

ALBERTA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS PHD PROGRAM PROCEDURES FOR FINAL DOCTORAL EXAMINATIONS

The final doctoral examination is the culmination of the student's doctoral program. Overriding policy regarding the final exam is set by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) in Section 8.3 of the Graduate Program Manual (GPM) (<https://www.ualberta.ca/graduate-studies/about/graduate-program-manual/section-8-supervision-oral-examinations-and-program-completion/8-3-conduct-of-examinations>). These procedures are prepared per Section 8.3 to highlight important matters for the PhD Program in Business.

Examination Committee Membership

The final exam must be attended by at least five committee members, including the supervisory committee and at least two arm's length members ([GPM Section 8.2](#)). The latter shall not have been involved in the student's or supervisor's research. Details on committees, including a checklist, can be found in the document titled Checklist for Structure of Exam Committees for Business PhD in the Business PhD Program Forms and Policies cabinet (<https://www.ualberta.ca/business/programs/phd/student-support/forms-and-policy-documents>) and in Section 8.2 of the Graduate Program Manual: <https://www.ualberta.ca/graduate-studies/about/graduate-program-manual/section-8-supervision-oral-examinations-and-program-completion/8-2-the-structure-of-examining-committees>

Each thesis must be reviewed by one arm's length member from outside the University. When attending the exam in person or electronically, this person is an External Examiner; if not, then the person is an External Reader. The supervisory committee and the Associate Dean of the Business PhD program shall agree on a nominee for the external. The Associate Dean will then formally nominate the person to FGSR at least two months in advance of the proposed exam date.

Preliminary Acceptance of the Thesis

Section 8.3 of the GPM states: "Before the thesis is forwarded to the External, the supervisory committee members must declare in writing to the supervisor(s) either that the thesis is of adequate substance and quality to warrant that the student proceed to the final examination or that the thesis is unsatisfactory and the student should not be allowed to proceed to the final examination." Email is sufficient for accomplishing this.

Approval of the Final Doctoral Examining Committee

In order to meet FGSR deadlines, the supervisor will recommend names of all members of the final examining committee to the PhD Program Office at least four weeks before the date of the final examination.

Scheduling the Final Doctoral Examination

The supervisor shall work with the Administrative Assistants of the PhD Program office to schedule the exam as soon as practical to ensure an appropriate room and technology.

Conduct of the Final Doctoral 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 Thesis Approval / Program Completion form.
6. Informing student of the decision.

Decision of the Doctoral Final Examining Committee

This sub-section quotes Section 8.3 of the GPM on this topic.

The decision of the examining committee will be based both on the content of the thesis and on the student's ability to defend it. The final examination may result in one of the following outcomes:

- Adjourned
- Pass
- Pass subject to revisions
- Fail

There is no provision for a final examination to be "passed subject to major revisions".

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: An adjourned examination is one that has been abandoned officially. A majority of examiners must agree to an outcome of Adjourned. The final examination should be adjourned in the following situations:

- The revisions to the thesis are sufficiently substantial that it will require further research or experimentation or major reworking of sections, or if the committee is so dissatisfied with the general presentation of the thesis that it will require a reconvening of the examining committee. In such circumstances the committee cannot pass the student, and must adjourn the examination.
- The committee is dissatisfied with the student's oral presentation and defence of the thesis, even if the thesis itself is acceptable with or without minor revisions.
- Compelling, extraordinary circumstances such as a sudden medical emergency taking place during the examination.

- Discovery of possible offences under the Code of Student Behaviour after the examination has started.

If the examination is adjourned, the committee should:

- Specify in writing to the student, with as much precision as possible, the nature of the deficiencies and, in the case of revisions to the thesis, the extent of the revisions required. Where the oral defence is unsatisfactory, it may be necessary to arrange some discussion periods with the student prior to reconvening the examination.
- Decide upon a date to reconvene. If the date of the reconvened examination depends upon the completion of a research task or a series of discussions, it should be made clear which committee members will decide on the appropriate date to reconvene. This new examination must be held within six months of the initial examination.
- Make it clear to the student what will be required by way of approval before the examination is reconvened (e.g. approval of the committee chair or supervisor, approval of the entire committee, or of select members of the committee).
- Specify the supervision and assistance the student may expect from the committee members in meeting the necessary revisions.
- Advise the Dean of the department's Faculty following the procedures established for this purpose.
- Advise the FGSR in writing of the adjournment and the conditions.
- When the date is set for the adjourned final examination, the department will notify the Dean of the department's Faculty and the FGSR. Normally, a Pro Dean attends the examination.

