Guidelines for Ph.D. Oral Examinations

Updated October 2021

General

Doctoral candidates must pass an oral examination of their thesis and matters relating thereto before they may obtain the Ph.D. degree. The examination will be conducted by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) or the Dean's designate chosen from among scholars of the University ("the Chair"). The examining committee will normally be comprised of the same members as that of the candidate's advisory committee, as well as an examiner external to the University of Manitoba. The doctoral student, advisor/co-advisor (if applicable), and all internal members of the examining committee must attend the examination unless otherwise approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. The participation of the external examiner is strongly encouraged but is not mandatory.

Scheduling the Oral Examination

Departments/Units cannot proceed with scheduling the oral examination prior to receiving the approved internal and external examiner reports from the Faculty of Graduate Studies. It is the responsibility of the Advisor and/or Department/Unit to contact the internal and external committee members to determine their availability and arrange a date for the examination. The Department/Unit must inform the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the following **no later than two weeks (10 business days)** prior to the date of the examination:

➢ The date and time at which the examination will be held;
➢ The location and/or platform to be used. Effective September 22, 2021, departments/units may choose to conduct Ph.D. Oral Examinations in-person, remotely, or using a hybrid model. Note that for in-person and hybrid examinations, Departments/Units will be responsible for providing appropriate space and technology for their chosen delivery method(s) (e.g., sufficient space for adequate distancing of all in-person attendees and reliable technology to facilitate hybrid participation) and aiding in securing a chair; and
➢ Whether the external examiner and invited member (if applicable) will be present or absent.

The department/unit or advisor(s) are strongly encouraged to contact prospective chairs to determine their availability to chair the examination. The method of delivery (i.e., in-person, virtual, or hybrid) must be disclosed to prospective chairs. Chairs should attend in the same manner as the candidate (e.g., for hybrid examinations, the chair should participate in-person only if the candidate also participates in-person). Prospective chairs must:

➢ Be members of the Faculty of Graduate Studies;
➢ Hold a rank of Assistant Professor or above; and

➤ **Not** hold an appointment, including nil-salaried appointments (e.g., Adjunct) in any unit represented by the advisor and co-advisor.

Examination Requirements

DATE/TIME	Oral Examinations are normally held during regular business hours (i.e. Monday-Friday, between 8:30 AM and 4:30 PM CST)
LOCATION/PLATFORM	**Virtual Examinations:** Oral Examinations may be held using any virtual conferencing platform available to the department/unit. Note that IST will only provide support for Microsoft Teams, Cisco WebEx, and Zoom. The department/unit or primary advisor must host the "meeting." If connections are lost, the proceedings must be paused, and the host must contact the affected participants. The host is strongly encouraged to arrange a test call with the candidate and Chair using the selected platform. **In-person and Hybrid Examinations:** All in-person and hybrid examinations must continue to adhere to the University's health and safety protocols as outlined on the Path Back to UM webpage and internal guidelines for building access. The department/unit is responsible for providing the appropriate space and technology for their chosen delivery method (e.g., sufficient space for adequate distancing of all in-person attendees and reliable technology to facilitate hybrid participation) and aiding in securing a chair.
ADVISOR(S), CANDIDATE, AND INTERNAL EXAMINING COMMITTEE ATTENDANCE	The candidate, advisor/co-advisor, and all internal committee members are required to attend the examination unless otherwise approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies.
EXTERNAL EXAMINER ATTENDANCE	The attendance of the external examiner at the candidate's oral examination is encouraged. If the external examiner cannot participate electronically, they will be asked to provide questions in advance.

	These questions will be read to the candidate at the defence by the Chair.
GUESTS/AUDIENCE	**Virtual and Hybrid Examinations:** Access to the oral examination should be restricted to ensure the security of the meeting (e.g. use a meeting password and/or a "waiting room" option, if available). Should the candidate and unit/advisor(s) wish to allow guests to attend (e.g. faculty members beyond the examining committee, candidates), they may do so by invitation only (i.e. the meeting invitation may not be shared publicly). Options include: ➤ Circulating the examination date/time and inviting prospective attendees to indicate their desire to attend to the designated contact (e.g. unit support staff, primary advisor). The unit would then share the meeting invitation or code only with those who have confirmed their desire to attend; or ➤ Inviting select guests individually and providing the meeting invitation or code when the invitation is accepted. The chat settings should be restricted by the host to ensure that participants and audience members are only able to send messages to the meeting host or chair. Settings may vary between platforms; consult the website of the platform being used for guidance. Links to commonly used platforms are provided later in this document. **In-person and Hybrid Examinations:** All in-person examinations must continue to adhere to the University's health and safety protocols as outlined on the Path Back to UM webpage and internal guidelines for building access.
RECORDING	Regardless of open or closed status, no recording will be permitted.
ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS	**Virtual Examinations:** The candidate and host should familiarize themselves with the platform and agree upon a method for sharing their presentation (e.g. Powerpoint) in advance of the examination. The

