INTRODUCTION
In response to concerns about doctoral student progress, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research of the University passed stricter rules in April 2013 regarding the timing of candidacy examinations: they must now be held within three years. The average time to candidacy in the Alberta School of Business has exceeded three years. The purpose of these revised policies and procedures on candidacy exams is to help students, supervisors, and examining committee members meet the new requirements.

THE POLICY FROM THE UNIVERSITY CALENDAR

204.3.3 Doctoral Candidacy Examination

Establishing Candidacy Examination Procedures: Each department offering a doctoral degree is responsible for establishing detailed examination policies and procedures for the candidacy examination. These documents should be publicly available.

The candidacy examination is an oral examination; some departments may also require that students take comprehensive written examinations prior to the candidacy examination, but such examinations do not form part of the candidacy examination itself.

For candidacy examinations, students must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the examining committee that they possess:

(1) an adequate knowledge of the discipline and of the subject matter relevant to the thesis;
(2) the ability to pursue and complete original research at an advanced level; and
(3) the ability to meet any other requirements found in the department’s published policy on candidacy examinations.

The candidacy examination must be held within three years of the commencement of the program in accordance with §203.17.1 of the University Calendar. The candidacy examination must be passed no less than six months prior to taking the final examination.

Decision of the Candidacy Committee: The candidacy examination may result in one of the following outcomes:

• Adjourned
• Pass
• Conditional pass
• Fail and repeat the candidacy
• Fail with a recommendation to terminate the doctoral program or for a change of category to a master’s program.

If the Examining Committee fails to reach a decision, the department will refer the matter to the Dean, FGSR, who will determine an appropriate course of action.
Adjourned: A majority of examiners must agree to an outcome of Adjourned. The candidacy examination should be adjourned in the event of compelling, extraordinary circumstances such as a sudden medical emergency taking place during the examination or possible offences under the Code of Student Behaviour after the examination has started.

Pass: All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Pass. If the student passes the candidacy examination, the department should complete the Report of Completion of Candidacy Examination form and submit it to the FGSR.

Conditional Pass: A majority of examiners must agree to an outcome of Conditional Pass. If the candidacy examining committee agrees to a conditional pass for the student, the chair of the examining committee will provide in writing within five working days to the Dean, FGSR, the graduate coordinator and the student:
• the reasons for this recommendation,
• the details of the conditions,
• the timeframe for the student to meet the conditions,
• the approval mechanism for meeting the conditions (e.g., approval of the committee chair or supervisor, or approval of the entire committee, or select members of the committee), and
• the supervision and assistance the student can be expected to receive from committee members

Conditions are subject to final approval by the Dean, FGSR. At the deadline specified for meeting the conditions, two outcomes are possible:
• All the conditions have been met. In this case, the department will complete the Report of Completion of Candidacy Examination form and submit it to the FGSR; or
• Some of the conditions have not been met. In this case, the outcome of the candidacy examination is a Fail, and the options below are available to the examining committee. Note that the options are different after a failed second candidacy examination.

Fail: If the candidacy examining committee agrees that the student has failed, the committee chair will provide the reasons for this recommendation to the department. The graduate coordinator will then provide this report, together with the department’s recommendation for the student’s program, to the Dean, FGSR, and to the student.

For failed candidacy examinations, an Associate Dean, FGSR, normally arranges to meet with the student and others as required before acting upon any department recommendation.

The options available to the examining committee when the outcome of a student’s candidacy exam is “Fail” are
• Repeat the Candidacy: A majority of examiners must agree to an outcome of Fail and Repeat the Candidacy. If the student’s first candidacy exam performance was inadequate but the student’s performance and work completed to date indicate that the student has the potential to perform at the doctoral level, the examining committee should consider the possibility of recommending that the student be given an opportunity to repeat the candidacy exam. Normally, the composition of the examining committee does not change for the repeat candidacy exam.
If the recommendation of a repeat candidacy is formulated by the examining committee and approved by the FGSR, the student and graduate coordinator are to be notified in writing of his or her exam deficiencies by the chair of the examining committee. The second candidacy exam is to be scheduled no later than six months from the date of the first candidacy. In the event that the student fails the second candidacy, the examining committee shall recommend one of the following two options to the department:

