

Instructions for Chairing PhD Defences - Virtual or In-Person

Prior to the Exam

- For detailed information on thesis examination, please refer to the Thesis Examination Policy: <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/wp-content/uploads/Thesis-Examination-Policy-revised-Jan-2022-1.pdf>
- You may ask for technical support prior to the examination, if needed.
- Coordinate with the candidate's home department to make sure you have the notice of examination and know the location (room number or Zoom link) of the exam.

Process Overview

1. Welcome
2. Initial deliberation without the student (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:
 - Pass or Fail
- Dissertation:
 - Pass, Pass with Minor Revisions, Pass with Major Revisions, Fail
- 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 medal nomination, the supervisor, External, and the Chair need to write a support letter. Others may also write one.

Guests

- For in-person examinations:
 - Faculty members are allowed to attend. Other guests may attend at the candidate's discretion.
- For virtual examinations:
 - Each guest must be approved by every examination board member
- In both virtual and in-person examinations, at any time the candidate asked to leave the "room" (such as for deliberations), guests must also leave the room (for example, candidates and guests will both be moved to a breakout group or a waiting room in a virtual examination).

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 guests to leave the room while the board reviews the defense.
 - In virtual exams: the candidate and guests will both be moved to a breakout group or a waiting room

First Deliberation of the Examining Board

- Make sure the External Examiner's report has been provided to everyone.
- Ask if supervisor has any comments prior to the examination.
- Ask whether the thesis defence is recommended or not. The concerns should have been brought up earlier, but still, it is important that it be asked. If there is major concern about proceeding to the oral defence, discuss and make a decision.
- 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.
- Decide on the order of questioning
- Remind the committee of the Primary Outcomes
- For virtual examinations, remind everyone to turn off their audio unless speaking. They may also turn off video to save Internet bandwidth.
- Remind the supervisor to take notes for revisions.

Proceeding with the defence

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

Second Deliberation

- Resolve the Primary Outcomes.
- 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.
- For minor and major revisions, ask the supervisor(s) to email the list of revisions to all members for approval.

Conclusion

- Allow the candidate and guests back in, and inform them of the results.
- Allow time for congratulations and short conversations.
- End the meeting.
- For in-person or virtual examinations, complete the [Thesis Exam Report](#) online, including all members as a sign of their agreement
 - Alternatively, the pdf [Examination Report](#) can be used, with all members signing off and returning it to the academic unit and FGPA (graduate.services@carleton.ca).
- Once the supervisor(s) have emailed the revision list and everyone has approved, use the list and submit your final report on Carleton Central.