candidate may choose to send their presentation to the examining committee in advance of the examination to safeguard against technical difficulties.

All participants (except the candidate) are required to have their microphones and cameras off when they are not talking (the host can control the video/audio of all participants) to reduce background noise and excessive bandwidth use. Video is not needed for the Chair or committee members as it may slow the examination. The candidate can show their video if they so desire. If participants cannot hear the proceedings or are experiencing other technical issues (e.g. video lag), they should notify the Chair via the chat function.

Hybrid Examinations:

Those participating in-person must familiarize themselves with the University's health and safety protocols as outlined on the [Path Back to UM webpage.](#)

The host should attend in-person to facilitate the setup of required technology and monitor the chat in the meeting platform. The chair should attend in the same manner as the candidate (e.g., for hybrid examinations, the chair should participate in-person only if the candidate also participates in-person). [Non-participatory guests attending virtually must have their microphones off when they are not speaking and are encouraged to keep their cameras off at all times.](#)

Preparation for the Oral Examination

<u>The candidate</u> must submit the following information in a .doc or .docx file to the Graduate Studies Student Programs Assistant responsible for their unit as soon as the examination date is scheduled:

- ➢ Biographical data, if desired (e.g., birthplace);
- ➢ List of degrees obtained (Institution, Degree, Date);
- ➢ List of awards received;
- ➢ List of all publications and joint publications; and
- ➢ Thesis abstract (not to exceed 350 words).

Approximately one week prior to the oral examination, the Faculty of Graduate Studies will provide electronic copies of the following documents to the Chair of the examination:

- ➢ "Chairing Ph.D. Oral Examinations" Guide, including:
    - o Guidelines for Ph.D. Oral Examinations;
    - o Sample Chair Script;
    - o Candidate Bio, Thesis Title (as distributed), and Thesis Abstract;
    - o Copies of all examiner reports, both internal and external;
    - o The questions and expected answers, if provided, from the external examiner if not participating;
- ➢ Approval Form;
- ➢ Chair Report; and
- ➢ MSpace Brochure.

The Chair is encouraged to contact the candidate before the examination for preliminary introductions and to confirm the candidate's preferred name, name pronunciation, and pronouns.

Virtual Examinations

- ➢ The meeting must be hosted by the Advisor or Department/Unit.
- ➢ The host of the meeting is responsible for sending the meeting link and/or login details to the committee members, candidate, Chair, and guests (if applicable) in advance of the examination.
- ➢ The host will open the meeting 15 minutes before the scheduled start time to allow participants to join, test their microphones and prepare for the start of the exam.
    - o If there are technical difficulties related to the platform within the first 15 minutes, an alternate platform should be used. The host is responsible for coordinating a new meeting using the new platform. Slide sharing, if applicable, should be taken into account when selecting a new platform. If the connectivity issues persist for an additional 15 minutes in the new

platform, the examination must be postponed to an alternate time and date. The primary advisor/department/unit must notify the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the issues immediately upon closure of the meeting.

Hybrid Examinations

- ➢ Those participating in-person must familiarize themselves with the University's health and safety protocols as outlined on the Path Back to UM webpage.
- ➢ The virtual component of the examination must be hosted by the Advisor or Department/Unit.
- ➢ The host of the meeting is responsible for sending the meeting link and/or login details to the participants and/or non-participatory attendees who indicate their desire to attend remotely.
- ➢ The host should attend in-person to facilitate the setup of required technology and monitor the chat in the meeting platform.
- ➢ The host will open the meeting 15 minutes before the scheduled start time to allow participants to join, test their microphones and prepare for the start of the exam.
  - o If there are technical difficulties related to the platform within the first 15 minutes, an alternate platform should be used. The host is responsible for coordinating a new meeting using the new platform. Slide sharing, if applicable, should be taken into account when selecting a new platform. If the connectivity issues persist for an additional 15 minutes in the new platform, the examination must be postponed to an alternate time and date. The primary advisor/department/unit must notify the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the issues immediately upon closure of the meeting.
- ➢ The chair shall indicate the number of participants who attend in-person and virtually on the Chair Report Form.