Pass: Pass is the decision given when the only revisions are typographical or minor editorial changes. All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Pass. If the student passes the examination, the department should submit a completed [Thesis Approval/Program Completion](#) form to the FGSR. If one of the examiners fails the student, that examiner does not have to sign this form. The form is available on the FGSR website (see [Forms Cabinet](#)).

Pass Subject to Revisions: All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Pass Subject to Revisions. The student has satisfactorily defended the thesis but the revisions to the thesis are sufficiently minor that it will not require a reconvening of the examining committee.

If the examining committee agrees to a "Pass subject to revisions" for the student, the chair of the examining committee must provide in writing, within five working days of the examination, to the Dean, FGSR, the graduate coordinator and the student:

- the reasons for this outcome,
- the details of the required revisions,

- the approval mechanism for meeting the requirement for revisions (e.g. approval of the examining committee chair or supervisor, or approval of the entire examining committee, or select members of the committee), and
- the supervision and assistance the student can expect to receive from committee members.
- A date for the revisions to be resubmitted, as negotiated with the student, but which should be no less than six weeks and no more than six months.

The student must make the revisions within six months of the date of the final examination. These changes should be checked and approved by the examining committee chair or supervisor, who does not sign until the required changes are satisfactorily completed. Other committee members may also wish to withhold their signature until they can verify that their required revisions have been made to their satisfaction.

Once the required revisions have been made and approved, the department should submit a completed [Thesis Approval/Program Completion](#) form to the FGSR indicating the committee decision was "pass subject to revisions". If one of the examiners fails the student that examiner does not have to sign the form. If the required revisions have not been made and approved by the end of the six months deadline, the student will be required to withdraw.

Fail: All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Fail. If the examination result is a Fail, no member of the examining committee signs the Thesis Approval/Completion form.

When the outcome is a Fail, the committee chair will provide the reasons for this decision to the graduate coordinator. The department will then provide this report, together with its recommendation for the student's program, to the Dean of the department's Faculty, the FGSR, and to the student.

An Associate Dean, FGSR will normally arrange to meet with the student and with the graduate coordinator before acting upon any department recommendation that affects the student's academic standing.

Section 8.3 of The Graduate Program Manual of FGSR now links directly to the Calendar. The following is extracted from the Conduct of Examinations section.

THE POLICY FROM THE UNIVERSITY CALENDAR

Common Examination Protocols

Attendance at Examinations: In the absence of unforeseen circumstances, it is essential that all examiners attend the entire examination. Attendance means participation in the examination either in person or via Teleconferencing (see below). The only exception allowed is the External Reader for a doctoral final examination, who participates by providing a detailed report and a list of questions.

If the department has warning that any member of the examining committee cannot attend the examination, the department should contact the Dean of the FGSR for advice. The situation will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but it may be necessary that the examination be postponed, or the examiner replaced.

The Dean, FGSR, the Dean of the department's Faculty, or a Pro Dean (the representative of the Dean, FGSR) may participate fully in the examination. Persons other than the examiners may attend only with the approval of the Dean, FGSR, the Dean of the department's Faculty, or the chair of the committee.

Responsibilities of a Pro Dean at Examinations: A Pro Dean is a full voting member when attending an examination. The Pro Dean's presence is in addition to the regular membership. Attendance of the Pro Dean may be at the request of a committee member, student, chair, graduate coordinator, the Dean of the department's Faculty, or the Dean, FGSR.

The Pro Dean's role is to ensure the proper conduct of the examination and will intercede actively to correct procedural problems. The Pro Dean has the power to adjourn an examination. If problems are encountered, the Pro Dean is asked to submit a brief report to the Dean, FGSR.

Teleconferencing Guidelines for Examinations: The term 'teleconferencing' is used here generically to include all forms of distance conference facilitation including telephone, video and synchronous electronic communication.

Departments may wish to use teleconferencing for one or more of the examiners (including the External). No more than two participants may attend by teleconference. Teleconferencing may be used for master's or doctoral examinations. Examiners participating in examinations by this means are considered to be in attendance.

Students must attend their candidacy examinations in person. In exceptional circumstances, for the final examinations, students may participate by teleconferencing. It is recommended that if the student is the remote participant, no remote committee members be used.

Use of teleconferencing must be submitted for approval to the Dean of the department's Faculty at the time the examination committee is approved, following the Faculty's established procedures.

Timelines and Approval of the Examining Committee: It is the responsibility of the department to nominate the members of the examining committee following the procedures established by the Dean of the department's Faculty using the Forms available on the FGSR website. The notice of final approval must be received by the FGSR at least two weeks in advance of the examination to be coded into the system.

