**GUIDELINES FOR ORAL EXAMINATIONS**

**Candidacy and Final Doctoral Examination**

**See also the FGSR *Graduate Program Manual***

An examination is used to determine if a provisional PhD student is qualified to become a PhD candidate. This examination is called the **Candidacy Examination.** A second examination occurs late in the PhD candidate’s tenure to determine whether the student’s thesis is acceptable. This examination is called the **Final Doctoral Examination.** The standards for these two examinations are described in detail in the body of this manual, but the procedures for them are similar and are outlined in the following text. The guidelines provided below are intended to follow the rules and regulations of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), as stated in the university calendar and in the FGSR document entitled “Graduate Program Manual: Policies, Procedures and Guidelines”. In the text below, “Committee Chair” refers to the Chair of the Examining Committee, and “Supervisor” refers to the student’s supervisor(s).

The Examining Committee Chair must be a member of the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine other than the student’s supervisor. Normally, the Chair of the Examining Committee will be the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies in the Faculty, or another member of the Rehabilitation Science Graduate Programs Committee. It is also possible for a member of the Examining Committee to serve as Chair. If the Chair is not one of the Examining Committee members, he or she *does not vote* on the outcome of the examination, and *does not sign* the thesis at the conclusion of a successful defense, but the Chair may participate in the questioning.

If the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies or a member of the Rehabilitation Science Graduate Programs Committee is not available to chair an Examining Committee, it is the responsibility of the Associate Dean to select an alternate to serve as the Chair in consultation with the Supervisory Committee. If the Supervisory Committee prefers a Chairperson other than someone among those mentioned here, the supervisor should contact the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies at least one month before the proposed date of the examination to select an alternate Chair.

If refreshments are to be served during an examination, their procurement, preparation, service, and removal will be the responsibility of the Administrative Assistant for Graduate Studies in the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, not the student or the supervisor(s).

PRELIMINARY ACTIVITIES

***Candidacy Examination***: The overarching purpose of the Candidacy Examination is to determine whether students are adequately prepared to continue their doctoral studies. The Candidacy exam is conducted by the Candidacy Examination Committee which consists of the Supervisory Committee plus two members (see FGSR Graduate Program Manual for specifics of committee membership and other information).

The candidacy examination in the FRM consists of two parts:

***Part I*.** Part I is a **written examination** that will provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate that they possess adequate knowledge of their discipline and the subject matter related to their thesis research. Members of the Candidacy Examination Committee will collaborate to develop the questions the student will answer during Part I of the Candidacy Examination.

At least 3 months before the date of Part I, the Supervisory Committee (with input as appropriate from the two additional members of the Candidacy Committee), will agree on a reading list that will guide the student’s preparation for the Candidacy Examination.

Part I of the Candidacy Examination will be written as a take-home examination consisting of three questions. Each question will be answered in extended essay format (5-10 double-spaced pages in 12-point font) and completed *within one week*. In addition to the answering the three exam questions, the student must prepare a 500 word abstract of their proposed general topic for thesis research.

Upon completion of the written examination, the student will return the examination, along with the 500 word research abstract, specific to the subsequent thesis prospectus, to the Chair, RS-GPC. The research abstract will provide context of proposed doctoral work to the Candidacy Committee, but it will not be a specific part of the Part II examination. Copies of the written examination and the abstract will be forwarded to each member of the Candidacy Examination Committee *at least two weeks* prior to the oral component of the candidacy exam. Thus, Part I of the Candidacy Exam needs to take place at least 3 weeks prior to Part II, the oral component of the Candidacy Exam.

Committee members will independently assess the student's answers and may follow-up on some of the student’s written answers in the subsequent oral examination. However, the topics covered in Part I of the Candidacy Examination shall not constrain the range of topics covered in Part II of the Candidacy Examination.

