8. DEFENCE

8.1. PERMISSION TO SUBMIT THE PH.D. DISSERTATION FOR DEFENCE
It is expected the student will follow the advice of the supervisor and the advisory committee in establishing when the dissertation is ready for examination. When a majority of the voting members of the advisory committee agree the dissertation is ready for defence, the academic unit will so advise the CGPS in writing.

Under exceptional circumstances, a student may request in writing that the Dean of the CGPS arrange for an examination of the dissertation without the agreement of the advisory committee. The rules for such an examination are determined by the Dean in consultation with the academic unit and the student. It is the student’s responsibility to prepare and assemble the complete dissertation for defence.

8.2. EXAMINING COMMITTEE
Once an academic unit has approved a dissertation for defence and forwarded its selection of university examiner and recommendations for external examiner to the CGPS, the role of the examining committee begins. The Ph.D. examining committee consists of at least six members, as follows:

1. Examining committee chair (non-voting) - Will be the Graduate Chair, Head, Dean/Executive Director (non-departmentalized colleges/schools) or designate. The Supervisor (Co-supervisor, if applicable) and other members of the examining committee listed below, may not serve as the examining committee chair.

2. Supervisor (Co-supervisors, if applicable) and all members that served on the advisory committee.

3. University examiner – Approved by the Graduate Chair, Head, Dean/Executive Director (non-departmentalized colleges/schools) or designate. See criteria for appointment under 8.2.1.

4. External examiner – Approved by the Associate Dean, CGPS. See criteria for appointment under 8.2.2.

8.2.1. APPOINTMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY EXAMINER
University examiners participate in the examination of doctoral dissertations to ensure that the quality of the dissertation and oral defence meet university standards. The university examiner will have an “arm’s length” relationship with the Ph.D. dissertation research.

The university examiner will:

- Be a member of the faculty of the CGPS (Adjunct Professors included, but cannot be a Professional Affiliate);
- Normally have a Ph.D. degree or equivalent;
- Have suitable knowledge in the general field of dissertation research;
- Ideally, have previous experience supervising or examining doctoral students.
The university examiner will not:

- Have been directly involved in the candidate’s Ph.D. dissertation research;
- Have served on the candidate’s Ph.D. advisory committee;
- Be related (e.g., family, partner) to the candidate or supervisor.

The university examiner may:

- Be from within or outside the academic unit of the candidate and supervisor(s), provided the arm’s length criteria noted above are met;
- Have taught the candidate in classes, and interacted in other ways not directly related to the dissertation research.

8.2.2. APPOINTMENT OF THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

External examiners participate in the examination of doctoral dissertations to provide an ongoing, independent assessment of the quality of doctoral research and mentorship at the University of Saskatchewan. The external examiner will have an “arm’s-length” relationship with the student, the supervisor and members of the advisory committee. In all cases, conflict of interest must be avoided in naming an external examiner. While it is the responsibility of the student and all members of the advisory committee to avoid conflict of interest, it is the duty of the Supervisor and Graduate Chair, Head, Dean/Executive Director (non-departmentalized colleges/schools) or designate to ensure that all members of the advisory committee are aware of this responsibility.

The external examiner will:

- Be from outside of USask;
- Normally have a Ph.D. degree or equivalent;
- Have demonstrated expertise and competence in the field of dissertation research;
- Have previous experience supervising and examining doctoral students.

The external examiner will not:

- Be a current Adjunct Professor or Professional Affiliate at USask;
- Have graduated from or have been a student in the academic unit within the previous six (6) years;
- Have collaborated with either the student or supervisor (within the previous six (6) years) as demonstrated by shared research grants, joint authorship of academic or professional publications, artistic works or presentations, or community-engaged collaboration or other joint scholarly activities;
- Have shared financial, professional, close family relationships or personal benefits or advantages with the student, the supervisor, or any member of the advisory committee;
- Have previous involvement with chapters or sections of the dissertation which have been published or submitted for publication that would affect their ability to fairly and impartially evaluate the dissertation;
- Be currently teaching or supervising other graduate students who are family members of either the student or the supervisor;
- Be currently enrolled as a graduate student at USask.
The external examiner may:

- Serve as an external examiner for multiple students within the same academic unit without restriction, but would not normally serve as an external examiner for more than one student supervised by the same supervisor within a 12-month period;
- Be a former faculty member or employee of USask if their employment with USask ended at least six (6) years prior to the proposed defence date;
- Be a former student of the supervisor if all other criteria are satisfied and the external examiner completed their degree under the supervisor’s direction at least six (6) years previously.