The Oral Examination

Chair Responsibilities

The Chair of the oral examination bears an important responsibility; a thorough examination of the thesis serves as the University's guarantee that the standards of the Ph.D. are met. To this end, the procedures for the conduct of the examination must be **consistent and strictly followed.**

The Chair is responsible for:

- ➢ Recording attendance of the examining committee and any guests that may be present.
  - o **Note:** All internal examiners must attend unless otherwise approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. If any of the expected members of the examining committee are absent, the Chair must seek approval for the examination to proceed from the Faculty of Graduate Studies;

- Ensuring that the examination follows the procedure detailed below in a professional and collegial manner;
- Monitoring the examining committee's deliberations and conducting a vote to determine the result of the examination;
- Informing the candidate of the result of the examination and outlining the post-examination procedures for both the candidate and the examining committee; and
- Completing and submitting the Chair Report Form to the Faculty of Graduate Studies immediately following the examination.

Order of Proceedings

The Order of Proceedings for the Ph.D. Oral Examination is as follows:

1. Welcome
2. Introduction of the Candidate and Examiners
3. Order of Proceedings
4. Candidate's Presentation
5. Examiner Question Period
6. Guest Member(s) and Audience Question Period (Time Permitting)
7. Examining Committee Deliberations
8. Inform the Candidate of the Result and Post-Examination Procedures

Welcome

The Chair must welcome all those in attendance to the examination and state the following:

> The Ph.D. Oral Examination is a formal examination and is the senior academic event in the Faculty of Graduate Studies. A successful examination is required for awarding the Doctor of Philosophy degree, which is the highest academic degree awarded by the University of Manitoba.

Introduction of the Candidate and Examiners

The Chair must:

- Introduce the candidate;
- Introduce each member of the examining committee in the following order:
  - External Examiner. In addition to stating the examiner's name, institution, and department, the Chair should indicate whether the examiner will be participating in the examination. In the event that the examiner is absent, the Chair should indicate if they will ask questions on the absent examiner's behalf;
  - Internal examiners, including the Knowledge Keeper (if applicable);
  - Advisor (and Co-advisor, if applicable);

o Invited Member (if applicable); and
➢ State that the written thesis has been reviewed by all members of the examining committee.

Order of Proceedings

The Chair must provide an overview to all in attendance of the procedures to be used for the conduct of the examination as follows:

➢ The candidate will give a 20 to 25-minute presentation of the major objectives, content, results, and conclusions of their thesis. The candidate's ability to present the thesis clearly and concisely is an essential part of the examination process.
➢ At the conclusion of the candidate's presentation, the examiners will each be initially allowed approximately 20 minutes to pose questions in the following order:
  o External Examiner (or Chair on the External Examiner's behalf)
  o Internal Examiners and Knowledge Keeper (if applicable)
  o Advisor (and Co-Advisor, if applicable).
➢ A second round of questions *may* be offered to the examining committee if time permits.
➢ The Invited Member (if applicable) and audience will be invited to ask questions if time permits.
➢ Once the question periods are completed, the candidate, audience, and Invited Member (if applicable) will be asked to leave the room/virtual meeting. The examining committee will discuss the candidate's performance and determine the outcome of the oral examination.
➢ The candidate will be invited to return once the examining committee reaches a decision.

For Virtual and Hybrid Examinations, the Chair must also state the following:

➢ All remote audience members must keep their microphone and video off for the duration of the examination. If time permits questions from the audience, members may turn their video and microphone on only when speaking;
➢ All participants and attendees may only use the chat function to communicate technical difficulties to the meeting host, or to indicate that they would like to pose a question during the appropriate time.

Professionalism and collegiality are expected of all participants and attendees. Any who behave inappropriately will be removed from the meeting.

In addition, note that:

➢ In no case should the questioning exceed two hours;

- ➤ The Chair must remain neutral, and consequently is not permitted to pose any questions of their own; and
- ➤ The examiners should keep comments and discussions on the subject matter of the thesis to a minimum, unless they are essential to the questions being posed. Otherwise, such comments and discussions should occur only during the examiners' deliberations.