Scheduling of Examinations: It is the responsibility of the supervisor(s) to ensure that:

1. proper arrangements are made for the student's examination,
2. the exam is scheduled and held in accordance with FGSR and departmental regulations,
3. committee members are informed of meetings and details of examinations
4. the student does not make these arrangements, and
5. the student provides a copy of the thesis (master's and doctoral final examination) to the individual delegated by the program to distribute the thesis to the examiners (e.g., chair of the examination, program administrator, supervisor). The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that all examiners receive the thesis in a timely way. All examiners for a doctoral final examination must receive a copy of the thesis at least four weeks before the examination.

In the absence of the supervisor, the department's graduate coordinator or designate shall be responsible for these arrangements.

Changing an Examining Committee Member: Changes to the membership of the Examining Committee must follow the procedures established by the Dean of the department's Faculty.

Language of Examinations: The language used to conduct examinations shall be English, except where already approved by the FGSR Council. However, the examining committee may petition the Dean of the FGSR, and on receiving written approval, may conduct the examination in a language other than English.

Time Limit for Submission of Theses to FGSR: Following completion of the final examination at which the thesis is passed or passed subject to revisions, the student shall make any necessary revisions and submit the approved thesis to the FGSR within six months of the date of the final examination. Departments may impose earlier deadlines for submitting revisions.

If the thesis is not submitted to the FGSR within the six-month time limit, the student will be considered to have withdrawn from the program. After this time, the student must apply and be readmitted to the FGSR and register again before the thesis can be accepted. If the final examination is adjourned, the six-month time limit will take effect from the date of completion of the examination where the thesis was passed with or without revisions.

In order to convocate, all thesis-based students must submit their thesis to the FGSR and have it approved before they can be cleared for convocation. The thesis cannot be approved without a valid student registration at the time of approval.

Conduct of Thesis and Candidacy Examinations

The following apply to all examinations. Matters specific to each type of examination are detailed in the sections that follow. Programs may have additional regulations in their program guidelines.

- The student may be required to give a presentation prior to the examination. The presentation may be public or only for the examining committee (and others approved to attend the examination—see Attendance at Doctoral Examinations, above).
- If a public seminar is held before the examination, typically the examiners do not ask questions until the examination itself begins.
- At the start of the examination the chair should review the procedures as detailed by the program's guidelines for the examination including the order of examiners, number of rounds of questions, the length of time allotted to each examiner and whether interjections by other examiners are permitted. Departmental examination procedures should have flexibility to adjust accordingly when there are large supervisory committees so as not to extend the questioning portion of the examination beyond a reasonable duration (2 hours for master's and 3 hours for doctoral examinations).
- The student may be asked to leave the room while the order of examiners is determined, and the student's academic record is reviewed by the supervisor for the committee. Typically the order of examiners is the External if applicable, the arm's length examiners, the supervisory committee members, and then the supervisor. The Examiners may seek clarification at this time regarding exam procedures.
- If academic misconduct is suspected, an Associate Dean, FGSR should be consulted prior to the exam.
- For thesis examinations the questioning should focus on establishing the quality of the thesis (or thesis substitute) and the student's breadth and depth of understanding at a level appropriate to the degree qualification. Expectations for a Candidacy examination are detailed in the program's guidelines.
- When the questions have concluded, the chair should ask the student if they have any final comments they would like to add.

Deliberation:

- The student is required to leave the room and will be asked to take their personal belongings including electronic devices with them.
- The deliberations are confidential proceedings. The committee will agree on the report to be provided to the student with the outcome of the examination.
- The examiners are asked to give their opinions on the quality of the thesis and the defense, or performance in the candidacy examination, in the same order as questioning occurred. All examiners must provide their opinion before a final decision is made.
- The options of the outcomes from the vote are detailed for each type of examination.

- If the outcome of the first vote does not result in a decision (eg. two of five examiners vote to fail), the chair will allow for further discussion and attempt to reach a decision. Only in cases where a decision cannot be reached in a reasonable time will the student be informed and matter referred to the Dean FGSR, who will determine the appropriate course of action.
- The Chair of the Examination Committee may sign the thesis examination form on behalf of an examiner who is participating from a remote location.

Final Doctoral Examination

Each department offering a doctoral degree is required to establish detailed examination procedures for final examinations. These procedures must be made available publicly.

Preliminary Acceptance of the Thesis: Before the thesis is forwarded to the External, the supervisory committee members must declare in writing to the supervisor(s) either that the thesis is of adequate substance and quality to warrant that the student proceed to the final examination or that the thesis is unsatisfactory and the student should not be allowed to proceed to the final examination.

The purpose of this process is to ensure the thesis is vetted by the supervisor(s) and all supervisory committee members and to verify that it is of sufficient substance and quality to proceed to the final examination.

