
Doctoral Defence Examination Process Overview

OVERVIEW

The PhD is the highest academic degree bestowed at Brock University and the Final Doctoral Defence Examination is the culmination of the Candidate's dissertation work. The Defence assesses the Doctoral Candidate's contribution to and creation of knowledge and their ability to express this knowledge in writing, formal presentation, and interactive discussion.

STRUCTURE OF THE FINAL DOCTORAL DEFENCE EXAMINATION

The basic structure normally is as follows:

- Candidate makes a public presentation of the dissertation (35 minutes maximum)
- Examination Committee members question the candidate during two rounds of questions (question period limited to 120 minutes)
- Public audience members are invited to ask questions of the candidate, if time permits at the end of the two rounds of questions
- Examination Committee privately decides the overall recommendation it will make to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (FGSPA) (see Evaluation Protocol below)
- Chair conveys the recommendations of the Examination Committee to the Candidate

The Final Doctoral Defence Examination normally takes two and a half to three hours.

DEFENCE FORMAT AND ATTENDANCE

The required format and procedures for the final Doctoral Defence are outlined by FGSPA. The Dean of FGSPA or designate will chair the final Doctoral Defence.

Normally, the final Doctoral Defence is an in-person public event where the External Examiner typically participates virtually.

Examination Committee members required for quorum should be physically present in the room unless remote participation has been approved in advance by FGSPA. Any Examination Committee members approved to participate virtually are subject to the same requirement to be virtually present throughout the defence and subsequent deliberations.

FGSPA coordinates the setup for hybrid defences. Any alternative arrangements must be approved in advance by FGSPA.

Guests normally attend defences in person. Alternate arrangements for guests must be made in advance and approved by FGSPA, because the program may be required to provide additional supports.

WHEN TO SCHEDULE

Arrangements for the final Doctoral Defence will commence once all members of the Supervisory Committee have signed off indicating their approval that the Candidate and dissertation are ready for defence. Scheduling the final Doctoral Defence is done collaboratively with the Graduate Program and FGSPA.

Blackout dates for final Doctoral Defences include the first full week of each term (Spring/Summer, Fall, Winter).

Candidates should plan for at least 10 – 12 weeks between the submission of the approved dissertation to the proposed date of the final Doctoral Defence. Typically, the final Doctoral Defence will occur 4 – 6 weeks following the External Examiner's receipt of the dissertation. External Examiners submit their report no later than one week prior to the date of defence (ideally, 10 business days) and identify whether the dissertation is ready for defence. The External Examiner's recommendation is binding, and the defence cannot proceed without a recommendation that the defence may proceed. FGSPA also reserves the right to postpone the final Doctoral Defence if the External Examiner's report is late.

We strongly advise that planning occur well in advance to avoid administrative hurdles and scheduling challenges that may impede the process, especially during peak periods. Candidates who fail to make the appropriate arrangements well beforehand may find themselves unable to meet their desired deadline for program completion.

Please review [Appendix A: Doctoral Defence Examination Timeline and Planning](#).

QUORUM

The defence may not begin unless all the following persons are present:

- Doctoral Candidate
- Examination Chair
- External Examiner
- Internal Examiner
- Supervisor or Cosupervisors
- At least TWO Supervisory Committee members (not including Supervisor or Cosupervisors)

The above-mentioned must be present throughout the defence and the subsequent deliberations. If quorum is lost at any point during the proceedings, the examination must either be paused until quorum is once again achieved, OR adjourned and rescheduled to resume where quorum was lost (and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs [FGSPA] notified).

EVALUATION PROTOCOL

The Examination Committee should make an **overall recommendation** after evaluating two aspects of the Candidate's performance.

1. Oral Defence

- a. Discuss Candidate's performance while presenting the synopsis, responding to questions, and defending the work.
 - b. Decide whether the performance of the candidate meets the Doctoral program degree level expectations for the candidate's program.
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2. The Dissertation

- a. Discuss the overall merit of the dissertation. Consider the quality of writing, scope, scholarship, and the impact of the contribution made.
 - b. Consider the External Examiner's report and the assessment of the Examination Committee, along with the questioning of the Candidate.
 - c. Decide whether revisions, if any, are required before the dissertation can be considered fully acceptable.
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The oral defence will be assessed as

- Pass, or
- Fail

The dissertation document will be assessed as

- Thesis satisfactory and accepted as submitted
 - Thesis accepted with minor revisions (revisions that can be completed within 4 weeks and which require no new data or chapters; Supervisor verifies required changes have been made. In the case of Cosupervision, both Supervisors verify.)
 - Thesis accepted conditionally upon completion of major revisions as outlined on the *Chair's Report* (such revisions should be able to be completed within three months; Examination Committee should choose two or more of its members, including the Supervisor, to verify that the required changes have been made; in the case of Cosupervision, both Supervisors and one or more members of the Examination Committee will verify)
 - Thesis unsatisfactory (Fail)
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Appendix A:

Doctoral Defence Examination Timeline and Planning

To initiate the final Doctoral Defence Examination scheduling process, the following documents and information needs to be submitted **to your program (GPAC/GPD) in one email:**

- Final, proof-read dissertation approved by your Supervisory Committee
- Supervisory Committee Approval of Thesis for Oral Defence form (top half completed, including signatures of the committee members)
- Doctoral Defence External Examiner Approval form
- List of potential Internal Examiners

The following deadlines are suggested to guide candidates through each step of the process in time to meet all program degree requirements.