Candidate's Presentation

The candidate will give a 20 to 25-minute presentation of the major objectives, content, results, and conclusions of their thesis. The candidate's ability to present the thesis clearly and concisely is an essential part of the examination process.

Examiner Question Period

At the conclusion of the candidate's presentation and before the questioning period, the Chair should allow sufficient time for those audience members who wish to leave the session to do so.

The Chair may also offer a reminder that each examiner, including the Knowledge Keeper (if applicable) has 20 minutes available to ask questions but that additional questions may be asked in a second round of questioning if time permits.

Invited Member and Audience Question Period (Time Permitting)

Once questioning from the committee is completed and if time permits, the Invited Member may be allowed to ask a question or two. Following this, and again if time permits, audience members may be given an opportunity to ask questions.

Deliberations

Once all questioning is completed, the Chair should thank the candidate, audience, and Invited Member for their participation and ask them to leave the room/virtual meeting. If the candidate is participating virtually, they should be directed to closely monitor their University email account for a notification to re-join the meeting; otherwise, they should be directed to wait outside of the room until the Chair invites them to return.

The decision of the examining committee will be based both on the content of the thesis and on the candidate's ability to defend it. The performance of the candidate at the oral examination may reveal problems of comprehension or explanation, and the examining committee may require revisions be made to the written thesis to address these problems prior to granting final approval.

When only the Chair and Examining Committee remain, the Chair must:

- ➢ Survey the committee as follows:
  - o Ask each examiner, in sequence, to comment on the candidate's performance;
  - o Ask each examiner, in sequence, whether, in their view, the candidate passed or failed the oral examination; and
- ➢ Conduct a vote, wherein each examiner must vote in favour of assigning either a pass or fail grade for the oral examination. Co-advisors share one vote. Invited members do not vote.
  - o "Pass"
    - ▪ A Pass grade indicates that the candidate has satisfactorily presented the thesis rationale, methodology, findings, and conclusions to the general satisfaction of the examining committee. Notwithstanding this, stylistic, grammatical, and content revisions to the thesis may be required.
    - ▪ The examination is passed if the external examiner and internal examiners (including the advisor/co-advisor) vote in favour of assigning a pass grade with no more than one (1) internal examiner voting in favour of a fail grade.
    - ▪ The Chair must establish with the examiners any required revisions, and the procedure to be used for approval of the revised thesis. Normally, the advisor/co-advisor is charged with ensuring that any revisions are satisfactorily completed. Under some circumstances, the entire examining committee may wish to ensure any required revisions are completed satisfactorily.
  - o "Fail"
    - ▪ A Fail grade indicates that the candidate has not adequately presented the thesis rationale, methodology, findings, and/or conclusions, or satisfactorily responded to questions posed related to the thesis. Failure may also arise because of defects in conception, methodology, or context.
    - ▪ The examination is failed if:
      - • The external examiner votes that the candidate has failed the examination (regardless of the votes of the internal committee members); or
      - • More than one internal examiner votes that the candidate has failed the examination (regardless of the vote of the external examiner).

A pass or fail decision must be made. No other decision is permitted.

Inform the Candidate of the Result and Post-Examination Procedures

Once the deliberations are over, the Chair must either email the candidate to inform them to re-join the meeting using the original meeting invitation link or invite them to re-enter the room. The Chair shall inform the candidate of the results of the examination, the nature of revisions (if any), and the procedure to be used for approval of the revisions. The candidate should be congratulated (if appropriate) and members of the Examining Committee thanked.

Finally, the Chair must inform all participants of their post-examination responsibilities as follows:

- ➢ The Chair shall:
  - o Communicate the result of the examination, nature of revisions (if any), participant attendance methods (for hybrid examinations only), and revision procedure to the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the submission of the Chair Report Form. If revisions are required, the Chair will obtain the signatures of those responsible for overseeing the revisions prior to submitting the form via email to the Faculty of Graduate Studies Student Program Assistant responsible for the candidate's unit;
  - o Sign the Final Oral Examination of the Ph.D. Thesis Approval Form and email it to the Advisor; and
  - o Provide the candidate with the MSpace brochure (if the examination is passed) via email.
- ➢ If the examination receives a "Pass" grade
  - o The Advisor/Co-Advisor (if applicable) shall:
    - ▪ Ensure that any required revisions to the thesis have been approved according to the agreed upon procedure;
    - ▪ Obtain the signature of all committee members who participated in the oral examination on the Approval Form; and
    - ▪ Submit the Approval Form via email to the Faculty of Graduate Studies Student Program Assistant responsible for the candidate's unit in time to meet relevant deadlines.
  - o The Candidate shall:
    - ▪ Revise the thesis as required by the examining committee and follow the agreed upon approval procedure;
    - ▪ Upload a digital (pdf) version of the final thesis to the MSpace website once all required revisions have been made and approved.
- ➢ If the examination receives a "Fail" grade
  - o All examining committee members who indicated a failed outcome must submit a written, detailed justification for their decision to the Dean of the Faculty of

