NAVIAGATING YOUR FINAL DOCTORAL EXAMINATION
Session Objective

• To provide you with:
  – An overview of the Doctoral Exam Process
  – Tips to help you plan effectively
  – A clear sense of your responsibilities and ours
  – Answers to your questions
Examination Overview

The Final Doctoral Examination is composed of 2 parts:

1. **External Examination** – *dissertation only*
   - An expert outside UBC reads & evaluates
   - Must be passed before the oral defence can take place

2. **Final Oral Defence** – *oral presentation & dissertation*
   - Panel of UBC faculty members evaluates
Major Steps in Doctoral Exam

1. Confirm an External Examiner
2. Submit exam dissertation
3. Confirm University Examiners & set defence date
4. Hold oral defence
5. Make revisions & submit final dissertation
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External Examiner Eligibility

• Not associated or affiliated with UBC
• Established reputation in the area of your dissertation research
• Recent experience with doctoral supervision and examination
• Full, Associate or Emeritus Professor – Not Assistant nor Clinical
External Examiner Eligibility

- Arm’s length from you and your supervisory committee members
  - No co-authors, research collaborators, future bosses, former supervisors/students, family
- Must not have acted as External for a candidate in your program or for another of your supervisor’s students for at least 3 years
Selecting an External Examiner

- Your Supervisor/Grad Program submits Nominations for External Examiner form
  - Approximately 8 weeks prior to planned dissertation submission date
- **WE** begin the invitation process
  - Do NOT contact potential nominees in advance
- We cite the submission date provided on the form
- We notify you & your supervisor once an External Examiner is confirmed
Tips for a Smoother Examination

• Do **NOT** contact your External Examiner nominees
  – This may result in their disqualification

• Don’t be hasty
  – Do not submit your External Examiner nominations if you are not reasonably 8 weeks from submitting the dissertation
Tips for a Smoother Examination

• If you know there will be a significant delay, let us know
  – This allows us to communicate such changes to the External Examiner and avoids unnecessary delays when you’re ready for examination
  – Your external examination & defence may be delayed if you do not notify us of a change to your submission date in advance
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Submitting for Examination

1. Have your dissertation formatting approved by Thesis Team at G+PS
2. Arrange to have the Graduate Program Approval Memo signed & submitted
3. Email a PDF copy of your dissertation
4. Submit a printed, bound copy of your dissertation (if required)
Submitting for Examination

- Submit all required documents to G+PS
- BREATHE!
- Wait for confirmation email with details about booking your oral defence
Tips for a Smoother Examination

• Take time to thoroughly proofread your dissertation
  – This document represents you as a professional academic

• Do not have your dissertation bound until after your formatting has been approved
Tips for a Smoother Examination

• Your examination cannot begin until all required documents are received
• Contact your Graduate Program Staff to arrange the Graduate Program Approval Memo well in advance
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Composition of the Examining Committee

- Examination Chair (G+PS responsibility)
- 2 or 3 Supervisory Committee Members (including Research Supervisor)
- 2 G+PS approved University Examiners
- External Examiner (not required at the defence but welcome)
University Examiner Eligibility

• Two UBC-Vancouver faculty members required
• Expertise in a field closely related to your dissertation research
• Normally Full, Associate or Emeritus Professors who have a formal affiliation with a graduate program
  – Not Assistant, Adjunct, Clinical
University Examiner Eligibility

- Both must be at arm’s length from you and your Research Supervisor
  - No present or former members of your supervisory committee
  - Not connected with thesis research in any way
  - Normally no co-authored papers or research collaborations with Candidate or Supervisor
- At least one must be from outside your Graduate Program and your Supervisor’s Department
Selecting University Examiners

• University Examiners must be approved by G+PS
  – Submit signed Approval of University Examiners form at least 4 weeks before defence date

• Consent of the proposed University Examiners must be confirmed by your Research Supervisor or Graduate Program prior to submission of form
Setting the Oral Defence Date

• Check the availability of the entire examining committee
• Find 2-3 dates that work for everyone (if possible)
• Get in touch with us to finalize your proposed oral defence date at least 4 weeks in advance
• Once we confirm the date, consider it final
Informing the Committee

• Your Research Supervisor communicates the oral defence details to the examining committee (except Chair)
  – Date, time, and location
• You and your Research Supervisor distribute copies of the dissertation to all examining committee members (except Chair)
• G+PS will communicate defence details to Chair and provide PDF copy of dissertation
Prepare Your Exam Programme

• Use the template provided on our website
• Ensure that all information is correct (check spelling!)
• Observe maximum abstract length (350 words)
• Submit this to us at least 4 weeks before your defence date
Optional: Practice Session

• If feasible, book a practice session in your exam room to familiarize yourself with the room, the equipment, etc.