- **Change of Category to a Master’s Program:** All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Fail and Change of Category to a Master’s Program. This outcome should be considered if the student’s candidacy examination performance was inadequate and the student’s performance and work completed to date indicates that the student has the potential to complete a master’s, but not a doctoral, program; or

- **Termination of the Doctoral Program:** All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Fail and Terminate the Doctoral Program. If the student’s performance was inadequate, and the work completed during the program is considered inadequate, then the examining committee should recommend termination of the student’s program.

Accessed July 23, 2015, from [http://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar/GradStudies-and-Research/Regulations/204.3.html#204.3](http://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar/GradStudies-and-Research/Regulations/204.3.html#204.3).

**INTERNAL SCHOOL OF BUSINESS PROCEDURES**

**The Research Proposal or Thesis Proposal**

In the Alberta School of Business PhD Program, a central component of many candidacy exams historically has been discussion of a written document distributed in advance of the candidacy exam. This document is sometimes known as the “research proposal” or “thesis proposal”, and the candidacy exam is sometimes known as the proposal defence. Practices for such a document vary across the majors in the School of Business. Proposal requirements also vary across the University. As of 2014, Biological Sciences and Geography require no more than 5 pages single-spaced; in Anthropology, 80-90 pages are needed. In Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology, the limit is 35 pages.

During 1990-2013, thesis proposals in the School of Business have tended to get longer and longer, and so has the average time to pass candidacy. Such practices are inconsistent with the University of Alberta’s definition of the candidacy exam, so part of this policy addresses the contents of the proposal.

**Template for the Pre-Candidacy Thesis Proposal**

The following *italicized components* are necessary and sufficient. The non-italicized components should be considered. While data collection and analysis may be part of the thesis proposal and the candidacy examination, they may not be a requirement for passing the candidacy
examination. Students should work closely with their supervisors on the proposal, with assistance of supervisory committee members as needed.

The length of this proposal must not exceed 35 pages including all figures, tables, and references. Figures and tables can be incorporated into the document or appended at the end. The main body shall be double spaced, 12 point font, and all margins at 2.5 cm (1 inch). Tables and references may be single spaced. Students may copy this template, which has MS Word headings, into the first drafts of their proposal.

Title Page

Introduction

Research Question(s)
Clearly state the research question(s). Examples include:

- How does high velocity trading influence short interest?
- What is the appropriate spatial and temporal distribution of EMS units in a city that ensures life-saving emergency service in less than 9 minutes?

Justification of research question(s)
This section should explain why the research question(s) is (are) original and important. This should incorporate a focused literature review. There is no need for an exhaustive and comprehensive literature review that mentions every study about the particular concept, relationship, or theory being investigated. Supervisory committee members should provide direction for this review and provide boundaries.

Plan to answer research question(s)
This section should present the initial plan to answer the research question(s). The necessary ingredients in the plan will differ depending on the research approach that you plan to take. Here we outline what the plan should include for some of common research approaches. You need to demonstrate competence to carry out the plan in the oral exam.

For theory-testing research, a few central propositions or hypotheses should/could be derived. There is no need for a comprehensive list, as hypotheses can be added or dropped as the research proceeds. You should present a research methodology for testing the hypotheses, such as experimental or quasi-experimental, and demonstrate familiarity with it. The likely source of data should be presented, such as CRSP or undergraduate students at a large publicly funded Canadian university. No data are required.
For inductive research, you should present a qualitative or quantitative methodology for answering the research question, and demonstrate familiarity with it. Potential research site(s) should be identified and ideally agreement from them should be secured (i.e., letter in appendix). Students should consider potential software tools to assist their analyses.

For non-empirical research, a work plan for building theoretical models should be presented.

