

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.html>) and corresponding Calendar entries. Each department is required to establish detailed examination procedures for final examinations. These procedures must be made available publicly. These procedures are prepared per Section 8.3 to highlight important matters for the PhD Program in Business.

Doctoral Thesis Requirements

The topic and format of the doctoral thesis must have been approved by the student's supervisor and supervisory committee. The thesis, at a minimum, must embody the results of original investigations and analyses and be of such quality as to merit publication, meeting the standards of reputable scholarly publications. It must constitute a substantial contribution to the knowledge in the student's field of study.

The thesis should be written in English. It may be a traditional format thesis, paper-based thesis, or mixed format (combining the traditional format and the paper-based format). Students are responsible for following the [FGSR Minimum Thesis Formatting Requirements](#).

Examination Committee Membership

The examining committee consists of the ex-officio examiners, one external examiner, and either one university examiner or one specialized knowledge examiner.

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/forms-and-policy-documents.html>) 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 external examiner from outside the University of Alberta. The supervisory committee and the Associate Dean of the Business PhD program shall agree on a nominee for the external examiner. The Associate Dean will then formally nominate the person to FGSR at least two months in advance of the proposed exam date.

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.

Preliminary Acceptance of the Thesis

Section 8.3 of the GPM states: “Before the thesis is forwarded to the External Examiner, 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. The preliminary acceptance should be forwarded to the Business PhD Program office for inclusion in the student’s file.

Scheduling the Final Doctoral Examination

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

Attendance

The final examination is normally open except for committee deliberation. In cases where the student requests a closed examination, the Associate Dean, PhD Program may make an accommodation. 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. The only exception allowed is an external examiner who attendance has been waived, and who participates by providing a detailed report and a list of questions (see below).

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. Inform 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 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.

External Examiner Guidelines

Every Final Doctoral Examining Committee must have an external examiner from outside the University of Alberta.

It is the responsibility of the department to recommend an external examiner and to submit the name to the Dean of the department's Faculty for approval. The supervisor may contact potential examiners to ascertain their availability and willingness to participate, but must have no further contact with the external examiner after the thesis has been distributed to the examining committee (see above). Any messages received after distribution of the thesis should be referred to the Graduate Coordinator.

Normally, the external examiner should be submitted for approval 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 examiner:

- Will be a tenure-track, tenured, or retired faculty member of a university that confers graduate degrees;
- Will be a recognized authority in the specific field of research of the student's thesis;
- Will be experienced in supervising doctoral students to completion; 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 examiner not have an association with the student, the supervisor, or the department as this could hinder objective analysis.

Associations that normally will preclude participation as an external examiner include:

- Having co-authored or performed collaborative research with the student or the supervisor within the preceding six years;
- Having overseen an edited volume that includes the work of the student or supervisor, or having published work in an edited volume overseen by the student or supervisor within the preceding six years;
- Having a financial interest in an entity that could benefit from the thesis research;
- Having read or evaluated the thesis, in whole or in part, prior to appointment as external examiner;
- Having examined or been examined by the student's supervisor within the preceding six years;
- Having engaged in discussions/negotiations with the student or the supervisor related to future employment or supervision, or intending to do so;
- Having a personal or financial relationship with the student or the supervisor that could appear to result in a conflict of interest (for example, past or present domestic or romantic partnerships, family relationships, and past or present business partnerships);
- Having a former (within the preceding six years) or pending affiliation with the student's department;
- Having had an academic appointment at the University of Alberta within the preceding six years.

Under normal circumstances an individual will not be used as an external examiner at the University of Alberta if they have served in the same capacity in the same department at this University within the preceding two years; this does not preclude service in another department.

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

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 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 all cases, the external examiner is asked to provide a 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.

If the thesis is acceptable with minor or no revisions or if the external examiner wishes to reserve judgment, then the examination will proceed. The external examiner's evaluation must be shared with the student and the supervisor, but only after the examination.

If the external examiner finds the thesis unacceptable without major revisions, then the external examiner is asked to contact the Dean of the FGSR immediately. The examination will normally be postponed, but it may proceed at the discretion of the Dean of the FGSR. If the examination is postponed, then the external examiner's commentary will be shared with the student and the supervisor. The thesis may be resubmitted exactly once, within six months. In this case, the

external examiner who wrote the initial report on the thesis will participate in the examination, but a second report will not be required. The thesis examination will be scheduled upon preliminary acceptance of the revised thesis by the supervisor and supervisory committee members (see Preliminary Acceptance of the Thesis, above).

Inability of an External Examiner to Attend

Although it is expected that the external examiner will attend the examination either in person or via videoconference, this requirement may be waived in extraordinary circumstances in which medical, technological, or geographical circumstances make attendance impossible. Such cases are subject to approval through the normal process for establishing committee membership. In such cases, the external examiner will be considered to be in attendance at the examination.

In addition to the required content specified above, the written commentary of an external examiner who has been excused from attendance will include either a list of clear, direct, contextualized questions to be posed to the candidate during the examination, or a brief written commentary on the thesis which can be read to the candidate. In either case, the Chair of the examination will read the external examiner's submission aloud during the examination, but will not participate in assessing the student's response.

The written commentary of an external examiner who has been excused from attendance must place the thesis in one of the following two categories:

- **Acceptable with minor or no revisions:** In this case, the external examiner submits the report to the department at least one week before the examination and the examination may proceed; or
- **Unacceptable without major revisions:** In this case, the external examiner contacts the Dean of the FGSR immediately by email. The examination will be postponed and the external examiner's commentary will be shared with the student and the supervisor. The thesis may be resubmitted exactly once, within six months. In this case, the external examiner who wrote the initial report on the thesis will participate in the examination, but a second report will not be required. The thesis examination will be scheduled upon preliminary acceptance of the revised thesis by the supervisor (see Preliminary Acceptance of the Thesis, above).

History

Updated 2023 September 26 to address recent changes in the Graduate Program Manual and Calendar.

Updated 2022 October 12 to include modified guidelines for remote participation.

Updated 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.