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Notes for Chairperson

These notes supplement the General Regulation – Thesis in the Academic Calendar for the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs to provide standard administrative practice in the conduct of oral thesis examinations.

Part 1: Receiving Reports and Other Documents

The examiners' reports and forms for the examination, will be sent by e-mail on the working day before the oral thesis examination.

If any two of the examiner's reports recommend that the oral thesis examination not proceed, the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs informs the Chair several days prior to the scheduled date of the oral thesis examination. The Chair consults the supervisor and Head/Director of the Department/Program who discuss with the candidate whether the oral thesis examination should proceed. The onus is on the candidate to make the decision whether the oral thesis examination will proceed or be postponed. If the candidate agrees that the oral thesis examination should be postponed, the Chair conveys to the candidate, through the supervisor, the nature of the revisions to the thesis that are advised in the negative reports. The candidate has the right to present the revised thesis later. At the subsequent submission of the thesis, the oral thesis examination must be held.

Part 2: Attendance at the Oral Thesis Examination

Oral thesis examinations are normally open, meaning that all members of the Queen's community (any faculty member, staff member, or student of the University) may attend. Visitors (anyone who is not a member of the Queen's community) may attend an open oral thesis examination if their attendance has been arranged by the candidate and the supervisor(s) and reported to the Head of the Department/Program, at least one week prior to the scheduled date of the oral thesis examination.

An oral thesis examination may be closed, meaning that only members of the Examining Committee may be present.

Regardless of whether the oral thesis examination is open or closed, **only members of the Examining Committee may ask questions of the candidate, and only members of the Examining Committee may be present during the preliminary and post-examination sessions.**

At the time of the oral thesis examination the Chair of the Examining Committee shall have final authority to determine who is eligible to attend the oral thesis examination. Attendance at an open oral thesis examination may be limited due to room capacity.

Attendance of the Examining Committee and student is required for the full duration of the defence.

The Chair of the Examining Committee may ask members of the Queen's community and all visitors to leave the examination after the oral presentation made by the candidate, in cases where a presentation is part of the oral thesis examination processes.

The Chair of the Examining Committee has responsibility for the conduct of the oral thesis examination, and has the discretion to exclude members of the Queen's community, and/or visitors, whose conduct disturbs the oral thesis examination processes.

Part 3: Introduction of Candidate, Procedural Matters, and Reading Reports

1. The Chair should remind the candidate, the examiners and all attendees that cell phones and/or other personal electronic devices such as laptops are permitted as personal assistive devices, and/or for the purpose of referring to an electronic version of the thesis. These devices must not be used for reasons such as texting or emailing or similar activities, during the oral thesis examination. The Chair should also remind the candidate, the examiners and all attendees that recording of the oral thesis examination is not permitted, even to document required revisions or examiner questions (unless recording has been identified as an approved accommodation).

The Chair should inform examiners and the candidate of the general procedures to be followed at the oral thesis examination. The following procedural matters should be explained to examiners and the candidate at the outset of the defence:

- a. Examiners must be present for the full duration of the oral thesis examination. In exceptional cases when one examiner is not able to attend the oral thesis examination in person or remotely (and their absence is known in advance), they are normally asked by the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs to supply written questions to be put to the candidate by the Chair or another member of the examining committee. For cases of unexpected absences, see 'Special Notes' section below.
- b. All examiners, Chair, and/or the candidate connecting remotely must be present for the duration of the examination and if joining via videoconference are advised to keep their cameras on unless it interferes with communication and bandwidth. Any exceptions should have been arranged with and approved by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs before the oral thesis examination.
- c. For remote examinations, examiners, the student, and delegates are not allowed to use chat functions (i.e., on Zoom or Teams) during any part of the examination.
- d. All examiners are required to cast their vote for one of the 4 outcome categories, at the end of the oral thesis examination. Abstaining is not an option. The 4 outcome categories are: Passed, Passed with Major Revisions, Referred, and Failed.

2. At the oral examination, when the examiners and the candidate have been introduced to each other, the candidate should then be asked to withdraw briefly while the examination committee members' reports are read, but to remain close to the examination room.
3. The Chair then reads aloud the examiners' reports in the following order:
 - a. Examiner external to the University (Ph.D./D.Sc./some Masters' examinations)
 - b. Internal/External examiner;
 - c. Additional examiner (if member of examining committee);
 - d. Examiner;
 - e. Head of Department or delegate (including if the Head is serving in Chair role; i.e., read their own report); and
 - f. Supervisor(s).

With lengthy reports, the Chair may read a summary of the reports that has met with the approval of the examiner concerned. The Chair may also invite examiners to read their own reports. The Chair will ask if there are any general questions that the examiners wish to discuss before the candidate re-enters.