This process is critical to protect and uphold the reputation of the department and the University of Alberta for excellence in graduate programs. It is also critical to ensure that Externals and other additional members of the examining committee are not asked to invest time reading a thesis that is substandard.

Departments may choose to prepare a "Preliminary Acceptance of Thesis" signature sheet for their own records.

Attendance at Doctoral Examinations: Faculty members of the student's home department as well as members of FGSR Council (or their alternates) have the right to attend doctoral examinations but should notify the chair of the examining committee. Other persons may attend the examination only with special permission of the Dean of the department's Faculty, the Dean, FGSR, or the chair of the examining committee.

Except for a Dean or a Pro Dean who may participate fully in the examination, persons who are not members of the examining committee:

- may participate in the questioning only by permission of the chair of the committee, but
- are not permitted to participate in the discussion of the student's performance and must withdraw before such discussion commences

Inviting the External Examiner or Reader: Every Final Doctoral Examining Committee must have an External i.e., an arm's length examiner from outside the University of Alberta. The term

External Examiner refers to an External who attends the examination, whereas the term External Reader refers to an External who provides a written evaluation of the thesis and questions to be asked during the examination. External Readers are deemed to be in attendance at the examination.

It is the responsibility of the department to recommend an External Examiner or Reader and to submit the name to the Dean of the department's Faculty for approval. Normally, this should be done at least two months in advance of the examination date. The submission must follow the procedures established by the Dean of the department's Faculty.

The External:

- Will be a recognized authority in the specific field of research of the student's thesis;
- Will be experienced in evaluating doctoral area work; and
- Must be in a position to review the thesis objectively and to provide a critical analysis of the work and the presentation.

It is essential that the External not have an association with the student, the supervisor, or the department within the last six years as this could hinder objective analysis. For example, a proposed External who has within the last six years been associated with the student as a research collaborator or coauthor would not be eligible. Also, a proposed External must not have had an association within the last six years with the doctoral student's supervisor (as a former student, supervisor, or close collaborator, for instance).

Under normal circumstances the same person will not be used as an External at the University of Alberta if that External has served in the same capacity in the same department at this University within the preceding two years; this does not preclude an External serving in another department.

Once the External has been approved an official letter of invitation is issued to the External by the department.

Approval of the Doctoral Final Examining Committee: The department will recommend the names of all members of the final examining committee and forward them to the Dean of the department's Faculty, if decanal approval is required, following the procedures established by their Faculty.

External Readers: Do not attend the examination. Instead, the External Reader is asked in the letter of invitation to prepare a written report consisting of:

- an evaluation of the scope, structure, methodology, and findings of the thesis,
- a list of minor errors (if any), and
- either a list of clear, direct, contextualized questions to be posed to the candidate during the examination, or a brief written commentary of the thesis which can be read to the candidate for response during the examination.

The External Reader must include a statement that the thesis falls into one of the following two categories:

- **Acceptable with minor or no revisions:** In this case, the External Reader submits the report to the Graduate Coordinator at least one week before the examination. If the External Reader considers the thesis to be of a calibre worthy of consideration for an award, the External Reader comments on this in the written evaluation; or
- **Unacceptable without major revisions:** In this case, the External Reader contacts the Dean of the FGSR immediately by email as the examination may need to be postponed.

The questions or commentary will be made available to the student for the first time during the examination and the committee will evaluate the student's answers as part of the examination.

External Examiners: Attend the examination in person. In the letter of invitation, the External Examiner is requested to prepare and send to the Graduate Coordinator, at least one week in advance of the examination, an evaluation of the thesis placing it temporarily in one of the following categories:

- the thesis is acceptable with minor or no revisions,
- the External Examiner wishes to reserve judgment until after the examination, or
- the thesis is unacceptable without major revisions.

In the first two cases, the External Examiner is asked to provide a brief written commentary (approximately two to three pages) on the structure, methodology, quality, significance and findings of the thesis for the reference of both the student and supervisor. The commentary should not be given to the student prior to the examination.

If the thesis is judged by the External Examiner to fall into the "Unacceptable" category, then the External Examiner is asked to contact the Dean of the FGSR immediately, since the final examination may need to be postponed.

The Examination: The examining committee should conduct a final examination, based largely on the thesis.

The graduate coordinator should ensure that the chair of the examining committee, the student, and all examiners have a final copy of the thesis at the examination.

The student should make a brief presentation about the thesis.

The most time should be allotted to the arm's length examiners, including the External Examiner, while the least time is allocated to the supervisor(s).

No final decision should be made without each examiner having given an opinion.

