



Faculty of Nursing Final Doctoral Examination Guidelines

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I. PURPOSE OF THE FINAL DOCTORAL EXAM

The purpose of the final doctoral examination is to judge the acceptability of the thesis (also referred to as a dissertation in a doctoral program) submitted by the student, as well as the student's ability to defend it.

A doctoral thesis 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 final doctoral exam is the last step in the completion of a PhD.

The final doctoral examination provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge about the discipline, research methods, and their substantive research area; respond to questions about their dissertation research; and demonstrate the ability to pursue and complete original research at an advanced level. The dissertation work will enable the student to make an original, substantive contribution to nursing knowledge.

II. PREPARATION FOR THE FINAL DOCTORAL EXAM

Creation and formatting of the dissertation document is outlined in the [Faculty of Nursing Thesis Guidelines \(Traditional & Paper-Based\)](#). Key academic requirements for the dissertation are described in the [University of Alberta calendar](#).



Doctoral candidates work closely with their supervisor and all members of the supervisory committee in the months leading up to the final doctoral examination.

III. SCHEDULING THE EXAM

It is the responsibility of the supervisor(s) to ensure that proper arrangements are made for the student's examination, and that the exam is held in accordance with GPS and Faculty of Nursing regulations. Key steps are as follows:

Establishing the examining committee

The final doctoral exam includes an examining committee. The [role and structure of examining committees](#) is outlined in the University of Alberta Calendar. To ensure the examination committee meets all requirements, please review the "Size and Composition of Examining Committees" section in the [University Calendar](#) which outlines regulations:

- A. The examining committee consists of the ex-officio examiners, one external examiner, and either one university examiner or one specialized knowledge examiner.
- B. The supervisor(s) and supervisory committee members are "ex-officio members" of the examining committee.
- C. The university examiner or specialized knowledge examiner should not be connected to the thesis research in a significant way; not be associated with the student outside of usual contact in courses or other non-thesis activities; not be related to the student or supervisor; not be an active collaborator of the supervisor(s).
- D. University examiners who have served on a student's candidacy examination committee are eligible to serve as arm's length examiners on the student's final doctoral examination if the other conditions of being a university examiner remain unchanged.
- E. At least half or more of the examiners must hold a doctoral degree or higher.
- F. At least half of the examiners must hold tenured/tenure-track appointment with the University of Alberta; be active in the general subject area of the student's research; and demonstrate continuing scholarly or creative activity of an original nature.
- G. The chair is not an examiner but is a faculty member who is normally identified by the Nursing Graduate Office from a rotating schedule of members of the Graduate Exam Chairs Committee.



External Examiner

1. 3-4 months prior to the final doctoral examination, the supervisor(s) will identify a preferred external examiner. The external examiner:
 - a. Will be tenure-track, tenured, or retired faculty member of a university that confers graduate degrees;
 - b. Will be a recognized authority in the specific field of research of the student's thesis;
 - c. Will be experienced in supervising doctoral students to completion; and
 - d. Must be in a position to review the thesis objectively and to provide a critical analysis of the work and the presentation
 - e. 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.
2. Once an external examiner is identified, the supervisor completes the [Approve External Examiner form](#) and forwards it to the Nursing Graduate Office along with the proposed external examiner's CV.
3. The Associate Dean will review the form and the proposed external examiner's CV.
 - a. The Nursing Graduate Office will notify the supervisor if the external examiner is approved.
 - b. The Associate Dean will contact the supervisor if the external examiner is not approved with the reasons for the decision.
4. Once approved, the Nursing Graduate Office will forward the Approve External Examiner form to GPS for processing.
 - a. Please note, this form must be received by GPS at least two months prior to the scheduled examination date.
5. The Nursing Graduate Office will send an official invitation and the External Examiner Guidelines to the external examiner.

Preliminary Acceptance of the Thesis

It is the responsibility of the student to provide the final draft of their dissertation to their supervisory committee at least 8-10 weeks in advance of the scheduled date of the final doctoral examination, allowing sufficient time for review and feedback by the supervisory committee and revisions by the student. As per the [University of Alberta Calendar](#), "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."

The supervisor will obtain signatures from the supervisory committee members on the [Preliminary Acceptance of Thesis form](#) and submit it to the Nursing Graduate Office.



The timeline and activities for preparing for the exam:

1. Supervisor confirms availability of all examining committee members, including the external examiner, and schedules the exam. Please ensure all examining committee members are added to the calendar invite and include the online meeting link (if applicable).
2. Once the exam date is set, the supervisor will contact the Nursing Graduate Office to request an exam chair. The supervisor will be provided with the name of the next exam chair on the rotation list to contact. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to secure the exam chair and provide the chair with the calendar invite and online meeting link (if applicable).
3. The supervisor informs the examining committee members of meetings and details of the examination.

At least 4 weeks prior to scheduled examination date

1. Supervisor completes the [Notice of Examining Committee & Examination Date form](#) and forwards to the Nursing Graduate Office for processing.
2. Associate Dean will review and approve the Notice of Exam.
3. Nursing Graduate Office will circulate the approved Notice of Exam to the examining committee and forward to GPS for processing.
 - a. This form must be received by GPS at least 4 weeks prior to the scheduled examination date.
4. Supervisor distributes the final thesis to the examining committee, excluding the external examiner, and submits the final thesis to the Nursing Graduate Office for distribution to the external examiner.
5. Supervisor must have no further contact with the external examiner. Any messages received after distribution of the thesis should be referred to the Associate Dean.
6. The Nursing Graduate Office will send the thesis and External Examiner Guidelines to the external examiner for review, asking them to complete their review and submit their evaluation no less than 1 week prior to the exam.
7. The exam chair will contact the student prior to the exam to let them know what to expect during the exam.