***Part II.*** Part II is an **oral examination** that provides students with the opportunity to respond to questions about the written answers generated in Part I and to demonstrate their ability to pursue and complete original research at an advanced level. The oral examination is limited to 2 hours of direct examination (exclusive of committee introduction and post-exam deliberation).

In the FRM, the outcome of the Candidacy Examination is based on the student’s performance in Part I and Part II. The possible outcomes the examination committee will consider are: 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, or Adjourned. The Candidacy Examination must be passed *no less than six months* prior to the student’s Final Doctoral Examination (FGSR *Graduate Program Manual*).

***Final Doctoral Examination****:* The Final Doctoral Examination is an oral exercise, based largely on the doctoral thesis. The examination is arranged by the Supervisor, not by the student, and must conform to FGSR regulations. All logistical aspects of the exam (scheduling, booking rooms etc. is done by the administrative assistant). Important information about thesis requirements, and procedures and timelines related to the exam are discussed below.

*Thesis Requirements.* The FGSR has assigned the following title to the degree in this program: Doctor of Philosophy in Rehabilitation Science, Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine. This should appear on the title page of the doctoral thesis and will be so designated on the diploma. Otherwise, for guidance regarding thesis preparation you should refer to the FGSR Graduate Program Manual – Thesis Requirement and Preparation Section. At a minimum the text of the thesis is, `an introduction, followed by the presentation of the research in a manner suitable for the field, and a conclusion` (taken from FGSR Minimum Thesis Formatting Requirements Document, current as of April 3, 2014). In the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, you have the option of doing a traditional or a paper based thesis. A traditional thesis generally has separate chapters for an introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion. By contrast, a paper-based thesis will have 3-4 ‘papers’. These will be similar to manuscripts sent for submission (i.e., a self-contained introduction, methods, results and discussion specific to the paper).

Use the supplied Thesis Submission Checklist to ensure you have completed all the FGSR requirements related to thesis preparation.

*Final Doctoral Examining Committee.* The Final Thesis Examination Committee will consist of a minimum of 5 persons: the members of the Supervisory Committee (usually 3), plus 2 arm’s length examiners (1 of which may be the external examiner). For details on committee membership see FGSR Graduate Program Manual.

Normally, if the student successfully completes the Final Doctoral Examination (i.e., the decision is pass or pass subject to revisions) the student should make the appropriate revisions **within 30 days of the Final Doctoral Examination** as per the recommendations of the examining committee. The student is officially required to make the revisions within 6 months of the final examination. Once the required revisions have been made and approved, the supervisor and student indicate to the Chair, RS-GPC that the changes have been made. The Chair, RS-GPC will then submit a completed Thesis Approval Form to the FGSR. If the required revisions have not been made and approved by the end of the 6 month deadline, the outcome of the examination is a Fail.

EXAMINATION PROCEDURES

Introductions. At the time the Committee members convene for the examination the Committee Chair should ensure that all of the examiners are acquainted with one another, and that the student/candidate has met all of the examiners. After these introductions (as necessary) the Chair should ask the examinee to leave the examining room for a few minutes so that specific procedural matters can be discussed. The Committee Chair or supervisor(s) shall have arranged for an adjoining room or sheltered area near the examination room to be available to the student during this initial waiting period and during the adjudication period at the end of the examination. ***The student should not be asked to wait in the hall during these periods.***

Review of Procedures. While the student/candidate is excused, the Committee Chair should outline the examination procedures that will be followed. These are described below. Any changes that are proposed by the Committee Chair or other members of the Examining Committee should be agreed upon at this point. During the review of these procedural matters, the Committee should be sensitive to the student’s/candidate’s expectations about the procedures and to the fact that the candidate is anxious for the examination to begin and should not be kept waiting for an extraordinarily long period of time.

