March 2021

The Proposal Defense is a key step in the PhD thesis/project process. At this event, the supervisor and committee, in person, respond to theoretical, methodological, substantive, and practical elements of the student’s proposal. The main goal is to assess and refine the plan, and (if the plan seems strong enough) to launch the student into the work. Other goals are matching the scope of the project to the time available to complete it, and ensuring that the role of committee members is clear to all.

The Chair conducts the meeting, acting as a representative of the Program and keeping an eye on the time and the process. The Chair is not required to read the thesis/project.

* The Chair **welcomes the candidate**, **goes through the possible outcomes** of the meeting as defined on PhD Form E (i.e., *pass, pass with committee directives, and revise/resubmit* -- failure is not an option if this is the first proposal approval meeting). **It may be useful to read the definitions of each from the form itself.** The Chair then **asks** **the candidate to leave the room**, reassuring them not to worry if the pre-discussion takes a bit of time.
* The Chair confirms with the supervisor and reader how much time the student has left to complete the thesis/project and **checks that the timeline is appropriate** – or, if missing, that it will be generated during the meeting.
* The Chair **invites the supervisor and committee members to briefly review their appraisal of the work** and their lines of questions — the point here is to make sure they know if others have serious concerns or particular lines of questioning.
* The Chair **invites the candidate back** and questioning proceeds starting with the examiner least familiar with the work. The Chair keeps track of time, making sure to leave time for committee discussion within the time allotment. There may or may not be time for a second round of questions.
* The Chair **asks the candidate out again** and examiners decide on the outcome. **If “committee directives” are included, the wording must be worked out during this time.** The Chair usually takes the lead on this, as they will be submitting the form. Also, this is a **good time for committee members to clarify their anticipated roles** in guiding the student going forward (e.g., will they only read the penultimate draft, or will they be involved before? Various options are possible, so clarity is helpful.)
* The Chair **calls the candidate back and delivers the news**.
* If the proposal is deemed insufficient (“revise and resubmit”), the student will have one opportunity to rewrite the proposal and defend the revision within the following three months.