1 week prior to scheduled examination date

1. The external examiner evaluation is sent to the Associate Dean.
 - a. If the external examiner places the thesis in one of the following categories, the Nursing Graduate Office will notify the supervisor and exam chair that the exam will proceed on the scheduled date and forward the evaluation to the exam chair:



- i. The thesis is acceptable with minor or no revisions.
 - ii. Judgment is reserved until after the examination.
 - b. If the thesis is deemed unacceptable without major revisions, the external examiner will contact the Dean of GPS and the exam will normally be postponed. The Dean of GPS will follow up with the supervisor notifying them of the decision and the next steps to follow.
2. The external examiner's commentary will be shared with both student and supervisor following the examination.
3. The Nursing Graduate Office will forward the [Thesis Approval/Program Completion form](#) to the supervisor who will collect signatures at the exam.

III. EXAMINATION PROCESS

Guidelines for the [Conduct of Thesis and Candidacy Examinations](#) are outlined in the University of Alberta Calendar.

1. Final Doctoral examinations are normally scheduled for a maximum of 3 hours including the student presentation (15-20 minutes maximum), approximately 2 hours of direct examination, and the remaining time for committee introductions and post-exam deliberation.
2. In addition to the dissertation, the student may bring paper, pen and summary notes to the examination if desired.
3. The student presentation may be public, and open to students, faculty members and invited guests. Questions and discussion are reserved for the subsequent meeting with the examining committee, which immediately follows the presentation.
4. The exam chair is a non-voting member whose role is to moderate the exam and ensure a fair process that conforms to GPS policy and Faculty of Nursing procedures.
5. At the start of the formal examination, the chair will ask the student to momentarily step out of the examination (physically, or move to an online waiting room) while the chair reviews the examination procedures with the committee. Public observers may also be present; they too would physically or virtually move to a waiting room.
6. Rounds of questions (normally two to three) are offered beginning with the examiner(s) most external to the committee, the supervisory committee members, and then the supervisor.
7. Questioning during the exam will focus on the dissertation, but examiners will also ask questions that are more comprehensive in nature. These questions could focus on disciplinary knowledge; theoretical approaches and contributions of the research; the substantive area; and research methods knowledge in general and specifically related to the dissertation topic.



8. When the questions have concluded, the chair should ask the student if they have any final comments they would like to add.
9. The student is asked to leave the room while the examining committee deliberates on the outcome of the examination.
10. The examiners are asked to give their opinions on the quality of the written work and the oral responses to questions in the same order as questioning occurred.
11. Evaluation criteria to be considered by the committee are outlined in section IV below.
12. The exam 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 in a reasonable time, the matter will be referred to the Dean of GPS.

IV. EVALUATION OF THE DOCTORAL FINAL EXAMINATION

As the doctoral final exam is integrative, the examination is passed or failed in its entirety. The evaluation of the examination will be based on demonstration of oral and written competence related to the following areas:

- A. Relationships among the subject matter of the research and development of knowledge relevant to the practice discipline of nursing, healthcare in general, and other disciplines;
- B. Ability to question and challenge colonial practices and thought in knowledge production, theory and practice as appropriate to the topic under study;
- C. Strong analytical, problem-solving and critical thinking abilities;
- D. Knowledge and skills specific to the research methodology;
- E. A range of potential research approaches relevant to the research focus;
- F. Completion of original research at an advanced level;
- G. Ability to respond to questions about the dissertation project;
- H. Ability to openly engage in scholarly discussion and debate.

V. FOLLOWING THE EXAMINATION

Immediately Following Examination

1. Supervisor will submit the completed [Thesis Approval/Program Completion form](#) to the Nursing Graduate Office.
2. The Nursing Graduate Office will submit the Thesis Approval/Program Completion form to GPS for processing.
 - a. This form must be received by GPS within 5 business days of the final examination date.



- Supervisor and student will receive a follow up email from the Nursing Graduate Office with thesis submission and convocation details.

Submission of Thesis and Approval for Convocation

Students are responsible for ensuring their thesis is formatted according to GPS guidelines and convocation application deadlines are met. Please refer to the [GPS Thesis Preparation, Requirements & Deadlines](#) website for important information, deadlines, required forms and submission options. The student is also responsible for ensuring they apply for convocation. Please refer to the [Convocation](#) website for further details.

Summary of Final Doctoral Examination Timeline

3-4 months prior to exam...	Supervisor completes the Approve External Reader/Examiner form and forwards to the Nursing Graduate Office along with the proposed external examiner's CV.
8-10 weeks prior to exam...	<p>Student submits copies of thesis to the supervisory committee allowing time for review, feedback and revisions.</p> <p>Supervisor confirms availability of all examining committee members and contacts the Graduate Office to request an exam chair.</p>
At least 4 weeks prior to scheduled examination date...	<p>Supervisor obtains signatures of core committee members on the Preliminary Acceptance of Thesis form and submits to the Nursing Graduate Office along with the final dissertation.</p> <p>Supervisor completes the Notice of Examining Committee & Examination Date form and forwards to the Nursing Graduate Office for processing.</p> <p>Supervisor distributes the final thesis to the examining committee. The Graduate Office distributes the final thesis to the external examiner.</p>

Leading with Purpose.



<p>1 week prior to scheduled examination date...</p>	<p>The external examiner report is received by the Associate Dean.</p> <p>The Nursing Graduate Office follows up with the exam chair and supervisor and provides the supervisor with the Thesis Approval/Program Completion form.</p>
<p>Immediately following exam...</p>	<p>The supervisor provides the Nursing Graduate Office with the signed Thesis Approval/Program Completion form that lists the decision of the committee.</p> <p>Please refer to the Decision of the Doctoral Final Examining Committee section of the Calendar for decision options.</p>

Approved by GEC Oct 2024