

- 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 examiner if applicable, the university and/or specialized knowledge 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, GPS 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 GPS, 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.

Thesis Based Master's Program Examination

Each department offering a thesis-based Master's degree is required to establish detailed examination procedures for final examinations. These procedures must be made available publicly.

Decision of the Master's 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, GPS, 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 Student Academic Integrity Policy 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, GPS, in writing of the adjournment and the conditions.
- When the date is set for the adjourned final examination, the department will notify GPS. Normally a Pro Dean attends the examination. The Pro Dean should be included on all correspondence for the rescheduling of 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 GPS. 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 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 GPS:

- 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.

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 GPS 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 department. The department will then provide this report, together with its recommendation for the student’s program, to the Dean, GPS, and to the student.

An Associate Dean, GPS will normally arrange to meet with the student, the graduate coordinator, and others if needed, before acting upon any departmental recommendation that affects the student’s academic standing.

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 the Degree of PhD 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, GPS, who will determine an appropriate course of action.

When the decision is Conditional Pass or Fail, chairs may refer to the decision process flowchart found on the GPS website.

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 Student Academic Integrity Policy 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 GPS.

Conditional Pass: A Conditional Pass is appropriate when the student has satisfied the committee in all but a very discrete area of deficiency that can be addressed through a reasonable requirement (e.g., coursework, literature review, upgrading of writing skills). Reworking of the entire candidacy proposal is not an acceptable condition and the examiners should consider the options available for a student that has failed the examination.

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, GPS, 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, but which should be no less than six weeks and no more than six months.
- 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 expect to receive from committee members

Conditions are subject to final approval by the Dean, GPS. 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 GPS; or
- If the conditions are not met by the deadline, the outcome of the examination is a fail and the committee must be reconvened to make the recommendation as described in the following section.

Fail: All or all but one of the examiners must agree to an outcome of Fail.

The options available to the examining committee when the outcome of a student's candidacy exam is "Fail" are

- **Repeat the Candidacy:** Repeating the Candidacy is not an option after a second failed examination. 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 GPS, the student and graduate coordinator are to be notified in writing of the student's 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.

If the candidacy examining committee agrees that the student has failed, the committee chair will provide the reasons and the recommendation for the student's program 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, GPS, and to the student.

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

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 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.

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 external examiners 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 GPS 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, GPS, or the chair of the examining committee.

Except for a Dean or a Pro Dean who may participate in questioning the student and in deliberations, 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

Except when a Pro Dean's vote is necessary to establish a majority for or against adjournment, persons who are not members of the examining committee will not be permitted to vote on the outcome of the examination.

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

It is the responsibility of the student's 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.

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 Examiners: 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 GPS immediately. The examination will normally be postponed, but it may proceed at the discretion of the Dean of GPS. 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 GPS 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).

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 external, university, and specialized knowledge examiners, 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, GPS, 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 Student Academic Integrity Policy 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 GPS 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 GPS. 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 GPS. 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 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 GPS:

- 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 GPS 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, GPS, and to the student.

An Associate Dean, GPS 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.

Thesis Requirements

Regulations and Outline of Responsibilities

All students in a thesis degree program must present and defend a thesis embodying the results of their research. The topic and format of the master’s and doctoral thesis must have been approved by the student’s supervisor and supervisory committee.

Departments may set specific requirements for student theses, including requirements pertaining to traditional format theses, paper-based theses (e.g., theses consisting of published, accepted or submitted papers), theses composed of digital, artistic, or performance-based materials, and mixed format theses (combining the any of the above formats). Clarity is recommended in setting departmental requirements to avoid disputes later.

For students in a master’s degree program, the thesis, at a minimum, should demonstrate that the program’s learning outcomes have been achieved and that the student is able to work in a scholarly manner and is acquainted with the principal works published on the subject of the thesis. As far as possible, it should be an original contribution.

A doctoral thesis, at a minimum, must embody the results of original investigations and analyses. It must demonstrate that the program’s learning outcomes have been achieved 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 normally be written in English. In some departments, students may be permitted to write their thesis in a language other than English, provided that language has been approved for use by the supervisory committee, the department, and the Dean of the department’s Faculty. Theses written in a language other than English must have two abstracts, one in the language of the thesis, and the other in English.

Students who write chapter- or paper-based theses, or theses combining these two formats, are responsible for following the [GPS Minimum Thesis Formatting Requirements for Chapter- and Paper-Based Theses](#). Students who prepare theses in other formats, or that combine other formats with papers or chapters, are responsible for following the [GPS Minimum Thesis Formatting Requirements for Digital, Artistic, Performance-based and Mixed-format Theses](#).

It is the responsibility of both the student and the supervisor(s) to be aware of any specific requirements of the student’s department with respect to the student’s thesis.

Policy on Public Access to Thesis Results

A thesis will be made freely available to the public as soon as possible after a student’s convocation. It is the responsibility of the supervisor and the supervisory committee to inform the student of the University’s policy on public access to thesis results and to explore with the student the possible ramifications of the student’s research, at the outset of the thesis project. In principle, graduate students should not undertake, nor supervisors involve, students in research for a thesis when the thesis project is part of a contract which prohibits public access to a thesis.

Restricting Access to the Publication of a Thesis