirement to withdraw within one week of the date of the examination.

Unanimous Agreement	If the Examining Committee unanimously agrees upon one of the four decisions outlined above, then the "PhD Thesis Examination Report" should be completed and signed by the Examining Committee, delegates of the absent examiners, and the Chair. Three copies of the Report, together with the written reports of the absent examiners, must be delivered to the Faculty Graduate Office as soon as possible after the conclusion of the examination.
One Dissenting Opinion	If all but one member of the Committee agrees on a decision, the decision shall be that of the majority, except when the one dissenting vote is that of the external examiner who has fully participated in the thesis examination process. In this case, the occurrence must be reported to the Faculty Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) concerned who will inform the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies. The Associate Provost and the Faculty Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) will come to a decision, which will be reported back to the PhD candidate and the Chair of the Examining Committee. In very exceptional cases, the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies may wish to take the matter before the Senate Graduate & Research Council, which is specifically given authority to make such decisions.
Two Dissenting Opinions	If two or more dissenting votes are recorded, the case must be referred to the Faculty Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) who will ascertain what is needed to reach a consensus.
Delayed Decision	In the event that the Examining Committee is not prepared to reach a decision concerning the thesis at the time of the examination, it is the responsibility of the Chair to determine what additional information is required by the Committee to reach a decision, to arrange to obtain this for the Committee, and to call another meeting of the Committee as soon as the required information is in his or her hands. It is also the responsibility of the Chair to inform the candidate that the decision is pending. Candidates should not normally be required to present themselves before the Examining Committee at the second meeting.
Informing Candidate	It is the Chair's responsibility to inform the candidate immediately of the Committee's decision.
Report to the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies	The Chair must report in writing to the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies on the conduct of the examination with the enclosed "Report of the Chair" form.
Length of Examination	Examinations are normally 2 to 3 hours in length. If the examination continues beyond this time, it is very reasonable for you to ask the Committee to begin to wrap things up. If the examination is a difficult one, then of course, it could take longer.
University Closure due to the weather	At the discretion of the Chair and in consultation with the Faculty Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) the examination will proceed if all committee members can attend.