

ALBERTA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS PHD PROGRAM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR CANDIDACY EXAMINATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In response to concerns about doctoral student progress, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) of the University passed rules in April 2013 regarding the timing of candidacy examinations: they must be held within three years from the student's start date of the PhD program. The purpose of these policies and procedures on candidacy exams is to help students, supervisors, and examining committee members meet the FGSR requirements. The Doctoral Candidacy Examination section in the Calendar states "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."

ALBERTA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS PROCEDURES

Examination Dates

Because candidacy examinations must be passed within three years of starting the program, students should schedule their candidacy exams up to six months prior to the end of their third year to allow for the possibility of a Conditional Pass, or Fail and Repeat Candidacy result. Students who do not pass the candidacy examination by the end of their third year risk reductions in their funding and must file an Application for Doctoral Program Three-Year Progress Requirements Extension (found in the [FGSR Forms Cabinet](#) under the Records section).

The Research Proposal or Thesis Proposal

In the Alberta School of Business PhD Program, a central component of many candidacy exams historically has been discussion of a written document distributed in advance of the candidacy exam. This document is sometimes known as the "research proposal" or "thesis proposal", and the candidacy exam is sometimes known as the proposal defence.

Template for the Candidacy Thesis Proposal

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

The recommended length of the candidacy proposal is 35 pages including all figures, tables, and references. Figures and tables can be incorporated into the document or appended at the end. The main body shall be double spaced, 12 point font, and all margins at 2.5 cm (1 inch). Tables and

references may be single spaced. Students may copy this template, which has MS Word headings, into the first drafts of their proposal.

Title Page

Introduction

Research Question(s)

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

How does high velocity trading influence short interest?

What is the appropriate spatial and temporal distribution of EMS units in a city that ensures life-saving emergency service in less than 9 minutes?

Justification of research question(s)

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

Plan to answer research question(s)

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

For theory-testing research, a few central propositions or hypotheses should/could be derived. There is no need for a comprehensive list, as hypotheses can be added or dropped as the research proceeds. You should present a research methodology for testing the hypotheses, such as experimental or quasi-experimental, and demonstrate familiarity with it. The likely source of data should be presented (eg. secondary data, online surveys, specific database, interviews, etc.). No data are required.

For inductive research, you should present a qualitative or quantitative methodology for answering the research question, and demonstrate familiarity with it. Potential research site(s) should be identified and ideally agreement from them should be secured (i.e., letter in appendix). Students should consider potential software tools to assist their analyses.

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

References

Organizing the Examination

The candidate will submit a “Candidacy Exam Approval Form” form to the Business PhD Program Office at least three weeks prior to the examination. The supervisor will advise the PhD Office of the university examiner or specialized knowledge examiner and chair, and the date and time chosen. The PhD Office will work with the supervisor to find a suitable room unless the exam will be conducted remotely.

Distribution of Thesis Proposal

The student or supervisor will send any documents or other materials to be discussed at the candidacy examination to the examining committee at least three weeks before the examination. Unlike the doctoral thesis, the thesis proposal does not require agreement from the supervisory committee members before distribution.

The Examining Committee

The examining committee consists of the supervisory committee plus one university examiner (or specialized knowledge examiner). Please see <https://www.ualberta.ca/business/programs/phd/student-support/forms-and-policy-documents> for instructions and a checklist. The members should be chosen by the student and the supervisor(s), with approval of the Associate Dean of the PhD Program.

Attendance

The candidacy examination is normally a closed exam. If the student has no objections, the chair of the examining committee may allow others to attend with advance notice of intent to observe, in as far as room capacity allows. Members of the examining committee are required to attend either in person or by teleconferencing; the term “teleconferencing” is used generically to include all forms of distance conference facilitation including telephone, video and synchronous electronic communication. The Dean of FGSR, the Dean of the department’s Faculty, or a Pro Dean (the representative of the Dean of FGSR) may also attend. A Pro Dean may be requested by the student, a committee member, chair, graduate coordinator, the Dean of the department’s Faculty, or the Dean of FGSR.

The Examination

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

6. Inform student of the decision.

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

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

Reporting the Examination Results

The Business PhD Office prepares the Results and Completion forms and delivers them to the chair prior to the exam. The chair ensures the completed Result of a Doctoral Candidacy Examination form is delivered to the PhD Office directly following the exam. If the student passes the exam, the supervisor or chair must also sign FGSR's Report of Completion of Candidacy Examination form and deliver it to the PhD Office.

If the student does not unconditionally pass the exam, the supervisor shall assist the chair of the Candidacy Committee in preparing a short report to the Associate Dean of the PhD Program and the Dean of FGSR consistent with the instructions in, Decision of the Candidacy Committee, as quoted below from the Calendar. A template is available from the Business PhD office.

Options for when Students Fail to Pass Candidacy in Three Years

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

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

An extension application requires the following:

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

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

Extensions are not guaranteed.

2. Recommend academic probation with specified conditions using the Recommendation for Change of Category or Academic Standing form of FGSR. Consultation with FGSR Associate Dean is recommended.

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

[Section 8.3 of the Graduate Program Manual](#) should be consulted for additional information.

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

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 [Degree of PhD](#) of the University Calendar. The candidacy examination must be passed no less than six months prior to taking the final examination.

CONDUCT OF EXAMINATIONS

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 an external examiner whose attendance has been waived, and who participates by providing a detailed report and a list of questions (see below). 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.

Teleconferencing may be used for any member of an examination committee, the chair, and the student. Examiners participating in examinations by this means are considered to be in attendance.

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.

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 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, 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 (e.g., 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.

Decision of the Candidacy Committee

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

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

If the Examining Committee fails to reach a decision, the department will refer the matter to the Dean, FGSR, who will determine an appropriate course of action.

When the decision is Conditional Pass or Fail, chairs may refer to the decision process flowchart found on the FGSR 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 Code of Student Behaviour after the examination has started.

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

Conditional Pass: A 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, FGSR, the graduate coordinator and the student:

- the reasons for this recommendation,
- the details of the conditions,
- the timeframe for the student to meet the conditions,
- the approval mechanism for meeting the conditions (e.g., approval of the committee chair or supervisor, or approval of the entire committee, or select members of the committee), and
- the supervision and assistance the student can be expected to receive from committee members.

Conditions are subject to final approval by the Dean, FGSR. At the deadline specified for meeting the conditions, two outcomes are possible:

- All the conditions have been met. In this case, the department will complete the Report of Completion of Candidacy Examination form and submit it to the FGSR; or
- 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 the FGSR, the student and graduate coordinator are to be notified in writing of the student's 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, FGSR, and to the student.

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

Accessed September 11, 2023 from

<https://calendar.ualberta.ca/content.php?catoid=39&navoid=12236#conduct-of-examinations>

Policy History

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

First revision approved via email on April 14, 2014.

Subsequent version approved via email on May 8, 2014.

Section 204.3.3 of the University Calendar was updated on July 23, 2015.

Link to FGSR updated February 16, 2017

Revised November 5, 2020 providing clarification on distribution of the thesis proposal and duties of supervisor and chair.

Revised by Business Policy Committee January 17, 2022 with regards to the length of the candidacy document.

Revised by Business Policy Committee October 12, 2022 with regards to remote participation and definition of teleconferencing.

Revised by Business PhD Policy Committee September 26, 2023 to recognize updates to FGSR policy changes for exam committees.