



FAQs on Ph.D. Committees and Thesis Distributions

PRIOR TO THESIS SUBMISSION

Knowledge Experts (new for 2021-2022)

How do I include a knowledge expert on an advisory committee?

Knowledge experts can be indicated on standard advisory committee doctoral Program of Study form found here: <https://umanitoba.ca/graduate-studies/forms>.

Can I use a knowledge expert on all my student committees?

Yes, but you will have to provide a unique justification each time and the individual must be nominated by the unit Head or Graduate Chair and approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies or designate. A knowledge expert is intended to provide specific knowledge or expertise to a particular student's committee.

Can a knowledge expert be a co-advisor on a PhD committee?

No, the criteria to co-supervise a doctoral student are to:

- be a member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies*;
- hold a Ph.D. or equivalent**;
- be active in research; and
- have expertise in a discipline related to the student's program.

Can I appoint a postdoctoral fellow as a knowledge expert?

No, post-doctoral fellows, graduate students, and Research Assistants or Associates may not serve as a member of graduate student advisory committees in any of the membership categories.

Is the knowledge expert on the advisory or examining committee?

Both, they are a voting member in relation to the progress of the student.

Do knowledge experts replace academic advisory committee members?

No, a knowledge expert is included as a member in addition to the usual number required at the doctoral level, per the Academic Guide and unit Supplemental Regulations.

Do knowledge experts replace Guest Members?

The Guest Member category has been replaced with the Invited Member category. The knowledge expert does not replace this option, but is offered in addition. The key difference is that knowledge expert members have “voting rights” on issues such as pass/failure of thesis proposals, candidacy examinations and thesis defences, while Invited Members do not.

Does the knowledge expert review the thesis?

Yes, as a committee member, it is required that the knowledge expert will review the resulting thesis and submit a report to FGS.

Can more than one knowledge expert be included on an advisory committee?

No, only one knowledge expert is permitted per committee. An advisory committee may have one knowledge expert or one invited member, but these individuals are in addition to the standard committee composition as outlined in the Academic Guide and unit Supplemental Regulations.

Do knowledge experts have to attend advisory committee meetings (e.g. for Progress Report completion)?

Yes, since knowledge experts are full members of the advisory committee, they are required to attend all meetings of the advisory committee.

A knowledge expert is no longer serving on an advisory committee – how is this reported to FGS?

Like any other change in the advisory committee structure, this change would be reflected on the “program of study and appointment of examining committee” form (for PhD student committees) and submitted to FGS. The form is found here: <https://umanitoba.ca/graduate-studies/forms>.

Thesis Formatting

Are there formatting requirements for a thesis?

Yes, there are and they can be found here:

<https://umanitoba.ca/graduate-studies/student-experience/thesis-and-practicum/format-your-thesis-or-practicum>

Can pictures go in a thesis?

Yes, but copyright issues will have to be resolved before final submission to MSpace. Note that obtaining permission may take a considerable amount of time and this must be taken into consideration when meeting a thesis/practicum submission deadline. A reference to written permission having been obtained must be included under the image or text. The reference should also include the date the permission was granted, and the name/title of the copyright holder(s).

What if the student can't get permission?

In these situations, the text or image may have to be omitted from the thesis/practicum.

Is there special formatting for a sandwich/manuscript style thesis?

Yes. The formatting of the thesis/practicum must be consistent throughout the thesis/practicum and the thesis/practicum cannot merely consist of several papers or articles bound within the one document.

1. There must be an **introductory chapter** to the entire thesis/practicum that includes its own bibliography. The collection of papers or articles must contribute toward the overall theme that represents the thesis/practicum work and must be smoothly integrated into the flow of the thesis/practicum to produce a unified document. This may require changes or additions to, and re-writing of, any work that has been previously published.
2. The thesis/practicum must contain **connecting text** between the different chapters providing logical links to allow the integration of the information. These connecting sections are mandatory. Not including these sections may compromise the ability of the examiners to evaluate the thesis/practicum and accordingly, there may be subsequent consequences.
3. The thesis/practicum must contain a **concluding chapter** that includes a discussion on how the thesis/practicum, with its findings, provides a distinct contribution to knowledge in the research area.

Approval to Proceed Form

As a committee member, does my signature on the *approval to proceed form* mean that I have passed the thesis at the written examination stage?