References

Distribution of Thesis Proposal
The proposal should be distributed to the examining committee three weeks in advance of the exam. Unlike the doctoral thesis, the thesis proposal does not require agreement from the supervisory committee members before distribution.

The Examining Committee
There must be at least five members of the committee, including the supervisory committee and two arm’s length members. Please see I:\PhD Public\Candidacy and Final Exams for instructions and a checklist. The members should be chosen by the student and the supervisor(s), with approval of the Associate Dean of the PhD Program.

Attendance
The candidacy examination is a closed exam. Members of the examining committee are required to attend either in person or by teleconferencing; FGSR recommends that no more than two committee members attend via teleconferencing. The Dean, FGSR, the Dean of the department’s Faculty, or a Pro Dean (the representative of the Dean, FGSR) may also attend. A Pro Dean may be requested by the student, a committee member, chair, graduate coordinator, the Dean of the department’s Faculty, or the Dean, FGSR.

Organizing the Examination
The candidate will submit a “Candidacy Exam Approval Form” to the Business PhD Program Office at least three weeks prior to the examination. The supervisor and the PhD Office will work together to find a suitable room and date. The student will send any documents or other materials to be discussed at the candidacy examination to the examining committee at least three weeks before the examination.

The Examination
1. Preliminaries, including introductions and explanation of the examination format by the committee chair.
2. Presentation by the student (approximately 15-20 minutes).
3. Question period (typically 90 minutes).
4. Evaluation and decision, taking place in the absence of the student.
5. Complete the “Result of a Doctoral Candidacy Examination” form.
6. Informing student of the decision.

The question period should consider not only the research proposal but also the student’s “knowledge of the discipline and of the subject matter relevant to the thesis proposal” and “ability to pursue and complete original research at an advanced level” – consistent with the University’s definition of the candidacy exam above.

The PhD Policy Committee recognizes that the research question and the plan to answer it may evolve during the conduct of the thesis research.

**Reporting the Examination Results**

Bring the Result of a Doctoral Candidacy Examination form to the PhD Office. If the student passes the exam, then the supervisor or chair must also sign the Report of Completion of Candidacy Examination form provided by FGSR and bring it to the Business PhD Office.

If the student does not unconditionally pass the exam, then the supervisor shall assist the chair in preparing a short report to the Associate Dean of the PhD Program and the Dean of FGSR consistent with the instructions in Section 8.3.3.2, Decision of the Candidacy Committee, in the Graduate Program Manual.

**Appendix: Options for when Students Fail to Pass Candidacy in Three Years**

1. Grant extension. The Business PhD Program has been delegated the authority to grant the first extension. Until procedures are created by FGSR, we model our procedure on Program Extensions (https://www.ualberta.ca/graduate-studies/about/graduate-program-manual/section-7-administration-of-graduate-programs/7-10-program-extensions):

   Requests for extensions will only be considered if there are well-documented reasons specific to a particular type of research that precludes completion within the time limit, or if there are sufficient, and substantial unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of the student and/or supervisor which prevent completion of the program within the time limits.

   An extension application requires the following:

   From the student: An explanatory letter with a timeline for passing the candidacy exam.

   From the supervisor: An explanatory letter summarizing the student's progress to date and a timeline for passing the candidacy exam approved by the supervisor and/or supervisory committee.

   Extensions are not guaranteed.
2. Recommend academic probation with specified conditions using the Recommendation for Change of Category or Academic Standing form of FGSR. Consultation with FGSR Associate Dean is recommended.

3. Recommend to FGSR that the student's program be terminated. Students may be able to transfer to a Master’s program. Consultation with FGSR Associate Dean is recommended.

**Policy History**

Discussed by Business PhD Policy Committee on April 10, 2014.

First revision approved via email on April 14, 2014.
This version approved via email on May 8, 2014.
Section 204.3.3 of the University Calendar was updated on July 23, 2015.
Link to FGSR updated February 16, 2017

This version replaces the version passed by Business PhD Policy Committee on January 24, 2014. The major changes are the addition of material about the research proposal and the full text defining the candidacy exam that became part of the University Calendar in the interim.