

University of Alberta University of Alberta Calendar 2024-2025

Supervision and Examinations

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The minimum requirements for all graduate programs are set by the Council of the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies of the University of Alberta. In this Calendar the minimum requirements acceptable are outlined under the respective headings. Students should note that the individual graduate program may impose additional requirements.

Please Note [May 8, 2024] - ADDENDA. The section on [Conduct of Examinations](#) has been updated. See [Amendments to the Calendar](#) for additional information.

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Supervision and Supervisory Committees

Departmental Regulations and Responsibilities

Departments are responsible for preparing a set of regulations and guidelines for supervisors and students. Guidelines should deal with the selection and functioning of supervisors and should outline the joint responsibilities of faculty members and graduate students. Options for students to pursue who believe they are receiving unsatisfactory supervision should also be specified.

Appointment of the Supervisor(s)

Every student in a thesis-based program is required to have a supervisor. The department that admits a student to a thesis-based graduate program is responsible for providing supervision within a subject area in which it has competent supervisors, and in which the student has expressed an interest.

Normally there is only one supervisor. Departments may consider the appointment of more than one supervisor for a student.

Implicit in the admission process is the following: on the applicant's part, that there has been an indication of at least a general area of interest and, preferably, provision of some form of proposal, particularly if the program is at the doctoral level; on the department's part, that the application has been reviewed, the area of interest examined, academic expectations and potential performance considered, and that the department accepts its obligation to provide appropriate supervision for the applicant in the specified subject area.

It is expected that every effort will be made to arrive at a mutually agreeable arrangement for supervision between the student and the department. Students are normally involved in the process for selecting their supervisor(s) although this process varies from program to program.

The authority for the appointment of supervisors rests with the disciplinary Dean. Such appointment decisions are final and non-appealable.

Article 7.02.1 of the Faculty Agreement lists the “supervision of graduate students” as a form of “participation in teaching programs”. It is expected that a department will monitor and review the performance of supervisors.

Supervisors on Leave

It is the responsibility of supervisors to make adequate provision for supervision of their graduate students during their leave. Therefore, if a supervisor is to be absent from the University for a period exceeding two months, it is the supervisor’s responsibility to nominate an adequate interim substitute or indicate the means by which supervision will be maintained. It is the supervisor’s responsibility to inform the student and the department in writing at the time the leave is approved.

In instances when an interim supervisor is appointed, they are not required to complete Supervisor-Student Guidelines since the primary supervisor relationship remains intact during the leave period. The interim supervisor may, however, be required to complete a [Progress Report](#) if their appointment coincides with the annual deadline and a previous report during the calendar year has not already been completed (e.g. by the supervisor prior to the start of their leave).

Supervisors planning to take a sabbatical should follow the requirements found in Appendix A.3 of the Faculty Agreement with respect to adequate advance arrangements for graduate students while a supervisor is on sabbatical.

Eligibility for Appointment as Supervisor

Each of the following criteria must be met by at least one of the supervisor(s):

1. be an Employee, Academic Colleague or Professor Emeriti, as outlined in 1. b, c and d of the [UAPPOL GPS Adjunct Academic Appointment and Graduate Student Supervision Policy](#);
2. be active in the general subject area of the student’s research;
3. demonstrate continuing scholarly or creative activity of an original nature;
and
4. either hold a degree equivalent to or higher than that for which the student is a candidate, or have a demonstrated record of successfully supervising students for the degree.

If one of conditions (2)-(4) is not satisfied by any of the proposed supervisors, then a departmental justification (with the proposed supervisors’ CV) is put forward to the Dean of the department’s Faculty for approval.

For supervisors from outside the University of Alberta, working with a supervisor at the University of Alberta, the means by which meaningful interaction can be maintained should be specified in writing to the student and the department.

Timeline for the Appointment of Supervisors

Ideally, the supervisor for a thesis-based student, both master’s and doctoral, should be appointed as soon as the student arrives to begin their program of studies. If this is not possible, an interim academic advisor should be appointed by the department.

The interim academic advisor or the graduate coordinator will be responsible for completing the Supervisor-Student Guidelines with the student in instances where a supervisor has not yet been appointed after the student’s first 12 months in their program.