Part 4: The Oral Thesis Examination

4. The candidate is recalled. If required by the department/program, the candidate gives a brief exposition (no longer than 20 minutes) of their thesis. Otherwise, the Chair normally opens the oral thesis examination by inviting the external examiner to begin their questioning.
5. Questioning follows in the order set out in Part 3(3) above. On average, Ph.D./D.Sc oral thesis examinations run for 2-3 hours. Each examiner, therefore, has roughly 20-25 minutes for their questions, but the Chair must exercise their discretion rather than enforce this allotment in any mechanical fashion. The examiner external to the university is usually allowed as much time as they wish. The Chair may help to guide the time limits that they feel are reasonable. Often the supervisor has fewer questions than the other examiners and may provide the candidate opportunity to tie up any loose ends from previous questions.
6. While each examiner, in turn, holds the right to question, they may allow supplementary questions from other examiners during their allotted time, when appropriate. The oral thesis examination may, therefore, temporarily take a more discursive form. The Chair should ensure that each examiner has their time quota without excessive interruption.
7. If the Head of Department (or delegate) is serving as Chair, like the supervisor, they may elect to ask the candidate questions; however, they may choose not to ask questions.
8. At the conclusion, the Chair asks each examiner, in turn, if they have any supplementary questions and, if not, the candidate is asked to withdraw along with any visitors.



Part 5: Discussion and Evaluation of Thesis and Oral Defence

9. On the candidate's withdrawal, the Chair calls for a discussion of the written thesis and the defence of the thesis in the oral thesis examination. Although unanimous decisions usually prevail, **the lowest outcome category with two or more votes will result in the decision of the examining committee.** For example, if two examiners vote to refer the thesis and three vote to pass the thesis, then the outcome is referred. If two examiners vote to fail the thesis and four vote to pass the thesis, then the outcome is failed. Each member of the examining committee listed in Part 1(2) above must cast a vote for one of the outcome categories outlined on the next page. Only these members of the examining committee have a vote in deciding the result of the oral thesis examination. The Chair may use their position to guide the examining committee in reaching a decision, but they are not a voting member of the committee. The external examiner's vote carries the same weight as that of any other member of the committee.

The outcome of the oral thesis examination is based on the acceptability of both the thesis and the defence of the thesis at the oral thesis examination. The purpose of the oral thesis examination is to ascertain that the student is able to adequately present and defend the thesis and its underlying assumptions, methodology, results and conclusions in a manner consistent with the degree being sought. **At the oral thesis examination, the examining committee will reach one of the 4 decisions listed below and record it on the "Thesis Examination Results" form. The 4 decisions are Passed, Passed with Major Revisions, Referred or Failed.**

If the Head of Department (or delegate) is serving as Chair, they would not vote towards the outcome of the oral examination.

Passed: A thesis is passed if it is acceptable in its present form or pending minor revisions, and its defence at the oral thesis examination was satisfactory. A thesis may be passed if no substantive changes are required. Changes in the form of corrections of typographical or grammatical errors, minor modifications to the thesis, editorial revisions to improve clarity and revisions to clarify results, findings or conclusions, or the like, may be recommended with a thesis classified as passed. A list of the required revisions must be provided by the Chair to the candidate and the supervisor and the completion of the revisions must be certified to the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs by the thesis supervisor or other designated person.

Passed with Major Revisions: A thesis is passed with major revisions if it is not acceptable in its present form or pending minor revisions but could be acceptable pending major revisions. Major revisions could include, for example, rearticulation and repositioning of research purpose, substantive integration of new literature, significant additions or revisions to conceptual framework, methodology, results, and/or discussion. In cases of portfolio or manuscript theses, a passed with major revisions outcome may be assigned if one or more of the manuscripts requires major revisions. A result of passed with major revisions does not require a second oral examination; however, all revisions must be completed within 4-months (i.e., one term). All required major revisions must be documented by the Chair and certified to the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs by those whom the examining committee deem responsible for oversight of the major revisions. A minimum of two members of the thesis examining committee are responsible for overseeing the major revisions.

Referred: A thesis is referred if it is not acceptable in its present form and, after extensive revision by the candidate, requires re-examination by the Ph.D./D.Sc. oral thesis examining committee. For example, a thesis will be referred if it requires substantive changes such as rewriting a substantial portion of the thesis, substantial reinterpretation, reanalysis or recalculation of data or findings, or additional research in order to attain acceptable standards of coherence and integrity in argument and presentation. The committee will reconvene and hold another oral thesis examination of the revised thesis.

The examining committee may also use the Referred category if it determines that the oral thesis examination itself, either separate from or in conjunction with the written thesis, is unsatisfactory. This means that the candidate did not adequately present and defend the thesis and its underlying assumptions, methodology, results, and conclusions in a manner consistent with the degree being sought. Following the second oral thesis examination, the committee must then return a decision of either Passed or Failed; Passed with Major Revisions or Referred outcomes are not options.