• Practice sessions can only be booked with less than 4 weeks notice
Exam Reminder Email

• G+PS will send a reminder email to your committee one week before your defence
  – Will include:
    • External Examiner’s report
    • Examination Programme
    • Chair Report form template

• External Examiner’s report is confidential until at/after oral defence – you will not be copied on this email
Tips for a Smoother Examination

• Do not book a defence date without consensus from your committee
• Do not make assumptions about exceptions to eligibility criteria
  – If you’re unsure, check with us first
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Defend!

• Showcase your research and wow the committee with your expertise
  – Plan to arrive 30 minutes early to get set up
  – Bring your own laptop
    • Let us know in advance if you will require one of ours
  – If you wish to bring refreshments for your committee, you will need to clean up after the defence
Defence Day

- Quorum must be met, which means the following must be present, in person:
  - Doctoral Candidate (that’s you!)
  - Examination Chair
  - 2 members of the Supervisory Committee
  - 2 approved University Examiners
- This is a public event
- No one can be admitted to the room once the exam has begun
Structure of Defence

• You present
  – Maximum 30 minutes
  – Not to be read

• Examining Committee asks you questions
  – Including questions from External Examiner

• Audience members are invited to ask questions

• Examining Committee holds *in-camera* discussion

• Chair conveys the committee’s recommendations to you

*Usually lasts 2 – 2.5 hours*
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Final Revisions

• The Examination Chair will notify you of:
  – The Committee’s recommendations to G+PS
  – What (if any) revisions are required for final approval
  – Which Committee Members will sign off on your final revisions

• Normally, you will be granted 1 month from the defence date to complete revisions and final submission process
Submit the Final Dissertation

• The final dissertation and associated forms and approvals are submitted to the Thesis team at G+PS
• Online submission to cIRcle is required
• See the website for further details, including deadlines
Bravo! Graduation

• In order to graduate you MUST apply for graduation
• Program End Date (when G+PS confirms your final submission) is NOT actually graduation
• A Letter of Program Completion can be issued once your final submission is confirmed
Examination Timeline Planning
Examination Timeline Overview

1. Submit XX Nomination Form
   - 8 Weeks

2. Submit Dissertation + Approval Memos
   - Minimum 6-7 Weeks

3. Confirm UXs & Request Oral Defence Date
   - Minimum 4 Weeks

4. Oral Defence
   - Usually Within 1 Month

5. Revisions and Final Dissertation Submission

UBC Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
Tools for Planning

• The best way to prepare for a smooth exam is to plan ahead and communicate clearly with your committee and G+PS
  – Our [Doctoral Examinations Planning Tool and Checklist](#) can assist you!

• Deadlines for common end dates are posted on our [website](#)
Tips for a Smoother Examination

• Do not plan on the barest minimum timeframe without accepting the risk that something could go wrong
  – We cannot accelerate the process for candidates who have delays
Tips for a Smoother Examination

• If you are absolutely counting on a particular end date or graduation date then ensure your documents are submitted on or before the deadlines

• If possible, try to submit at least a day or two before the deadline
  – Dissertations are sent out in the order they are received…and we receive a LOT on deadline days
Managing Administrative Responsibilities

Yours, Your Supervisor’s, Ours
What Are You Responsible For?

• Ensuring all required documents are received by G+PS and that the information they contain is correct
• Having the content of your dissertation approved by your committee
• Having the formatting of your dissertation approved by G+PS
• Completing & submitting your examination programme
• Bringing a laptop to your defence
• Getting permission from the committee if you would like to record the presentation portion of your defence
• Leaving your exam room as you found it
• Applying for graduation and notifying Thesis Team when you have uploaded your final dissertation to cIRcle
What Is Your Supervisor Responsible For?

• Nominating External and University Examiners who meet eligibility and arm’s length requirements
• Ensuring your dissertation is ready for external exam
• Getting commitment from University Examiners in advance of submitting nominations
• Ensuring the University Examiners receive a copy of the dissertation
• Confirming the commitment of all members of the examining committee for the date and time of the oral defence
• Providing a paper copy of the dissertation to the Chair, if requested
What Is G+PS Responsible For?

- Communicating with the External Examiner
- Transmitting the dissertation to the External Examiner
- Receiving the External Examiner’s report
- Approving all examiner nominees
- Inviting and confirming an Exam Chair
- Transmitting an electronic copy of the dissertation to the Chair
- Sending an email reminder to your Examining Committee one week before your defence
Be the Captain of Your Own Ship!

- It’s your degree and your life, not your Supervisor’s, not your Graduate Program Staff person’s
- If vital parts of the process are not attended to, you could be more than a little inconvenienced
- We assist over 500 candidates a year; we cannot micromanage you
We’re Here To Help!

Jenn Fletcher
jennifer.fletcher@ubc.ca

Doctoral Exams
graduate.doctoral@ubc.ca
a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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