Supervisor(s) must be appointed within the first 12 months of the student’s program following the procedures approved by the Dean of the department’s Faculty and submitted to GPS.

Responsibilities Related to Supervision

The supervisor is directly responsible for the supervision of the student’s program. Refer to [Responsibilities Related to Graduate Programs](#) for further regulations.

Completion of the Supervisor-Student Guidelines

All students registered in a thesis-based program are required to meet with their supervisor (assigned at admission or with an interim academic advisor or the graduate coordinator if one has not yet been assigned - see [Timeline for the Appointment of Supervisors](#)) to complete the Supervisor-Student Guidelines as soon as possible after registration in the first academic term but no later than the submission of the first Progress Report, which is due in GPS within 12 months from the student's program start date.

If there is a change in supervisor at any point in a student's program of study, the guidelines will be completed anew in accordance with the timeline noted.

Completion of the guidelines is required. In instances where the Supervisor-Student Guidelines are not submitted within the first 12 months from the student's program start date, the student's registration in subsequent terms will be restricted as a last resort and temporarily so as to determine a plan for completion. In these unlikely instances, GPS will assist the student and supervisor(s) in the completion of the guidelines and remove registration restrictions immediately. Note: both the student and supervisor(s) will receive reminders to complete the guidelines in advance of any deadlines, allowing for inquiries to assist or to set out an alternate completion deadline.

If changes to the content of the Supervisor-Student Guidelines are made or required, these changes will be recorded on the student's Progress Report indicating both parties have discussed and mutually agreed to them.

Progress Report

Student progress in thesis-based programs will be reported at least once annually to the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies using the standardized Progress Report form. Progress reports are due in GPS at minimum once every 12 months of the student's original program start date. The progress report form should be filled out during the annual meeting required for all PhD students. Master's thesis-based students also require at least one progress report completed within a full academic year.

Completion of the progress report is required. In instances where the progress report is not submitted at least once within a 12 month period, the student's registration in subsequent terms will be restricted as a last resort and temporarily so as to determine a plan for completion. In these unlikely instances, GPS will assist the student and supervisor(s) in the completion of the progress report and remove registration restrictions immediately. Note: both the student and supervisor(s) will receive reminders to complete the progress report in advance of any deadlines, allowing for inquiries to assist or to set out an alternate completion deadline.

In instances where more detailed monitoring of a student's academic standing may be required, a progress report form may be filled more than once annually; however, only one (1) progress report may be submitted every four (4) months.

A student who receives two (2) consecutive evaluations of "in need of improvement" or one (1) "unsatisfactory" rating will normally be required to withdraw from their program and GPS on the recommendation of the Associate Chair (grad) within their academic department and/or the Department Chair to the Dean of GPS.

Resolving Conflicts in Supervisor-Student Relationships

The relationship between students and supervisors is normally close and long-lasting. At times, conflicts may arise between a student and the supervisor. In such cases, the first step should be to try to resolve the misunderstanding or conflict informally. This is more likely to be successful if attended to as early as possible. The supervisor and student should discuss the problem together. The supervisor should document the discussions and keep a record of any agreements made. This document should be shared with the student. In the event of a conflict that cannot be resolved, the graduate coordinator should be consulted as early as possible by the parties involved.

It is the responsibility of the graduate coordinator to arrange for consultation and mediation. The graduate coordinator or the parties involved may request advice and/or mediation assistance from their Faculty, GPS, and/or other appropriate services such as the Office of the Student Ombuds. The student and supervisors shall not be required to participate in informal resolution.

If informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate and the graduate coordinator determines that the supervisor-student relationship is beyond repair, the department will attempt in good faith to work with the student to find alternative supervision within the department and will keep GPS apprised of these efforts.

Where the supervisor has been providing funding to the student, the funding should continue for a period of at least 30 days from the date on which the graduate coordinator determines that the supervisor-student relationship is beyond repair.

If the best arrangements of the department and GPS fail to meet the expectations of the student, the student may choose to withdraw without prejudice. If the student refuses to accept the supervision provided, or if no supervision can be secured, then the student is not fulfilling the academic requirement of having a supervisor and may, on academic grounds, be required to withdraw.

