

Policies And Procedures for the M.A. Thesis Defence in the Faculty of Social Sciences

The University Senate has established rules for the conduct of thesis defences in Section III.14.8.4 of the Faculty Handbook, and in the Faculty of Graduate Studies Manual. The purpose of the policies and procedures set out below is to supplement these Senate rules. In the event of conflict between rules of the University Senate and the policies and procedures set out below, the former will take precedence.

It is important to understand that it can take several months to schedule a defence after the final version of the thesis has been submitted. All participants will do as much as possible to expedite the process but identifying and obtaining the agreement of examining committee members, allowing them time to read the thesis, and finding a suitable date for the defence can take a considerable amount of time. This should be a minimum of 6 weeks. Students needing to graduate by a certain date must take this into account.

1. When the candidate and Thesis Supervisor, and Thesis Supervisory Committee agree that the thesis document is complete and is ready for examination, the Thesis Supervisor will notify the Graduate Program Director.
 - If the candidate and the Thesis Supervisory Committee do not agree on the suitability of the thesis for examination, the candidate has the right to appeal to the Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.
2. The unit's Graduate Program Director, in consultation with the candidate and the Thesis Supervisor, will prepare a list of potential external examiners for submission to the Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.
 - The external examiner must be someone who is sufficiently knowledgeable in the field to be able to assess the work adequately. The external examiner must be a person, preferably external to Brock, who has not participated previously in the thesis project and will be principally responsible for provision of an independent and objective evaluation of the academic quality of the thesis. The external examiner would normally be an associate or full professor and a member of the faculty of graduate studies at her or his university, or eligible for membership in the faculty of graduate studies if her or his university does not have such a faculty. In special cases, the external examiner does not have to have a university appointment, but they must have an understanding of the academic

environment that would allow them to evaluate the quality of a thesis. Special circumstances may include the nature of the research (e.g., Indigenous Research, Community-Based Research) or the circumstances of the proposed external examiner (e.g., change of institution that impacts rank, international institutions with different rank system, specific area of expertise).

3. Once the list of proposed external examiners has been established, the GPD will establish 3-6 dates and times when the committee and student are available for defence (These dates need to be at least 6-weeks from form submission) and submit information via online form [Thesis Defence: External Examiner Request](#). These dates should be held by the student, and committee, until the thesis date is confirmed. The completed thesis must be attached to this form, to be submitted to the external examiner. The GPD will also determine if the student wants the defence in-person, or fully virtual. Note, if there is a submission that is less than 6-weeks before the scheduled date, then a request for special accommodation due to exceptional circumstances must be made for consideration.
4. The Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research will review the form and will select up to three or four external examiners from the ranked list. Proposed dates will be reviewed and dates on which a Chair is available will be held and provided to the GPD as dates available for scheduling. The GPD will be notified via email once this process is complete.
5. The unit's Graduate Program Director (or designate) will contact the approved external examiners in the approved order, via email to determine if the external examiner is available for the dates on hold. Should the first external examiner not be available for any of the dates on hold, the next approved external examiner can be contacted.
6. GPDs complete the [Thesis Defence Notice](#).
7. The FOSS Faculty Liaison and Support Coordinator will manage the administrative steps. These include:
 - Scheduling room for event if in person
 - Creating event in calendar for Chair, student, external, and committee
 - Providing instructions on written thesis feedback form to external
 - Providing thesis to external
 - Providing FOSS Thesis Procedures to external
 - Sending instructions for the day of event to Chair, student, external, and committee.

- Creating paperwork for signatures and sending to Chair
- Confirming information with the FOSS Communication Team
- Follow up with external examiner for report if not provided 7 days before defence

8. The examining committee will consist of the following:
- the Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research (or designate) who acts as Chair of the examining committee/ thesis defence
 - the External Examiner (may attend via videoconferencing)
 - the Graduate Program Director (or designate) if specified in the departmental/program rules
 - the Thesis Supervisor
 - other members of the supervisory committee as determined by the Graduate Program Director of the unit.

*Please note, if one committee member is unable to attend, they may provide questions in advance and have a committee colleague, or the Chair pose the questions to the candidate. The defence cannot continue in the absence of an external examiner or Chair and will need to be rescheduled.

