

PhD Thesis and Oral Examination procedure in EAS (Updated September 2006)

Before the submitted thesis is sent to an external examiner (see below), supervisory committee members notify the supervisor that the thesis is of sufficient substance and quality to proceed. The committee has a minimum of three weeks to complete this evaluation. The external examiner must receive the thesis at least four weeks before the final oral examination (defence); in other words, the candidate must have the thesis ready at least seven weeks before the planned date of the final oral examination.

The Preliminary Acceptance of Thesis form signed by the supervisory committee states that the thesis is of adequate substance to proceed to oral examination. It does not imply success of the thesis at the defence. If a supervisory committee member declines to sign the form, a period of not less than one month after submission and not more than three months is available to the supervisor, candidate, and supervisory committee members to resolve the issue(s) involved. If after three months all but one of the members have signed, the supervisor may proceed to set the date for the final examination and recommend the external examiner.

At least three weeks before the final oral examination, the Associate Chair notifies examiners of the examination date. The external examiner receives the thesis at least four weeks before the final oral examination.

Examining Committee

The committee consists of at least five examiners: the supervisory committee and at least two other examiners.

One member of the examining committee is from another University of Alberta department; this is an arm's length member who comes new to the examination although they may have served on the student's candidacy examination.

The external examiner is a recognized authority in the field of the thesis from outside the University, and is an experienced supervisor of doctoral students. The examiner reviews the thesis objectively and provides critical analysis of the work and its presentation. The external examiner may not have current or previous association with the student, supervisor, or department that would hinder objective analysis. An examiner who has been associated with the student as a mentor, collaborator, or co-author is not suitable. An examiner also may not have had recent association (10 years) with the supervisor as a former student, supervisor, or research collaborator.

Examination Procedure

The examination judges both the substance of the thesis and the candidate's ability to defend it. The Associate Chair or his/her designate chairs the examination. Faculty members in EAS as well as members of FGSR Council have the right to attend the examination. Other persons, such as graduate students or members of the public, may attend the examination with permission of the Dean or the chair of the examination. No persons other than the examiners may participate in the questioning except by permission of the chair; they may not attend the committee's discussion of the student's performance. They are subject to the following conditions:

- Permission has been granted by both the candidate and the chair of the examination committee.
- They may be present only when the candidate is in the room.
- They may not be present when the examination committee's decision is conveyed to the candidate.

After informing the student of the order of procedure, the chair asks the student to withdraw. The supervisor then reviews the student's academic progress in the original research program. Questions arising are dealt with

before proceeding further. The chair establishes the order and length of examination questioning, with the external examiner and out of department examiner being given priority, and the supervisor generally last.

The student returns and makes a brief presentation of the thesis (not more than 20 minutes). Questioning takes place for approximately two hours, or until all examiners are satisfied that they can make a decision. Once questioning is complete, the candidate withdraws. A discussion follows.

Each committee member states a decision based on 1) the content of the thesis, and 2) its defence. Committee members may change their original vote after discussion. If all members except one agree, the committee decision is that of the majority, *unless the dissenting vote is by the external examiner*. If this happens, the case is referred to the FGSR for a decision. If two or more dissenting votes are recorded, the case is also referred to FGSR. The chair recalls the candidate and informs them of the decision in the examination room, with the committee present.

There are only four possible decisions:

Pass:

The defence is passed and no changes are required to the thesis. All examining committee members sign the thesis signature page.

Pass subject to revisions:

The student has satisfactorily defended the thesis, and revision to the thesis are minor (e.g., spelling, missing references, minor editing). It is expected that the thesis will be submitted to the FGSR by the deadline for the next convocation. The revisions are checked by the supervisor acting for the rest of the committee, who withholds signature until revisions are completed.

Adjourned:

The examination is adjourned in the following situations. The committee will reconvene the exam at a later date:

- required revisions of the thesis are substantial,
- the thesis presentation is unsatisfactory overall
- further research or experiments are needed
- the defence is unsatisfactory, even if the thesis itself is acceptable
- an emergency situation occurs during the examination (e.g., medical, fire alarm).

When an examination is adjourned, the committee chair follows the procedure outlined by FGSR concerning the date and conditions for reconvening the exam, and informs the student in writing (see FGSR web site).

Fail:

If the committee decides that the examination has been failed, the chair provides the reasons for this recommendation and the department's decision for the student's program to the FGSR and to the student. Following procedure, FGSR will meet with the candidate and with the department before making a decision.