Process for PhD Proposal Defence

It is the responsibility of the supervisor and the student candidate to build a PhD committee throughout the latter part of the 1st year of the candidate's program, with input from the Graduate Coordinator if required. This PhD committee should consist of the supervisor and two other Faculty members who are well-versed in the area of the student's research.

The examination committee for the dissertation proposal defence will consist of this PhD committee along with a Chair. The Chair is a non-voting member of the examination committee and as such does not need any specific expertise in the student's research area. The Chair may be a Faculty member from the Department of Philosophy or from another Department at Queen's.

The supervisor, in discussion with the examination committee and the student, will select a time and date for the examination and inform the Department Graduate Assistant. If a Chair has not yet been secured, the Graduate Assistant can help to find a Chair. The Graduate Assistant will prepare the notice paperwork to send to SGSPA. This paperwork must include the following information:

- Date and time of the defense
- Names of the Student and Examination Committee (including Chair)
- Signatures from the candidate and the Graduate Coordinator

The student will provide a copy of the thesis proposal to all committee members **no later than ten working days prior to the oral examination.** It is the responsibility of the student to provide the examining committee with the thesis, but the Graduate Assistant can provide help as needed.

NB: Normally, a proposal would go forward to a defence after the Supervisor has agreed that the proposal is ready to be examined. However, if the Supervisor and the student disagree about the readiness of the proposal, the student may inform the Graduate Coordinator in writing that they wish to go ahead with an oral exam of the proposal against the advice of their Supervisor, and the exam will proceed.

Process for PhD Proposal Defence

Examiners should provide the Chair with a written report on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal before the date of the exam, and they are encouraged to share those reports with the student once the exam is complete.

The results of the oral examination will be either “Pass”, “Revisions Required”, or “Fail”. The decision to Pass must be unanimous.

- If one or more examiners vote to fail the examination, the Supervisor should consult with the Graduate Coordinator to determine next steps. In the event of a Fail result, withdrawal of the student from the program will likely be required.
- If major revisions are required, the committee must specify in writing the nature of the revisions. The candidate must resubmit their proposal with the revisions incorporated within three months and proceed to a second oral exam shortly thereafter.
- If the second proposal and exam do not Pass OR if the student is unable to resubmit the proposal within three months (barring extenuating circumstances), this requirement will be considered Failed, and the student will be required to withdraw from the program.

If the proposal and defence receive a Pass, the Chair will notify the candidate, examination committee, and the Graduate Assistant. The Graduate Assistant will write and submit a memo to SGSPA noting that the student has completed the Comprehensive Exams portion of their PhD requirements. SGSPA will make the appropriate changes to the student’s transcript so that the completed comprehensive exams designation appears.

Process for PhD Proposal Defence

Purpose of the PhD Proposal Defense

The oral examination of the candidate's dissertation proposal fulfills the comprehensive exams portion of the PhD program in the Department of Philosophy. It is intended to demonstrate that the candidate possesses the necessary focus and knowledge to begin writing their dissertation. In doing so, this oral examination enables an evaluation of the candidate's suitability for continuing in the PhD program. In general, the Proposal should be 15-20 pages long and should accomplish the following:

- Discuss the current relevant philosophical literature on the topic
- Provide an outline of the argument to be made in the dissertation
- Identify and defend the significance of the argument to be made
- Provide a timetable of research and writing for the various chapters
- Provide a projected date of completion
- Provide a bibliography of primary and secondary source readings

During the oral examination, the candidate should be able to speak confidently on all of these points.

Timeline Planning Notes

- It is strongly recommended that students seek to complete this proposal defense before the end of the 2nd year of their PhD program.
- It is often a good idea to factor in a couple of days between deciding on a date/time, and sending notice in to SGSPA to allow for finding a Chair if the first option is not available.
- It is important to note that neither departmental nor SGSPA staff work on weekends or holidays, so if a student is trying to complete this requirement by a specific date, scheduling should plan to allow completion by the nearest weekday before that specific date.

Process for PhD Proposal Defence

Scheduling Example: PhD Proposal Defences should ideally be completed by **August 1** of Year 2 of the PhD. Given this timeline, this is the latest we would want to complete these pieces:

- July 14 - Supervisor advises Graduate Assistant of examination, leaving time to secure a Chair
- July 16 - Notification form submitted to SGSPA and thesis sent to examiners
- July 30 - Oral Examination; Examiners should submit their reports to the Chair before this date
- July 31 - Graduate Assistant notified of successful exam and Memo of Completion sent to SGSPA

If possible, it is always beneficial if we can allow slightly more time between these steps, but hopefully this illustrates the tightest turnaround manageable with notification requirements.