Order of participation by the examiners

The order in which examiners ask questions in the Candidacy Examination or in the Final Doctoral Examination should be established. Typically, the examiner who is least familiar with the student’s/candidate’s past work (usually an external examiner) is given the option of asking the first set of questions, and the examiner who is most familiar with the student’s work (the supervisor) is the last to ask questions. In some cases, the supervisor(s) may choose not to ask questions.

Interrogation time per examiner

Normally, each Committee Member should be allocated a maximum of 15 minutes to examine the student/candidate on the first round of questions. Subsequent rounds will follow the same process. The Committee Chair must be prepared to monitor the time taken by each examiner and to enforce diplomatically the limits to which the examiners have agreed, as necessary.

­Normally, the time allocated to each examiner is intended to be used primarily by that examiner. Other examiners may ask brief questions of clarification during that period, but extensive questioning by other examiners usually is inappropriate. The Committee Chair is responsible for determining that each examiner has an appropriate amount of time for questioning and is allowed to exercise that time.

The Committee Chair and other committee members are expected to be sensitive to the candidate’s level of fatigue and to assess sensibly whether prolonged questioning is useful. Examinations normally last between two and four hours. The Committee Chair or the student/candidate may request a brief break at any point during the proceedings.

Purpose of the examination and adjudication criteria

The Committee Chair should remind the examiners that the purpose of the Candidacy Examination is to determine to the satisfaction of the Committee that the student possesses an adequate knowledge of the scope of Rehabilitation Science and its disciplines and of the subject matter relevant to the proposed doctoral thesis, and that the student demonstrates the aptitude to pursue and complete original research at the doctoral level. In cases when the PhD thesis has been started or well‑defined by the time of the Candidacy Examination, the committee convened for the Candidacy Examination also may consider the thesis proposal. If so, the Committee must remember ***it is not appropriate for the outcome of the Candidacy Examination to be based solely on the thesis proposal or the student’s defense of it.***

The Committee Chair also should remind the examiners briefly about the judgments they will be called upon to make at the end of the examination. These are detailed within the body of this manual for the oral examinations whose procedures are reviewed here. It is especially important to reiterate the scope of the Candidacy Examination within which the student must be evaluated. For the final doctoral examination, examiners are reminded that their evaluations must consider *both* the thesis *and* its defense by the student in making their judgments about the outcome of the final examination.

Summary Presentation by the Supervisor(s). Before the student/candidate is invited to rejoin the Committee to begin the examination, the supervisor(s) may wish to describe briefly the student’s academic and employment record, current research activity and history of research productivity, record of scholarships and awards, and any other background information that might be useful to the Candidacy Examining Committee. In the case of the Final Doctoral Examination, this summary should include a description of the Candidate’s research activities, associated achievements and any special aspects of the thesis process that deserve to be mentioned.

The Examination period.The Committee Chair will invite the candidate to re‑join the examiners at the table and will inform the candidate about the order in which examiners will ask questions and any other pertinent procedural details decided upon while the candidate was excused. The student/candidate should then be given an opportunity to ask for clarification of any procedures before beginning the examination.

At this point in the **Candidacy Examination**, any comments from the student are **optional** and should be brief (approximately 5 minutes). For example, such comments could summarize the student’s approach to the scope of the Candidacy Examination as defined by the Examiners and the relevance of that scope to the student’s research interests. This brief opportunity for the student to speak at the outset of the examination also may facilitate the student’s transition to the commencement of questions from the Examining Committee. Normally at this juncture in the **Final Doctoral Examination**, the candidate is given an opportunity to provide a brief (15-20 minutes) overview of the thesis. This overview is unnecessary if the candidate has just finished presenting the thesis in a public forum with committee members present.

Questioning commences immediately after the student’s/candidate’s presentation (if any). The Committee Chair invites each examiner to participate in turn. The Committee Chair should ensure that the student/candidate has ample opportunity to respond to each question and should encourage the student to request clarification of questions, if necessary, and to answer as efficiently and accurately as possible.

