NAVIGATING YOUR FINAL DOCTORAL EXAMINATION
Session Objective

- By the end of this session you will have:
  - a solid overview of the Doctoral Exam Process;
  - a clear sense of responsibilities:
    - yours
    - your supervisor’s
    - ours
  - tools to help you plan effectively;
  - answers to current questions.
Examination Overview

The Final Doctoral Examination is composed of 2 parts:

1. External Examination – dissertation only
   - An expert outside UBC reads & evaluates
   - Examiner must recommend progressing before the oral defence can take place

   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 nor affiliated with UBC.
- Established reputation in the area of your dissertation research.
- Recent experience with doctoral supervision and examination.
- Full, Associate or Emeritus Professor.
  - No Assistant or Clinical Professors
Arm’s Length

- 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 use the submission date provided on the form to give the examiner a timeframe.
- We notify you & your supervisor once an External Examiner is confirmed.
Troubleshooting

- Have more than 3 nominees in mind.
- 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 firm about your submission deadline.
Submission Delays

- Delays are common, and not a problem.
- If you know there will be a significant delay, let us know.
  - If we know about delays, we can work to ensure the examination proceeds smoothly.
  - Your external examination & defence may take longer if you do not notify us of a change to your submission date in advance.
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Submitting for Examination

- Polish and proofread your work.
- Have your committee approve your dissertation.
- Arrange to have the Graduate Program Approval Memo signed & submitted.
- Email a PDF copy of your dissertation.
- Submit a printed, cerlox-bound copy of your dissertation (if required).
Submitting for Examination

- Check your External Examiner Confirmed email for details of required documents.
- Submit all required documents to G+PS.
- Wait for confirmation email with details about booking your oral defence.
- Resist the temptation to revisit or revise your work. Dissertation copies to all examiners must be exactly the same.
Common Problems

- Your examination cannot begin until all required documents are received.
- Signatures may take time to secure.
- Contact your Graduate Program Staff to arrange the **Graduate Program Approval Memo** well in advance.
- Make sure you respond to email from us, we might need to change dates or requirements for a paper copy.
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Composition of the Examining Committee

- Examination Chair (normally G+PS responsibility).
- 2 or 3 Supervisory Committee Members (including Research Supervisor)
- 2 G+PS approved University Examiners
- External Examiner (welcome at the defence but not required)
- Quorum is 5; those people must attend in person.
University Examiner Eligibility

- Two UBC-Vancouver faculty members.
- Expertise in a field closely related to your dissertation research.
- Full, Associate or Emeritus Professors who have a formal affiliation with a graduate program.
  - No Assistant, Adjunct, or Clinical Professors.
  - Associate Dean approval required for exceptions.
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.
  - No relatives or close personal relationships.
- 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.

- Research Supervisor or Graduate Program Advisor must obtain consent of the proposed University prior to submission of form to G+PS.
Setting the Oral Defence Date

- Check the availability of the entire examining committee.
- Find 2-3 dates that work for everyone (if possible).
- Submit a defence booking request using our online form at least 4 weeks in advance.
- Dates are not guaranteed until confirmed.
- Once we confirm the date, consider it final.
Informing the Committee

- You and your Research Supervisor communicate 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.
Completing your booking

• Even if you book your own room, you need to submit a Booking Request via grad.ubc.ca

• Do not book a defence date without consensus from your committee.

• Confirmation of University Examiners is not confirmation of date and time.

• Do not make assumptions about exceptions to eligibility criteria.
  – If you’re unsure, check with us first.
Optional: Exam Programme

- If you like, use the template provided on our website.
- Ensure that all information is correct (check spelling!).
- Observe maximum abstract length (350 words).
- G+PS approval is not required, but check with your Supervisor and/or Grad Advisor.
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.
- During high demand periods, practice sessions in the room may not be possible.
Exam Reminder Email

- G+PS will send a reminder email to your committee one week before your defence.
  - It will include:
    - External Examiner’s report
    - Chair Report form template
- External Examiner’s report is confidential until at/after oral defence – you will not be copied on this email.
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Defend!

- Showcase your research and impress 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
- Examing 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 let you know:
  - The Committee’s recommendations to G+PS.
  - What (if any) revisions are required for final approval.
  - Which Committee Member(s) 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.

www.grad.ubc.ca
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

- **Submit XX Nomination Form**: 8 Weeks
- **Submit Dissertation + Approval Memos**: Minimum 6-7 Weeks
  - **Confirm UXs & Request Oral Defence Date**: Minimum 4 Weeks
    - **Oral Defence**: Usually Within 1 Month
  - **Revisions and Final Dissertation Submission**
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.
  - [Doctoral Examinations Planning Tool and Checklist](#).
- Deadlines for common end dates are posted on our [website](#).
- Your exam timeline is up to you. If you want to meet a specific deadline, make sure you know the required dates.
Examination Timeline

- Timeline is not a guarantee.
- Things can go wrong.
- Doc Exams will move forward with your exam no matter when you hand in.
- However, we cannot accelerate the process for candidates who have delays.
- Your exam will be completed, but it may not be completed by your desired date.
Meeting the Timeline

- 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.
- 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.
- Your timeline is your responsibility.
We’re Here To Help!

Doctoral Exam Guide

www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/final-doctoral-examination

Questions?

graduate.doctoral@ubc.ca