DOCTORAL EXAMS OFFICE

In response to the growing concerns surrounding the COVID-19 virus, G+PS, in consultation with UBC IT, has developed a process to support total virtual participation in a doctoral defense.

This remote protocol applies for defences held on or after March 19, 2020 until further notice.

This document outlines the main procedures for a Virtual Defence. There are also guidelines for Faculty which are emailed with the Exam Reminder, and guidelines and advice to candidates which is sent when the exam is booked.

Virtual Defense
Virtual defenses will be supported on two platforms:
• UBC’s Virtual Meeting Room (VMR). This platform is the one used in G+PS exam room 203 and for videoconferencing at some hospital locations.
• UBC Zoom accounts. Doctoral Exams staff will normally set these meetings. Supervisors who have UBC Zoom accounts and are familiar with the platform may also set the meeting.

IN NO CIRCUMSTANCES should the Zoom meeting be created by the candidate.

Information about booking the virtual defence will be sent with the regular defence email notifications. The Exam Reminder sent to the committee one week before the defence is now the regular timeline for setting up Zoom or VMR.

All required participants, outlined below, must agree to participate in a virtual defense. This agreement should be indicated at the time the defence is booked using the updated Online booking form.

The Doctoral Exams team will be experiencing a higher than normal workload as the University responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, and sufficient notice must be provided in order to schedule the virtual defense. Doctoral Exams Staff will send confirmations of the virtual defense which will include specific instructions on joining the defense. Questions should be directed to graduate.doctoral@ubc.ca.

Participants
Virtual defenses give preference to participants required for quorum, meaning that attendees will be restricted to six participants as follows:

• The Doctoral Candidate
• The Examination Chair
• Two Supervisory Committee Members (supervisors, co-supervisors or committee members)
• Two G+PS-approved University Examiners

A third committee member and/or the External Examiner can be approved attend. Requests for approval should be made at the time the defence is booked, in the appropriate section of the Online Booking form.
It is important to note that while the approved platforms are capable of supporting a virtual defense with six participants, the quality of both the audio and visual components will depend greatly on the quality of each participant’s internet connection. We recommend connecting from a location with a reliable internet connection (hard-wired if possible). Both platforms allow testing the connection prior to the defence, and all participants should take the opportunity to do so. As we cannot control the quality of each participant’s internet connection, participants should be prepared for technical issues (eg. poor audio or visual quality, dropped connections) and the Chair should be prepared to uphold the responsibilities as outlined below.

Although the doctoral defense is normally a public event, virtual defenses present additional challenges to the candidate and the committee, and may be more difficult. In order to ensure a rigorous, fair, and uninterrupted defence, the virtual defence cannot be open to members other than those stated above. The Zoom URL or VMR Room ID should not be circulated to anyone but the committee and candidate.

This is a temporary measure approved by the Dean of G+PS in order to facilitate virtual doctoral defenses, and is applicable only to total virtual participation in a doctoral defense (ie. does not apply to in-person defenses or partial virtual defenses at this time).

**Responsibilities of the Chair**

1. Represent the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
2. Moderate the defense proceedings; ensure fairness.
   a. Outline the potential technical issues that may occur, encourage patience and kindness towards each other, and describe the Chair’s responsibility to suspend the defense if there are technical difficulties that compromise the defense.
3. Ensure that any questions posed in the External Examiners Report are addressed by the Candidate during the question period.
4. Chair the *in camera* discussion of the Examining Committee and convey the outcome to the Candidate.
   a. Ensure the Candidate is removed from the connection for the entirety of the *in camera* discussion.
5. Submit a report on the Final Doctoral Examination to the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies using the form provided.

**Important note:** the Chair has the authority to discontinue a remote connection at any time they judge that it is interfering with the proper conduct of the examination. If one or more participants drop from the connection or lose audio, the defense must be halted until the participant’s connection or audio is restored. If the connection or audio cannot be restored after 30 minutes or if the total amount of time lost exceeds 60 minutes, the Chair must suspend the defense and notify graduate.doctoral@ubc.ca immediately. The Doctoral Exams team will communicate with the Candidate and their Supervisor regarding rescheduling the defense.