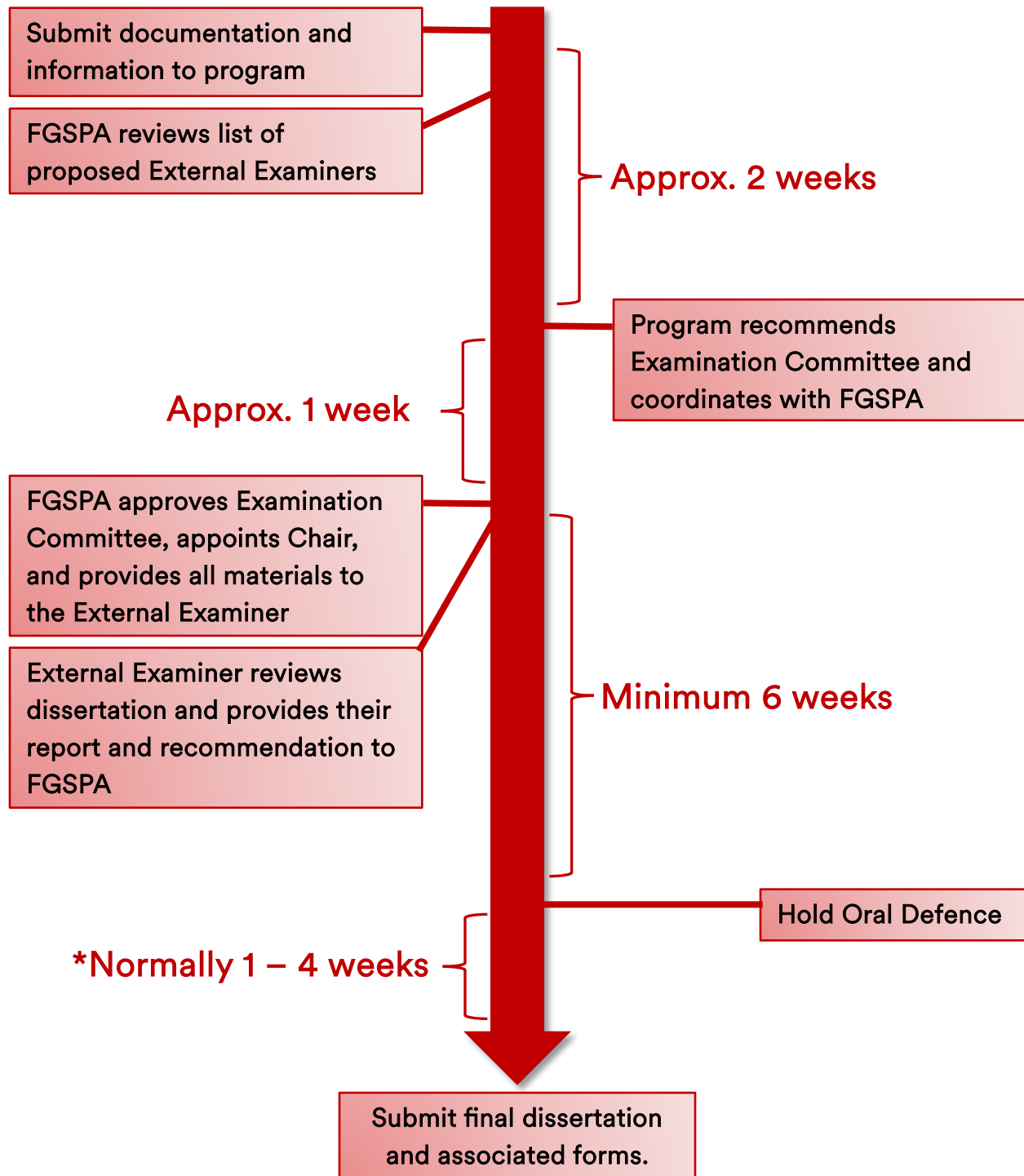
Please note that if deadlines are not met, candidates may not be able to fulfill requirements for intended program completion dates or for convocation.

Normally, the above-mentioned documentation and information should be submitted to your program (GPAC/GPD) **no later than:**

- June 1st (Spring/Summer term)
- October 1st (Fall term)
- February 1st (Winter term)

If received after these dates, there is no guarantee that the final Doctoral Defence can be scheduled in the same term in which you submitted your documentation and information.

The flowchart on the next page represents a typical timeline for arranging the final Doctoral Defence consistent with our regulations. It is meant to be an estimate and is not guaranteed. **It is in the best interest of the doctoral candidate to meet the deadline for each step of the Doctoral Examination process.**



*Please note the timeline after the oral defence will depend on its result. Should major revisions be required, it can take 2 – 3 months to complete.