The criteria for the selection of external examiners may not address all possible cases of potential conflict of interest. Further, there may be occasions where an exception to any of the criteria is warranted. The Dean of the CGPS (or designate) retains the authority to reject a recommended external examiner based upon a real or perceived conflict of interest that has not been anticipated in the existing criteria. Further, the Dean (or designate) may also allow exceptions to any of the criteria, based on an appeal by the Graduate Chair, Head, Dean/Executive Director (non-departmentalized colleges/schools) or designate of the unit recommending the external examiner.

The external examiner will provide the Dean of the CGPS with a pre-defence report at least seven (7) days prior to the scheduled defence date, indicating whether the oral defence should proceed. Following examination of the dissertation and candidate, the external examiner will provide the Dean of the CGPS with a written report on the oral defence within fourteen (14) days.

8.3. SCHEDULING THE PH.D. ORAL EXAMINATION

The Ph.D. dissertation defence will be scheduled only after the academic unit has advised the CGPS that the dissertation is ready for defence, has selected one person to serve as University Examiner, and recommended at least one person(s) to serve as External Examiner. It is recommended that academic units have on-hand a second (and perhaps third) choice for External Examiner in case the first choice is declined by CGPS.

The CGPS must be sent the necessary documentation (including the dissertation and CV of the preferred external examiner) a minimum of five (5) weeks prior to the desired oral defence date. After approval by the CGPS, the external examiner and university examiner must have the dissertation a minimum of four (4) weeks prior to the defence. The CGPS Graduate Program Advisor forwards the dissertation and any necessary documentation to the External Examiner and University Examiner.

The academic unit will ensure the student file contains all necessary documentation and that the academic requirements for the degree have been met prior to submitting the defence request. The student will ensure all requirements of the Program of Studies (DegreeWorks requirements) have been completed, registration is current, outstanding fees are paid, and University deadlines are respected in view of any particular convocation.

The defence must be scheduled at a time when the student and all examiners are known to be available and willing to participate. All arrangements for the Ph.D. dissertation defence (time, date, location, platform for remote participation) are made by the academic unit. The CGPS contributes on a limited basis to help offset the expenses (travel, lodging, and meals) of the External Examiner as funding permits, up to a maximum of CDN$2000. Should this amount change, academic units will be notified early-on in the academic year.
Defences may occur in-person on-campus; remotely through digital platforms; or, by a combination of both. The three most common scenarios for holding a defence are:

- External examiner participates remotely through a digital platform; candidate and all other examining committee members are in-person on-campus in a room equipped for high quality video-conferencing
- Candidate and all examining committee members are on-campus, in-person
- Some members of the examining committee and/or candidate participate remotely through a digital platform; others are in-person on-campus in a room equipped for high quality video-conferencing.

The academic unit is responsible for booking an appropriate and properly equipped space for the dissertation defence, as well as setting up and inviting participants to the digital platform selected for the defence, if applicable.

It is the responsibility of a student who has a disability that could interfere with their ability to respond to questioning at an oral defence, to contact Access and Equity Services (AES) to schedule an Accommodation Planning Committee meeting in sufficient time prior to the defence to ensure appropriate accommodations can be made.

8.4 ORAL EXAMINATION OF THE PH.D. DISSERTATION

The adequacy of the written dissertation and oral defence is decided by the Examining Committee.

The candidate will make a brief (10-20 minute) presentation summarizing the major themes and findings of the dissertation, followed by questions from the Examining Committee, beginning with the External Examiner, followed by the University Examiner, other members of the examining committee, and the supervisor. The candidate is expected to defend the work, and to answer questions in a clear, direct, and knowledgeable fashion. In general, examination questions are limited to work done by the candidate for the dissertation, to knowledge of matters directly related to it, and to peripheral knowledge of the subject matter.