9. The Faculty of Social Sciences Communications Team will publicize the date of the thesis defence by notifying relevant university publications and posting notices in appropriate areas. This information comes from the GPD Submission on the Thesis Defence Notice.
10. The external examiner must write a letter, and send via email, to the Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at least seven business days before the scheduled date of the thesis defence (unless special accommodations have been approved) stating whether the examiner feels that the thesis is of sufficient quality to be ready for examination. The letter will be forwarded to the GPD via email. The GPD then shares the letter with the student, and thesis committee members. If this letter is not received enough time before the scheduled date of the thesis defence, the defence might not take place as scheduled.
11. If the defence is in-person, on the day of the examination, the Defence Chair (or designate) will bring 1 copy of the relevant forms to the examining room.
- “Faculty of Social Sciences Report of Graduate Thesis Examination Board,”
 - “Faculty of Graduate Studies Certificate of Approval,”
 - “Faculty of Social Sciences Statement of Major Modifications”

The Chair will ensure the room is arranged in a suitable pattern, and if the external examiner is attending virtually, ensuring they are able to connect. The

Chair will assist the candidate with technology for presenting their slides as needed.

If the defence is online, the Chair is responsible for ensuring all required members are in Lifesize.

12. The defence is open to anyone who wishes to attend, but only the candidate and members of the examining committee may participate in questioning. If the defence is virtual, up to 5 guests may attend by invitation of the student, and with permission of the Associate Dean.
13. At the beginning of the defence, the Chair of the examination committee/thesis defence will start with a land acknowledgement, then describe the rules to be followed and ensure that the candidate and all members of the examining committee are familiar with those rules. The Chair will establish the preference of the committee – if they would like formal or informal address during the defence.
14. The candidate will begin with a presentation about their research of approximately twenty (20) minutes.
15. After the candidate's presentation, the members of the examining committee can pose questions to the candidate based on the thesis. The order of questioning will be: external examiner, other members of the examining committee in the order selected by the Chair before the defence. The Thesis Supervisor will go last. The Chair of the examining committee/thesis defence may pose points of order at any time. In the first round of questioning, each questioner will have a maximum of fifteen minutes.
16. There is a second optional round of questions. This is limited to 10 minutes per examiner. The Chair will remind the examining committee that it is optional, and ask each committee member in turn, if they wish to participate. If the GPD is in attendance, it is during this round that they may ask questions. They will be slotted into the order immediately prior to the supervisor.
17. When the questioning process is complete, the candidate and anyone else in the room who is not a member of the examining committee shall be excused.
18. The Chair of the examining committee/thesis defence will lead a discussion to determine the acceptability of the thesis. The external examiner will express their view of the defence and the document, then the other members of the committee.
19. The committee will have the following options:

- Thesis satisfactory and accepted as submitted. (This will be the determination even if there are minor typographical errors that must be corrected.)
- Thesis accepted after minor corrections or modifications. (This will normally involve rewriting small sections of the thesis.)
- Thesis accepted conditionally upon completion of major modifications as outlined on attached sheet. (The examining committee will not normally meet again. The revisions must be completed to the satisfaction of either the Thesis Supervisor or a sub-committee of the examining committee, as decided by the full examining committee. No modifications other than those outlined by the examining committee may be required of the student.)
 - Decision deferred until, i) completion of major modifications as outlined on attached sheet, and ii) a new and satisfactory defence.
- Thesis unsatisfactory and not acceptable.

Acceptance of the thesis will require acceptance by two-thirds of the members of the examining committee and must include acceptance by the external examiner. If revisions are necessary, the examining committee will specify the nature of the revisions and the date by which the revised, typed thesis is to be submitted and approved. This date will normally be within three months of the examination, or within six months if additional research is required.

20. Grading System. The thesis does not receive a numerical grade. The options open to the examining committee are Pass or Fail. The criteria for these grades are specified in the Faculty Handbook as follows:
 - A fail grade will be awarded if two or more committee members find the thesis unacceptable or if the External Examiner does not approve the thesis. If this happens, it must be reported to the Dean of Graduate Studies, who in consultation with the Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research will determine an appropriate course of action.
 - Normally, if all but one member of the committee agrees on a decision, the decision shall be that of the majority, except when the single dissenting vote is that of the external examiner.
21. Once deliberations are complete, the forms will be signed. If the external examiner (or a member of the thesis committee) has participated by videoconference, the Chair will sign on their behalf (or as detailed on the required forms)
22. When deliberations and paperwork have been completed Chair or supervisor,

will invite student back into room, to inform of Defence Committees decision. (If unsuccessful, just invite the candidate, and allow student and supervisor to discuss modifications). The Chair will inform them of the results of their defence at which point the defence is closed, and available for congratulations and/or additional discussion as appropriate.

23. Appeals relating to the procedures followed in a thesis examination, or to the grade assigned, shall be considered by the Senate Committee on Graduate Studies.
24. The Defence Chair will submit the completed forms to Graduate Liaison and Support Coordinator, who will submit them to FGS and the GPD.
25. The Graduate Program Director (or designate) will update the defense status in BrockDB.
26. Once the thesis document is ready as per the specifics of the defence outcome, the student will follow the [Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs procedures](#) for uploading their thesis to the repository, in the correct format, for their thesis to be considered complete.

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