No, it means that feedback has been given to the student about the content of the thesis, but the thesis has not been evaluated according to the categories for a pass/fail. A thesis can be failed even after all signatures are collected on the approval proceed form.

After the approval to proceed form is signed, what happens?

The candidate will submit the approval to proceed form and thesis to the Ph.D. Thesis Distribution Portal in JUMP. Once an external examiner has been confirmed by the Faculty of Graduate Studies, the thesis will be distributed to examining committee members for official review. Committee members have four (4) weeks to complete and submit their final report to FGS. This is a good time for the members of the committee to discuss tentative timelines for the oral examination should the student pass the written stage to keep the process moving.

Why does this take so long from submission to oral examination?

Several delays are caused when advisors suggest external examiners who do not meet the criteria to serve as external examiner or the external examiners chosen are not available. Also, committee members and external examiners may delay the process when reports are not submitted within four (4) weeks. Data from March 2020 until March 2021 show that over 75% of reports are submitted late to FGS. After two follow up emails from program staff, that number drops to 20% of reports being late. This causes significant work and delays for our graduate students in completing their degree requirements. It is important to the student that committee members attend to deadlines for submitting their reports.

The one stage thesis review process still seems like two stages, why do I have to review the thesis twice?

Even in the old process, there were multiple reviews as feedback was given to the student and the responsiveness of the student to the feedback would be evaluated after the internal committee members provided comments. In order to ensure a complete document is sent for external review, the internal committee provides an initial review before distribution to ensure the thesis is complete and that there are no major missing elements prior to distribution.

External Examiners

What are the criteria for external examiners?

They need to:

- hold a Ph.D. or equivalent (if outside of North America);
- hold the rank of Associate Professor, Full Professor, Senior Scholar or Emeritus Professor (or the equivalent if outside North America) at a

university, or have comparable expertise and standing if not a faculty member at a university;

- have an established reputation in the area of the thesis research and be able to judge whether the thesis would be acceptable at an institution comparable to The University of Manitoba; and
- have a demonstrated record of supervising a significant number of Ph.D. students to completion, **and** significant recent experience with the supervision/examination of Ph.D. students.

What if the external who is the expert in this research area has not supervised doctoral students as there is no doctoral program at their university?

They will not be selected. Our criteria require graduate student supervision to ensure examiners are familiar with the requirements for a doctoral degree.

What if the external I want is retired?

That is acceptable as long as they have an appointment as a senior scholar or professor emeritus/emerita.

What is equivalent to a PhD mean?

This reflects degrees that are at the doctoral level, but are not called a Doctor of Philosophy. For instance, some countries use Doctor of Science (DSc) like the USA or Doctor of Theology. Proposed examiners could have other degrees and we look for the other required criteria such as research background, publications, graduate student experience, etc.

What does significant mean here in requirements for an external – “have a demonstrated record of supervising a *significant* number of Ph.D. students to completion, and *significant* recent experience with the supervision/examination of Ph.D. students.”?

This is intended to be broad enough to reflect disciplinary differences, but is intended to show a track record of successful supervision of doctoral students to completion. If no doctoral student has been supervised in the last ten years that is unlikely to be seen as significant. FGS is looking for a case to be made to include an individual as an external examiner. Frequently, FGS receives nominations for individuals who are very strong in their field of study, but do not have direct academic supervisory experience at the doctoral level. FGS will only approve individuals with demonstrated track records in both areas.

Are there restrictions on who an external examiner can be?

Yes, the external examiner must not:

- have acted as an external examiner for a student of the same Ph.D. advisor and/or co-advisor within the previous two (2) years;
- have been associated with the candidate at any time or in any significant way in the past five (5) years, present or reasonably foreseeable future (as advisor/co-advisor, colleague, teacher, co-author of published material, family member *etc.*); or

- have held any faculty appointment within the candidate's home department/unit at the University of Manitoba within the last 10 years
- be associated with the candidate's advisor/co-advisor in any of the following ways:
 - former student within the last ten (10) years;
 - research advisor/co-advisor within the last ten (10) years;
 - research collaborator within the last five (5) years;
 - co-author of published material within the last five (5) years.

Am I allowed to contact the external in advance of submitting their names to FGS?

Yes. This is now required to determine the nominees' willingness and availability to review the written thesis within four (4) weeks of receiving the thesis and their participation in the oral defence if so desired. Following through on this requirement is an opportunity for the advisor to speed the thesis distribution and help their student proceed to defence quickly and efficiently.

What if I am not comfortable asking the external that I would like to invite?

You can ask your unit head/graduate chair/graduate support staff person to reach out. We encourage units to work out these details at the unit level.

What should I say to the external?

You should request a copy of all nominee's full CVs which includes a current list of their scholarly publications and research activities and their experience with Ph.D. student supervision/examination (e.g., Ph.D. students they have supervised to completion; Ph.D. students they are currently supervising; experience serving as an external examiner for Ph.D. examining committees).

It is best to inform nominees that the Faculty of Graduate Studies will only contact them if they are selected from the list of nominees to be invited and/or they require additional information.

Inform nominees that if they receive an invitation from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and they accept the invitation to serve as the external examiner, an electronic copy of the thesis and instructions for submitting their written report will be emailed to them upon receiving their acceptance.

Are there template emails available to use?

Yes, we have included samples at the bottom of this FAQ.

Will FGS let me know which examiner was chosen?

No. The external examiner will remain anonymous until such time that the examination of the written thesis has concluded and all examining committee reports have been received; as such, no further communication should be made between nominees and advisor/co-advisor/committee members/student until copies of all reports are provided to the advisor(s)/unit head/committee members to share with the candidate.

Does FGS communicate with the examiners that are not selected?

Not anymore. When the unit did not contact externals, we advised those who were not chosen. Now that units are contacting potential externals in advance to request their participation, we ask that it is clearly indicated to the externals that only the chosen external will be contacted.

What takes so long to secure an external?

If the external's availability is not checked by the advisor before they are recommended or externals do not meet the outlined criteria in the Academic Guide, the list will have to be sent back for additional names causing a delay.

Why did the process allowing units to contact externals change?

This was at the request of the FGS community to secure externals faster by checking if they are available before their names are submitted.

AFTER THESIS DISTRIBUTION***Reports*****What goes into the report that should be submitted by a committee member or external?**

Reports will critique the rationale, methods used, important results, and implications of the research, address the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and any required revisions, and will ultimately assign the thesis a category (1-4) passing or failing the thesis.

What is the expected length of a thesis report?

There is no page limit or minimum, but there should be sufficient content to constitute a report. More than a few sentences are needed to provide feedback to the students on the rationale behind the research, the methods used, what the results mean, and the implications of the research. The report must address the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and any required revisions, and assign the thesis a category (1-4) passing or failing the thesis.

If the thesis is a sandwich thesis, how am I supposed to provide comments on published work?

Publication does not preclude feedback on the work or even a failure despite publication. In addition, feedback can still be provided for other sections of the thesis that are included to provide additional information for the committee.

There are a number of authors on the paper in the sandwich thesis, how do I know what the student did?

Students who submit a sandwich thesis are required to clearly outline their contributions to the papers when there are other authors. This information must be included in the thesis and explicitly specified in a section entitled "Contributions of Authors" in the "Preface" of the thesis/practicum. For further details on a sandwich/manuscript thesis see Appendix 1 in the Academic Guide.

If there is a late report on a thesis, will I be told who it is to follow up with them?

No, we do not disclose who might not have submitted a report, we keep that confidential. We do follow up on late reports until received and will update on expected timelines when we can. We follow up on late reports one day and one week after the four-week deadline has elapsed. If reports remain outstanding after this point, reminders are escalated to the Associate Dean overseeing the student's unit (and, in some cases, to the Dean). FGS staff are often unable to provide updates on expected timelines; your patience is appreciated as we work diligently to obtain all necessary reports and issue them to the internal examining committee and unit head in a timely fashion.

AFTER REPORTS ARE RECEIVED

Failed Distribution

What if one person fails the thesis?

The oral defence can proceed if only one internal examiner fails the thesis. If the external fails the thesis, it does not proceed to the oral examination.

Oral Examination

Can we pre-set the date of the oral examination?

Tentatively, yes as long as everyone recognizes that it only proceeds if the written examination is passed. This can be part of the conversation that the advisor/unit has with the prospective externals when contacting them to request willingness and availability to serve and request their CV. A few dates can be proposed or indicate the approximate time frame the defence might be scheduled. FGS requires at least two weeks' notice of scheduled defences beginning on the date that the reports are issued to the internal examining committee and unit head.

What if one committee member does not show up for the scheduled defense?

If an examiner is not present at the oral defence, the defence may not begin and the chair and/or unit must contact FGS immediately (Graduate.Programs@umanitoba.ca). If the absent examiner remains unreachable or is unable to join the proceedings in a timely fashion, the defence will be postponed. The chair must indicate the reason for postponement on the Chair Report Form and submit it to FGS as soon as possible.

Who can chair an oral examination?

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 Adjunct) in any unit represented by the advisor and co-advisor.

Is the external supposed to attend the oral examination?

The external examiner's electronic participation is expected (and in some units, required). If the external examiner cannot participate electronically, the Faculty of Graduate Studies will request a list of 4-6 questions to be submitted to them prior to the defence for the Chair to pose to the candidate on their behalf.

What happens if a student passes the written examination but fails the oral examination?

The unit head should schedule a meeting of the internal members of the examining committee and the advisor within one week. The purpose of this meeting is to determine what the candidate must do to bring the thesis to an acceptable standard and the improvements required to success at the oral defence.

Subsequent to this meeting, a written summary of the steps to be taken by the candidate to bring the thesis to an acceptable standard and the improvements required to succeed at the oral defence should be provided to the Dean of FGS (deanfgs@umanitoba.ca) within one week of the failed oral examination. The advisor must support the candidate during the revisions and ensure/confirm that these expectations are met. The candidate will be required to make the requested revisions to the thesis and provide a detailed summary of the changes that were made to improve the thesis.

Once revisions have been completed, the "Approval to Proceed to PhD Thesis Examination" form (https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/graduate_studies/media/approval_to_proceed.pdf) should be submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies with the signatures of the advisor and unit head along with a detailed summary of the changes that were made to improve the thesis.

The internal and external examiner are not required to submit new reports on the revised thesis, it is not re-examined. Any further revisions to the thesis can be documented at the time of the second oral examination.

Thesis Restrictions

Can a restriction be put on a thesis so it is not accessible through MSpace?

Yes, a one-year restriction can be put in place for publication purposes. Please see Section 6 (Policy of withholding thesis pending a patent application content or manuscript submission) of the Academic Guide for further details.

Can a thesis be permanently restricted?

No, students should be discouraged from engaging in research that cannot be put in MSpace. This falls under the Research Agreements Policy, Principles Guiding the Acceptance of Research Agreements Section 2.5 c “The University prohibits secret or classified research.”

https://umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/media/Research_Agreements_Policy_-_2014_02_03_RF.pdf

If there are concerns with some of the content being considered for a thesis, please consult early with FGS or the Copyright Manager of the UofM.

When should a student submit their thesis to be eligible to graduate?

Please see this link: <https://umanitoba.ca/graduate-studies/student-experience/thesis-and-practicum/submit-your-thesis-or-practicum>

Sample external examiner request Department/Unit Inquiry

Good morning Dr. External Examiner,

I am contacting you because Dr. Advisor has nominated you as a potential external examiner for his/her/their student/advisee Doctoral Student who is a Ph.D. candidate in Department. Doctoral student's thesis is entitled "This is my PhD thesis." The abstract is as follows:

Here is the student's abstract of the thesis.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies requests that three names are submitted as potential external examiners. An Associate Dean in the Faculty of Graduate Studies will select an examiner from amongst the nominations submitted. Once an examiner is selected, they will receive an email with a link to the thesis and details about the written report; reports from all examiners are due 4 weeks after the date that the thesis is distributed.

In order to assist us in this process, I am writing to ask if you would be willing to be considered as an external examiner. If so, then I would appreciate if you would send me a copy of your most recent CV that includes specific indication of your experience supervising graduate students to completion, most particularly Ph.D. level students, within the next day or two. Only the chosen external will be contacted from the names submitted. According to Faculty of Graduate Studies regulations, external examiners are expected to have a record of supervising doctoral students to completion, be at arm's length to the advisor and student, and possess a record of expertise in the area of the thesis.

Thank you for considering our request. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sample external examiner request Advisor Inquiry

Good morning Dr. External Examiner,

I am contacting you because my student/advisee Doctoral Student is ready to submit their Ph.D. thesis for external review. The student's thesis is entitled "This is my PhD thesis." The abstract is as follows:

Here is the student's abstract of the thesis.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies asks advisors to suggest three names to be submitted as potential external examiners. An Associate Dean in the Faculty of Graduate Studies will select one examiner from the three nominations submitted. Once an examiner is selected, they will receive an email with a link to the thesis and details about the written report; reports from all examiners are due 4 weeks after the date that the thesis is distributed.

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