At the conclusion of the examination, the candidate will withdraw while the Examining Committee decides by majority vote whether the dissertation as submitted and the candidate’s oral defence meet the requirements for the degree. The decision will be one of the following five recommendations (Table 1), when the External Examiner shares the majority view.
Table 1: Dissertation/Thesis Oral Examination Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation 1</th>
<th>Recommendation 2</th>
<th>Recommendation 3</th>
<th>Recommendation 4</th>
<th>Recommendation 5</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| • Dissertation/Thesis acceptable, with or without minor revisions  
  • Oral defence acceptable | • Underlying research adjudged to be sound, but dissertation/thesis in need of recasting, addition of illustrative material or limited additional data  
  • Oral defence acceptable | • Dissertation/Thesis acceptable  
  • Oral defence unacceptable  
  • Only available to students taking the oral exam for the first time. | • Dissertation/Thesis does not meet minimum standards, but committee believes that further research and/or revision may bring it to an acceptable standard or oral defence is unacceptable but the committee agrees that the student has the potential, with additional preparation, to be able to successfully defend work.  
  • Only available to students taking the oral exam for the first time. | • Dissertation/Thesis does not meet minimum standards and committee considers that no reasonable amount of additional research or revision is likely to bring it to an acceptable standard or oral defence of dissertation/thesis is completely unacceptable and committee agrees that the student does not have potential to be able to successfully defend the work.  
  Committee recommends student be required to discontinue from the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. |
| All members of the examining committee sign the certification pages EXCEPT THE SUPERVISOR, who will sign only after ensuring the necessary revisions have been made. | Recommendation 2 is often used in a situation where different members of the committee take on specific responsibilities for ensuring that a particular part of the dissertation/thesis is revised as required. In these circumstances, the normal practice is for those with such responsibilities not to sign the approval page until the revisions have been made, while other members not so involved may sign immediately after the examination. Otherwise, none of the committee members sign approval pages until the revisions have been returned for the committee’s final approval (no additional oral defence). | Second attempt at oral defence should be completed within three months of the date of the initial examination. | Re-submission of dissertation/thesis and second attempt of oral defence no sooner than six months and no later than twelve months after the original defence. | CLEAR FAIL |

As a general guide, if the committee does not feel that dissertation/thesis revisions can be completed within a two-week time frame by a student working full-time on the dissertation/thesis, it should consider Recommendation 2.

As a general guide, if the committee does not feel that dissertation/thesis revisions can be completed within a six-week time frame by a student working largely full-time on the dissertation/thesis, it should consider Recommendation 4.
The Committee’s decision will be reported to the CGPS Graduate Program Advisor. Where the Examining Committee’s
decision is not unanimous, the majority view will prevail provided the External Examiner shares the majority view. If
those voting in favour of the majority opinion do not include the External Examiner, the examination will be adjourned
and the person chairing the examination will so inform the Dean, CGPS. The Dean will then investigate the
circumstances and decide upon an appropriate course of action.

Recommendations 3 and 4 are only available to candidates taking the oral exam for the first time.

Candidates receiving Recommendation 5 will be automatically required to discontinue from their graduate program.
This decision can be appealed to the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee of the CGPS.

The approved electronic version of the dissertation must be submitted to the Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD)
site by the student at the end of their program.

8.5. ORAL EXAMINATION OF THE MASTER’S THESIS
An oral defence of the master’s thesis is required. It is up to academic units to establish and implement the process for
conducting master’s thesis defences, and determining the adequacy of the written thesis and its oral defence. Units may
wish to use the five recommendations established by the CGPS (Table 1) to determine the outcome of the thesis and
defence.

The CGPS requires that:
• The advisory committee be joined by one arm’s length examiner to constitute the examining committee for the
oral defence;
• Academic units establish and implement a consistent, predictable, rigorous, and procedurally fair process for
holding and adjudicating master’s thesis oral defences;
• Master’s theses comply with CGPS General Form and Style Guidelines for thesis formatting;
• Each master’s student submit the approved electronic version of the thesis to the Electronic Theses and
Dissertations (ETD) site at the end of their program.

The arm’s length examiner must be approved by the Graduate Chair, Head, Dean/Executive Director (non-
departmentalized colleges/schools) or designate. The arm’s length examiner may be from within or outside the
academic unit but should not have been directly involved in the student’s thesis research.

The arm’s length examiner must have the thesis a minimum of two (2) weeks prior to the defence date.

The CGPS does not universally require that a non-voting examining committee chair be appointed for the master’s thesis
oral defence. However, the academic unit may add a non-voting chair to the examining committee, who is a member of
the faculty of the CGPS, in accordance with the policy and practice of the academic unit, or upon request from the
student, supervisor(s), or any other member of the examining committee to the Graduate Chair, Head, Dean/Executive
Director (non-departmentalized colleges/schools) or designate.

If the academic unit determines that a student has failed to produce an acceptable thesis and oral defence, the student
will be automatically required to discontinue from their graduate program. This decision can be appealed to the
Graduate Academic Affairs Committee of the CGPS.