Decision of the Doctoral Final Examining Committee: The decision of the examining committee will be based both on the content of the thesis and on the student's ability to defend it. The final examination may result in one of the following outcomes:

- Adjourned
- Pass
- Pass subject to revisions
- Fail

There is no provision for a final examination to be "passed subject to major revisions".

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: An adjourned examination is one that has been abandoned officially. A majority of examiners must agree to an outcome of Adjourned. The final examination should be adjourned in the following situations:

- The revisions to the thesis are sufficiently substantial that it will require further research or experimentation or major reworking of sections, or if the committee is so dissatisfied with the general presentation of the thesis that it will require a reconvening of the examining committee. In such circumstances the committee cannot pass the student, and must adjourn the examination.
- The committee is dissatisfied with the student's oral presentation and defence of the thesis, even if the thesis itself is acceptable with or without minor revisions.
- Compelling, extraordinary circumstances such as a sudden medical emergency taking place during the examination.
- Discovery of possible offences under the Code of Student Behaviour after the examination has started.

If the examination is adjourned, the committee should:

- Specify in writing to the student, with as much precision as possible, the nature of the deficiencies and, in the case of revisions to the thesis, the extent of the revisions required. Where the oral defence is unsatisfactory, it may be necessary to arrange some discussion periods with the student prior to reconvening the examination.
- Decide upon a date to reconvene. If the date of the reconvened examination depends upon the completion of a research task or a series of discussions, it should be made clear which committee members will decide on the appropriate date to reconvene. The final date set for reconvening shall be no later than six months from the date of the examination. This new examination must be held within six months of the initial examination.
- Make it clear to the student what will be required by way of approval before the examination is reconvened (e.g., approval of the committee chair or supervisor, approval of the entire committee, or of select members of the committee).

- Specify the supervision and assistance the student may expect from the committee members in meeting the necessary revisions.
- Advise the Dean of the department's Faculty following the procedures established for this purpose.
- Advise the FGSR in writing of the adjournment and the conditions.
- When the date is set for the adjourned final examination, the department will notify the Dean of the department's Faculty and the FGSR. Normally a Pro Dean attends the examination.

Pass: Pass is the decision given when the only revisions required are typographical or minor editorial changes. All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Pass. If the student passes the examination, the department should submit a completed Thesis Approval/Program Completion form to the FGSR. If one of the examiners fails the student, that examiner does not have to sign this form.

Pass Subject to Revisions: All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Pass Subject to Revisions. The student has satisfactorily defended the thesis but the revisions to the thesis it will not require a reconvening of the examining committee. If the examining committee agrees to a "Pass subject to revisions" for the student, the chair of the examining committee must provide in writing, within five working days of the examination, to the student, the graduate coordinator, and FGSR:

- the reasons for this outcome,
- the details of the required revisions,
- the approval mechanism for meeting the requirement for revisions (e.g., approval of the examining committee chair or supervisor, or approval of the entire examining committee, or select members of the committee), and
- the supervision and assistance the student can expect to receive from committee members.
- A date for the revisions to be resubmitted, as negotiated with the student, but which should be no less than six weeks and no more than six months.

The student must make the revisions within six months of the date of the final examination. Once the required revisions have been made and approved, the department shall submit a completed Thesis Approval/Program Completion form to the FGSR indicating the committee decision was "pass subject to revisions". If one of the examiners fails the student that examiner does not have to sign the form. If the required revisions have not been made and approved by the end of the six months deadline, the student will be required to withdraw.

Fail: All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Fail. If the examination result is a Fail, no member of the examining committee signs the Thesis Approval/Completion form.

When the outcome is a Fail, the committee chair will provide the reasons for this decision to the graduate coordinator. The department will then provide this report, together with its

recommendation for the student's program, to the Dean of the department's Faculty, the FGSR, and to the student.

An Associate Dean, FGSR will normally arrange to meet with the student and with the graduate coordinator before acting upon any department recommendation that affects the student's academic standing.

History

Updated and approved by the Business PhD Policy Committee on 2018 March 15 to reflect new numbering in the Graduate Program Manual and updates to the Calendar entries referenced therefrom.

Updated 2016 October 18 to reflect web link changes and additional paragraphs added in the Graduate Program Manual regarding Pass Subject to Revisions.

Approved by Business PhD Policy Committee on 2015 November 17.

This version updated the **Decision of the Doctoral Final Examining Committee** section to reflect that the external examiner no longer has veto power. The entire section is pasted herein.

Previous version approved by Business PhD Policy Committee on 2014 April 10. It added the section called "Conduct of the Final Doctoral Examination."

Previous version was approved 2013 April 18.