

Guidelines for Doctoral Oral Examinations

The role of the Oral Examination Defence Chair is to ensure that the defence is conducted fairly, in an orderly and timely fashion, and with appropriate attention and discussion being given to evaluating the quality of the dissertation and defence with respect to national standards in the discipline. Total examination time is normally three (3) hours. For more in-depth information refer to **Section 7.9** of the Graduate Calendar.

The procedure for defence is as follows:

- i. The Chair convenes the defence, welcomes the audience, and outlines the processes to be followed.
- ii. The Chair requests that everyone in the room switch off all their mobile phones/devices that may make noise.
- iii. The Chair ensures NO recording equipment (of any type) has been set up at the defence (unless pre-authorized by the Dean in advance of the scheduled date).
- iv. The Chair introduces the supervisor, who introduces the examining committee members, the candidate and the dissertation topic and asks the candidate to make the presentation of the dissertation results. The candidate's presentation is expected not to exceed 30 minutes in length. This normally equates to between 25 and 30 PowerPoint slides.
- v. After the presentation, the Chair introduces the question period which will normally be a maximum of two (2) hours in duration. The initial questioner will be the external examiner followed, if required, thereafter by the members of the supervisory committee. Normally each examiner asks one question with the opportunity for follow-up questions on the same topic, before passing on to the next examiner. There will be two round of questions in total by all members of the examining committee followed by a final opportunity for the external examiner to ask any outstanding questions.
- vi. Throughout questioning, the Chair ensures that the questions are on the topic of the dissertation, are clear, and fairly examine the candidate on the topic of the research represented in the dissertation.
- vii. Throughout the question period, the Chair records a précis of the questions being asked and the responses given by the candidate. Particular attention is given to questions with which the candidate has difficulty and to concerns expressed by members of the examining committee.

- viii. At the end of questions from the examining committee, and if time permits, the Chair invites questions from the audience.
- ix. Thereafter, the Chair asks the audience and the candidate to withdraw, instructing the candidate to remain nearby while the examining committee deliberates.
- x. In opening the examining committee deliberations, the Chair identifies the candidate's supervisor (or a co-supervisor) in order that he/she may coordinate the information from the deliberations to go to the candidate in memorandum form.

The information contained in the memorandum includes items such as: a) who must approve the required revisions, b) time limits for the completion of revisions, c) the necessity for a second oral examination, and d) any other matters identified by the examining committee.

- xi. The Chair then advises the examining committee members that the final judgement of the examiners on the dissertation and the oral examination shall be reported to the Dean (or Designate) in the term "Pass" or "Fail". For a "pass" the dissertation must be passed by the external examiner and a majority of the members of the examining committee. In the case of a "failure" of the dissertation, a detailed written report will be prepared by the Chair and made available to the candidate and to the Office of Graduate Administration.

- xii. The Chair then invites, beginning with the external examiner and ending with the supervisor, each member of the examining committee to give their assessment of the candidate's work and their verdict.

- xii. If there are discrepant verdicts the, Chair facilitates discussion, always ensuring fair consideration of all viewpoints and orderly discussion.

If, after discussion, discrepant verdicts remain, the Chair will summarize the discussion and the distribution of verdicts. The Chair will also recommend a global verdict and poll the examining committee whether all members agree with the recommended global verdict. If the external examiner's recommendation is a failure, or if the majority of the examining committee members recommend a failure, the Chair will write a detailed report and submit it to the Office of Graduate Administration and to the candidate.

- xiii. If the candidate receives a pass, the Chair asks examining committee members to sign the Approval Page; the candidate's supervisor does not sign the Approval Page until all required revisions are made.

- xiv. The Chair invites the candidate to return, and informs the candidate of the global verdict reached by the examining committee in the presence of the examiners; and indicates that the Supervisor (or Co-Supervisor) will provide the candidate with a memorandum regarding changes required, etc.