Graduate Studies within one week of the oral examination. A copy of these reports will be provided to the candidate by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies;

o In the case of a first failure of the oral examination, the candidate may be permitted to undergo a second oral examination (contingent on support from the candidate's department/unit). In such a case:

- The department/unit Head shall convene a meeting of the internal members of the examining committee and the advisor/co-advisor (if applicable) to determine how to bring the thesis to an acceptable scholarly standard and/or prepare for the second oral examination. This may involve additional scholarly work which the department/unit Head will describe, in writing, to the advisor/co-advisor, candidate, and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies;

- In some circumstances, the candidate may revise the written thesis. The revised thesis accompanied by a detailed summary of the revisions made will be provided to the examination committee prior to the second oral examination. The revised written thesis shall not be re-examined; however, revisions can be recommended at the oral examination;

- Support of the candidate's advisor, co-advisor, advisory committee, and department/unit is required prior to the second examination. This support must be communicated to the Faculty of Graduate Studies by way of a newly completed Approval to Proceed to Examination Form, accompanied by a detailed summary of the changes made to improve the thesis (if applicable).

- Candidates whose thesis is failed twice at the written review and/or oral examination stage will normally be withdrawn from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the notation on the student record will be "Required to withdraw".

Tips for Virtual and Hybrid Oral Examinations

Chair or Host

- ➢ 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; and
- ➢ Ensure that you are familiar with the platform prior to the oral examination.

Candidate

- ➢ If possible, use a headset to speak;
- ➢ Test streaming quality at the same time of day as the scheduled examination;
- ➢ Have your computer close to your wifi router, or use wired Ethernet for better quality video;
- ➢ Make sure to look at the camera and speak slowly and clearly; and
- ➢ Consider whether others will be connected to the same network during your examination.

Examining Committee

- ➢ Ensure that you are comfortable using the features of the meeting platform (e.g. 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 that your audio is transmitted clearly; and
- ➢ Be positive and encouraging. While you can still ask probing questions, do so in a supportive way focused on helping the candidate.

All Participants

- ➢ Keep your microphone muted when you are not speaking to ensure high quality audio experiences for all attendees;
- ➢ Minimize background distractions before joining the meeting (i.e. mute cellphone, remove pets and children from the room, inform cohabitants that you are not to be disturbed, turn off TV/radio, etc.);
- ➢ **Oral Examinations may not be recorded for any purpose**;
- ➢ Don't forget to celebrate after the candidate passes! Applause, send congratulations, and virtual high fives will be appreciated by the candidate; and
- ➢ A guide for signing pdf documents can be found at the following link: http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/nursing/media/How_to_Sign_a_PDF_Online.pdf.

Platform Tutorials

Links to tutorials for the most commonly used videoconferencing platforms are provided below. Please consider the following when preparing for the examination:

> ➢ The University of Manitoba's Information Services and Technology (IST) Service Desk will only provide support for Cisco WebEx, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom;
> ➢ Ensure that your device meets the minimum technical requirements of the examination platform prior to the examination date.

Cisco WebEx	https://help.webex.com/en-us/8bzter/Cisco-Webex-Meetings-Video-Tutorials
Microsoft Teams	https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/microsoft-teams-video-training-4f108e54-240b-4351-8084-b1089f0d21d7
Zoom*	https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206618765-Zoom-video-tutorials
BlueJeans	https://support.bluejeans.com/s/topic/0TO2R000000kaifWAA/videos
Skype	https://support.skype.com/en/faq/fa11098/how-do-i-get-started-with-skype
Google Meet	https://support.google.com/a/users/answer/9282720?hl=en

*Effective September 2021, UM Zoom is available for unlimited use for anyone with a University of Manitoba email address. Details for claiming and merging accounts are available on the UM Zoom webpage.