Faculty of Graduate Studies Guide for Virtual Oral Examinations

Pre-examination Procedures

1. Confirm the student is comfortable proceeding online (private email, separate from committee). The committee is free to use any virtual conferencing options that may be available to them or that they are comfortable with (e.g. Cisco WebEx, BlueJeans, Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams etc.)\(^1\). This document includes some tips for two platforms (Cisco WebEx and BlueJeans).

2. For slide sharing, students might want to consider sending their slides in advance to committee members if there are technical difficulties. For those instances when slide sharing is used:
   a. Cisco WebEx allows the Chair of the oral examination to project their own screen and then assign the screen to another participant during the meeting. This is the way by which to let the student show their slides during the meeting.
   b. BlueJeans allows the student (or any participant) to request desktop access by clicking on the arrow beside their name in the participant list. Once remote desktop access is granted, the student can present their slides if needed (this option only works if the student has a BlueJeans account; as a guest, this option is not available).

3. The Chair should have contact details (email, phone/cellphone) for all participants in case connections are lost during the examination.

4. If the Faculty would like to allow members outside of the student’s committee to attend defenses (e.g. other faculty or students), they can post the details of the defense and invite attendees to indicate their desire to attend virtually to someone designated by the department. The department would make arrangements to invite them to the defense by sharing the meeting invitation or code. This invitation should not be shared publicly, the department should control who is attending and know who they are to ensure a secure defense. The chair of the meeting would ensure that all audience members mute their microphones and video.

Pre-examination Procedures for Chair

1. The Chair will have to send the invitation to the committee members and student via the platform being used (Cisco WebEx or BlueJeans). This invitation includes access and login details for everyone.
   a. For Cisco, after activating your account, go here: https://umlearn2.webex.com
      i. Schedule and start a meeting in Cisco WebEx (https://www.webex.co.in/support/getting-started.html)
   b. For BlueJeans, after activating a free account, this is how to schedule if you are Chair: https://support.bluejeans.com/s/article/Schedule-Meetings-from-your-BlueJeans-Account/ Committee members/students do not need to create an account (they can, of course); the email invitation will activate the software needed to participate without an account.

\(^1\)Please note some concerns have been raised about security and privacy in the Zoom platform: see https://www.businessinsider.com/zoom-privacy-issues-fbi-facebook-data-sharing-2020-3 and https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/zoom bombing-fbi-warning-1.5519024. Committees should safeguard the security of the oral examination process to the best of their ability.
2. Fifteen minutes prior to the oral examination, the Chair will open the meeting to allow everyone to sign in, test their microphones and be ready for the start of the exam. This time also permits installation of any needed software/app that is not currently on the participant’s device.

3. If in the first 15 minutes the chosen platform is experiencing issues, a switch will be made to an alternate platform. A new invitation would have to be created by the Chair. If the switch is from Cisco WebEx to BlueJeans and slides are being used, the Chair will have to advance the slides on direction from the student and share their own screen through BlueJeans. If the Chair has multiple screens, the platforms allow for designation of a particular screen. If the Chair only has one screen, they will want to close other programs so email/meeting notifications are not heard in the background.

4. If the connectivity issues persist another 15 minutes in the new platform, the examination will have to be postponed to an alternate time and date.

Examination Procedures for Chair

1. The Chair does the introductions and process description. All committee members might be required to have their microphones and cameras off when they are not talking (in BlueJeans the Chair can control the video/audio of all participants) if bandwidth is an issue. The student will always have their mic on; the Chair only when speaking. Each committee member will turn on their microphone when it is their turn, the others turn theirs off to avoid feedback. Video is not needed for the Chair or committee members as it may slow the exam. The student can show their video if they so desire. The Chair should remind all participants to reduce potential background distractions (e.g. put pets in another room, mute phones, warn family members that a web event is occurring).
   a. There are chat functions in both platforms. In Cisco you can chat with one person privately or publicly (https://help.webex.com/en-us/WBX21522/How-Do-I-Send-a-Chat-Message). In BlueJeans it is similar (https://support.bluejeans.com/s/article/Chat-with-participants-in-your-BlueJeans-meeting). If committee members are having trouble hearing when the student is presenting, they can send a private chat to the Chair.

2. The student presents for the allotted time.
   a. The Chair will have to assign them the screen within Cisco WebEx: https://help.webex.com/en-us/WBX21180/How-Do-I-Allow-an-Attendee-to-Remotely-Control-Shared-Software OR in BlueJeans the student requests remote desktop access to project their screen.

3. The Chair invites questions in the established order. All other mics, with the exception of the student’s, are off.

4. When the question period is done following the exam, the student needs to leave the meeting for committee deliberations.
   a. In WebEx, you can invite someone back into the meeting while the meeting is ongoing. On the task bar for Chairs, click the ellipses … which is for more options – then click on
invite and reminder, then click on reminder email, hit send – you will see confirmation that an invitation is sent and then student comes back (note you can only send one invitation and one reminder email in the platform). You will see that the student has left in the participant list and see when they return (they will get a notification to join a WebEx meeting in progress). If the invite/remind function does not work for you, you can email the student through your email program and let them know to rejoin the meeting. If they click the invitation they receive, they should be let back in (https://help.webex.com/en-us/WBX10620/How-Do-I-Invite-an-Attendee-From-Inside-a-Meeting).

b. In BlueJeans, to leave the meeting, the student can click “end call” (they do not need to close the app) – they can leave and the participant list will reflect that they have left. There is no way within BlueJeans to send another invitation to rejoin, thus the Chair will need to email the student when they can rejoin, and the student can rejoin using the original meeting invitation. You also have the option as Chair to drop the student from the meeting and they can return by following the link in the email invitation.

Tips and Advice for Virtual Oral Examinations

Student
- If possible, use a headset to speak
- Test streaming quality at same time of day as scheduled exam
- Have your computer close to your wireless router, or use wired Ethernet for better quality video
- Make sure to look at camera, and speak slowly and clearly
- Consider whether other users in the house might use up bandwidth while you are online

Chair
- If there are bandwidth issues you may want to have the audience stop their video
- Use the chat feature to communicate with committee members in order to avoid interrupting the presenter if quality issues arise
- Ensure you are familiar with the method for how to have the student “leave” the meeting for deliberations and for them to return to hear the result

Committee Members
- Ensure you are comfortable using the features of the online software (how to: turn video on/off, mute/unmute, use the chat feature).
- If bandwidth is not an issue, use video during questions. Live faces provide a sense of having an actual audience, and you can provide positive encouragement via facial responses such as head nods, smiling, etc.
- If you encounter bandwidth issues when asking questions, turn off your video to ensure you are communicating clearly.
- Be positive and encouraging. While you can still ask probing questions, do so in a supportive way focused on helping the student.
- Don’t forget to celebrate after the student passes! Applause, send congratulations, virtual high 5’s or anything will be appreciated by the student.
General Tutorials

https://support.bluejeans.com/s/topic/0TO2R000000kaifWAA/videos