When all of the examiners have agreed that they have completed their questioning, the Committee Chair should ask the student/candidate whether there are any brief, closing comments. At the conclusion of any such comments, the Committee Chair should excuse the candidate to the waiting room until the Committee has reached a decision.

ADJUDICATION

The adjudication criteria for the **Candidacy Examination** include “adjourned, unconditional pass,” “conditional pass”, “fail and repeat candidacy”, and “fail with a recommendation to terminate the doctoral program or for a change of category to a master’s program”. *A majority of examiners must agree to an outcome of “conditional pass”.*

The adjudication criteria for the **Final Doctoral Examination** includes “pass”, “pass subject to revisions”, “fail”, and “adjourned”. *All or all but one of the examiners must agree to the outcome of the examination.*

During the adjudication period, each Committee member may be asked to comment on the strengths or weaknesses of the student’s/candidate’s performance and express his/her preliminary opinion about what the final decision should be. Often the examiner who is least familiar with the student’s past work is offered the option of commenting first. The Committee Chair is responsible for encouraging discussion and for determining whether consensus can be reached in a timely manner with respect to an adjudication criterion and in respect of the student awaiting the Committee’s decision. In addition to the formal decision about the candidate’s performance in the Oral Examination, Committee members should be encouraged to provide informal and helpful comments, suggestions, and advice to be passed on to the candidate by the supervisor(s) or by the Committee Chair.

An alternative to the open discussion/consensus exercise described above is the use of a secret ballot at the outset of the adjudication period *before* any discussion of the student’s performance which might bias some examiners. If all ballots but one on this first round are for an “unconditional pass,” the majority decision on the outcome shall be that. If there is some discrepancy among the votes, however, and no consensus is achieved on the first ballot with respect to an outcome criterion, open discussion is invited (as above) and a second vote via secret ballot is solicited as the decisive one.

In the case of conditional outcomes, adjournments and examination failures, it is important that the conditions that resulted in a “Conditional Pass” as the outcome of a Candidacy Examination, or plans for a re-examination after an adjournment of a Final Doctoral Examination, be specified by all members of the Examination Committee at the time of the adjudication and recorded by the Committee Chair. The Chair of the Examining Committee and the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine are responsible for forwarding those details (conditions that remain to be met, cause for adjournment and plans for reconsideration of the thesis, or reason for failure) to the Dean of the FGSR along with the official report of the examination outcome.

As soon as possible following the adjudication decision, the candidate should be invited back into the room by the Committee Chair and informed of the Committee’s decision. In the case of conditional passes (Candidacy), examination adjournments (Final Doctoral Examination), failures, or the need for extensive revisions to a document, the supervisor typically provides explanatory details to the student at a later time. The supervisor also is responsible for describing to the student the factors that influenced the Committee’s decision.

If signatures of the Committee members are required following the Final Doctoral Examination, they should be obtained at the end of the examination meeting before the examiners have dispersed. Where editorial changes have been suggested for a thesis that is otherwise successfully defended, signatures are obtained from all but the supervisor who is charged with signing off on the document once all the necessary changes have been made.

POST‑EXAMINATION PROCEDURES

On the advice of the Examination Chair, the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine is responsible for advising the FGSR of the outcome of the Candidacy Examination or the Final Doctoral Examination by means of the appropriate forms (“Recommendation for Change of Category Form” following a successful Candidacy Examination; “Report of Completion of Final Oral Examination” following the Final Doctoral Examination), or a full report associated with a Conditional Pass, Adjournment, or Failure.

Following a successful thesis defense, the candidate and the supervisor are responsible for completing the revisions to the thesis within 30 days of the examination.

The candidate is responsible for submitting the final version of the thesis to the FGSR within six months of the examination.

Following a successful final examination the candidate also will be expected to make a formal presentation of the thesis at a public seminar sponsored by the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, normally in Corbett Hall. Arrangements for this seminar will be facilitated by the supervisor and the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies.