

Instructions for Chairing PhD Defences - Virtual or In-Person

Prior to the exam

- For detailed information on thesis examinations, please refer to the Thesis Examination Policy: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/thesis-examination-policy/>
- Coordinate with the candidate's home department to:
 - Make sure you have the notice of examination and know the date, time, and location (room number and/or online meeting link) of the exam
 - Clarify program-specific norms, such as the prescribed length for the student's opening statement and the time limit given for the external examiner and other examiners during the question periods
 - Confirm if observers will be present during the defence, and if so, whether there will be a brief observer question period following the student presentation. Also determine whether the observers will stay for only the student presentation or for both the presentation and examination
 - Determine whether the candidate is eligible for consideration for a medal
 - Identify whether there are any specific approved accommodations for the student (for PMC graduate students)

Process overview

1. Welcome
2. Initial deliberation without the student or observers (setting up the exam)
3. Opening remarks by the candidate
4. The first round of questions: In this round, questions are one-on-one between the candidate and the member and proceed in the following order (in general, from the farthest member to the closest to the candidate):
 - External,
 - Internal,
 - Committee members,
 - Supervisor(s)
5. The second round of questions: In this round, discussion is more interactive, following the same general order but potentially with group discussion
6. Closing remarks by the candidate (at the candidate's discretion)
7. Second deliberation without the student (decisions)
8. Conclusion and presentation of the results of the deliberation to the student

Primary outcomes of a defense for consideration by the examination board

- Oral Defense:
 - Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory
- Dissertation:
 - Accepted, Acceptable after minor revisions, Acceptable after major modifications, Rejected
- Medal nomination:
 - Yes, No
 - This question applies only if the candidate has a GPA of at least 11.0 and the External has answered "yes" or "undecided" to the medal question in their report
 - If there is a medal nomination, the supervisor, External, and the Chair need to write a support letter. Others may also write one

Observers

- Faculty members are allowed to attend. Other observers may attend at the candidate's and examination board's discretion
- In both virtual and in-person examinations, at any time the candidate is asked to leave the "room" (such as for deliberations), observers must also leave the room (for example, candidates and observers will both be moved to a breakout group or a waiting room in a virtual examination)
- Observers are not permitted to participate in any way during the examination, except for during a brief (<10 minutes) designated observer question period following the student presentation, if this is approved by the candidate and Chair of the Department

Starting the Exam

- Begin by welcoming everyone, especially the candidate and the External. Emphasize to the candidate that they have your support and understanding, and inform everyone that they can ask for a break at any time if needed
- Describe the process to the candidate
 - In virtual exams: You may ask the candidate if they have a preference regarding the examiners' video being on or off
- Ask the candidate and the observers to leave the room while the board reviews the defence procedures.
 - In virtual exams: the candidate and observers will both be moved to a breakout group or a waiting room

First Deliberation of the Examining Board

- Ask if supervisor has any comments prior to the examination.
- Ask whether there are any concerns relating to the thesis defence moving forward, and if so, discuss and make a decision after consulting with Graduate Studies when needed.
- Review the process.
 - Suggested time is 15-20 minutes for the external examiner and 10-12 minutes for others in the first round. The overall duration of the exam is expected to be no more than 3 hours
 - Discuss with the examiners how the chair will signal when they are approaching the end of their questioning time limit (i.e. – on their last question)
- Confirm the order of questioning with the examiners
- Remind the committee of the primary outcomes (see above)
- For virtual examinations, remind everyone to turn off their audio unless speaking. They may also turn off video to save Internet bandwidth, when needed
- Remind the supervisor to take notes of all the potential revisions suggested by the examiners

Proceeding with the defence

- Invite the candidate and guests back in
- Start the steps 3 to 6 of the process overview above
- After all questions and comments, ask the candidate and observers to leave the room while the committee deliberates.
 - In virtual exams: the candidate and observers will both be moved to a breakout group or a waiting room

Second Deliberation

- Resolve the primary outcomes (above)
- The decision may be arrived at by consensus or a formal vote. If a formal vote, a simple majority is required, **though the supervisor does not vote** and the external examiner must vote to approve in order for the thesis to be accepted. The supervisor(s) must not participate in the discussion regarding medal nominations
- For minor and major revisions, ask the supervisor(s) to email the agreed upon list of revisions to all examination board members

Conclusion

- Allow the candidate and observers back in, and inform them of the results
- Allow time for congratulations and short conversations
- End the meeting
- Complete the [Thesis Exam Report](#) online. This webform is linked to at the bottom of the "Thesis Defence Approved to Proceed" email.
- Once the supervisor(s) have emailed the approved revision list to all examiners, submit your final report on Carleton Central under the "Review E-Thesis Submissions" tab