In all cases of referral, the nature of the revisions and/or additional work, and/or the deficiencies associated with the oral thesis examination, must be specified in writing by the Chair to avoid dispute or ambiguity. **When outlining the revisions and/or additional work required, the Chair must be as specific as possible. These comments will be passed on to the candidate in a letter from the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs as revisions and/or improvements that must be met for the thesis to be reconsidered.**

Any outlined revisions in relation to a referred outcome must be certified by the Chair or delegate as having been completed satisfactorily. Usually, this certification is delegated to at least two members of the Committee. In all cases of referral, the examining committee continues to exist until it has agreed that the thesis outcome is either Passed or Failed.

The outcome of 'Passed with Major Revisions' is not an option once the thesis and/or oral examination has been placed in the Referred category.

Notes On The "Referred" Category

1. If the committee returns two or more votes for referred it will hold another examination after the candidate has carried out further research and/or rewritten the thesis, but normally not more than one year later.
2. Candidates have up to twelve months from the date of the first oral thesis examination to complete revisions to their thesis but should be encouraged to do so as soon as possible.
3. A thesis that has been defended by oral thesis examination can be submitted once more only in revised form. A candidate whose thesis and/or defence of the thesis at the second oral examination, does not satisfy the examining committee on the second submission will be failed.

Failed: Failure can occur in two ways:

1. A thesis is failed if the document is unacceptable to the discipline even with substantive revisions. If the committee returns two or more votes of Failed on the basis of the document, this means that the committee recommends that the student be required to withdraw on academic grounds.
2. Failure may also result from an unacceptable second oral thesis examination, where the student was manifestly unable to adequately present and defend the thesis and its underlying assumptions, methodology, results and conclusions in a manner consistent with the degree being sought. A decision of Failed on the basis of the second oral thesis examination requires agreement by the majority (more than half) of the examining committee.

When the examining committee has reached a decision, the Chair will note the result on the "Thesis Examination Result" form and asks each examiner to sign it and check the appropriate box (unless the exam is occurring remotely in which case the chair will sign on behalf of remote examiners). The Chair then signs the form. The student is recalled and the Chair informs the student of the result, including details of any revisions required.

Part 6: Completing the Oral Thesis Examination and Documentation

10. The Chair reminds the supervisor(s) and student that, prior to the final submission of the revised approved thesis to QSpace, all issues of intellectual property rights and any potential for patents from the work in the thesis should be discussed. The Chair reminds the student that they can choose to select the "**Restrict**" option when submitting the thesis to QSpace to protect any rights to commercial publication, to obtain a patent, as a result of any contract with a third party, or for any other justifiable reason.
11. The Chair informs the examining committee and student that the Chair submits a report on the conduct of the oral thesis examination to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs, and that all examiners and the student are welcome to contact the Dean with any comments or concerns about the oral thesis examination.
12. The Chair fills out the Confidential Report for the Dean. This form records the Chair's judgment on the quality of the examination. The Chair should draw the Dean's attention to any other aspect of the oral thesis examination that requires comment or action.

Chair's Report & Result – Please return completed forms to:

Rose Silva, Thesis Coordinator
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Part 7: Special Notes

Remote Participation in the Ph.D./D.Sc. Oral Thesis Examination

All examiners, Chair, and/or the candidate connecting remotely must be present for the duration of the examination and if joining via videoconference are advised to keep their cameras on unless it interferes with communication and bandwidth. If the candidate is joining remotely, arrangements should be made to use a waiting room function during closed deliberation sessions of the defence. Guests are allowed during remote defence if the following protocols are undertaken: the Chair and/or Supervisor is responsible for obtaining everyone on the Committee's permission (most importantly the candidate's permission) to have guests enter into the examination, but only for the candidate's presentation (if there is one) and general questioning period. Similar to the in-person procedures, guests may not be present during the Committee deliberations. All examiners, the candidate, and guests must verbally agree not to record the examination and not to be in communication with the candidate during the examination (e.g., sending texts, photos, or any answers during the examination). The Chair is responsible for ensuring that guests and the candidate are welcomed at the appropriate time and leave the online examination at the appropriate time.

When Head of Department (or delegate) is Serving as Chair

If the Head of Department (or delegate) role is merged with the Chair role for the defence, the expectation is that in advance of the oral thesis examination, the Head's Delegate/Chair would still read the thesis and signal if the exam should proceed by submitting a pre-defence report by the stated deadline. This report should include any suggested revisions to align the thesis with departmental standards. This pre-defence report fulfills the 'Head's Delegate' responsibilities.

At the defence, the Head's Delegate would assume the role and responsibilities of the Chair, and:

- Would moderate the discussion and decision deliberations
- Like the supervisor, may elect to ask the candidate questions
- Would read their Head's report to the examining committee, when reading reports, including any suggested revisions needed to align the thesis with departmental standards
- Would not vote towards the outcome of the oral examination.

Unexpected Absence of an Examiner

If an examiner has not joined the examination by the scheduled time, and cannot be contacted or located, the examination should proceed, as long as the candidate does not object to proceeding. In addition, you can contact Graduate Thesis Coordinator at thesis@queensu.ca for assistance or if you have questions or concerns.