Supervisory Committees

Thesis-based master's students

It is not a University requirement for master's students to have a supervisory committee; however, some graduate programs require them. If required by the program, the supervisory committee members are ex-officio members of the master's final examining committee. Attention should be paid to the qualifications of the committee members as examiners to ensure the composition and size of the examination committee will be appropriate.

Doctoral students

Every doctoral student's program shall be under the direction of a supervisory committee approved by the department.

A doctoral supervisory committee must have at least three members, and must include all the supervisors.

The department should ensure that the members of a supervisory committee are sufficiently competent and experienced to serve at the required level. In forming a supervisory committee, the department should consider the rank and experience of the prospective members, their publications and other demonstrations of competence in the subject area or field of specialization, and the prospective members' experience in graduate supervision.

Attention should be paid to the qualifications of the committee members as examiners to ensure the composition of the examination committee will be appropriate as they are ex-officio members of doctoral examining committees.

The supervisory committee is chaired by one of the supervisors.

Compliance with the University of Alberta's Conflict Policy - Conflict of Interest and Commitment, and Institutional Conflict is mandatory.

The supervisor is responsible for ensuring committee meetings are held and making arrangements. The committee shall have a formal regular meeting with the student at least once a year. The department should maintain a record of meetings that have occurred and when students who are not on an approved leave fail to respond to requests to schedule a committee meeting.

For doctoral students, the department shall appoint the supervisory committee well in advance of the candidacy examination.

The Role and Structure of Examining Committees

Formal examining committees are required for thesis-based master's final examination, doctoral candidacy examinations, and doctoral final examinations. Members of these examining committees perform two functions: 1) they bring knowledge and expertise to the assessment of the thesis, and 2) they ensure that the University's expectations are met regarding the conduct of the examination, adherence to all relevant policies, and the suitability of the thesis for the degree.

The University of Alberta is committed to equity, diversity and inclusivity. To the extent possible, academic units should intentionally constitute examination committees that are diverse and inclusive.

The Chair

Every examining committee must have a chair who is not the supervisor and is a faculty member with experience supervising graduate students. The chair should have sufficient experience of graduate examinations to be able to allow the examination to be conducted in a fair manner. The chair is responsible for moderating the discussion and directing questions. It is the chair's responsibility to ensure that departmental and GPS regulations relating to the final examination are followed. If the chair is not an examiner, then the chair does not vote.

The committee chair is not an examiner for doctoral examinations. See Size and Composition of Examining Committees for the requirements for each examination.

The chair should not have real or apparent conflict of interest with the student or any of the examiners.

Examiners

Examiners are full voting members of the examining committee. All examiners must be either active in the general subject area of the student's research or bring relevant expertise to the assessment of the thesis.

Categories of Examiners and Eligibility

There are four types of examiners: ex-officio examiner, university examiner, specialized knowledge examiner, and external examiner.

Ex-officio Examiners

The supervisor(s) and supervisory committee members are ex-officio members of the examining committee.

By definition, no individual can be both an ex-officio and any other kind of examiner on the same examining committee.

University Examiner

A university examiner is a member of the University of Alberta community who is knowledgeable in the field and comes fresh to the examination. They must not be (or have been) a member of the supervisory committee, or have been connected with the thesis research in a significant way. The examiner should not have been associated with the student, outside of usual contact in courses or other non-thesis activities within the University, nor be related to the student or supervisor(s). Eligible University of Alberta community members include current or retired Academic Staff members, Academic Colleagues, Postdoctoral Fellows, or Executive Members/Academic Administrators who will be appointed or re-appointed as Academic Faculty members on the conclusion of their term (current or retired categories A, B, C, D, and E, as defined in the [University of Alberta's Recruitment Policy \(Appendix A\)](#) Definition and Categories of Academic Staff and Colleagues).

A university examiner should not be a former supervisor or student of the supervisor(s).

Except in special circumstances (fully justified in writing to the Dean of the department's Faculty), a university examiner should not be an active collaborator of the supervisor(s) (see [Conflict of Interest Guidelines](#) below).

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 doctoral final examination if the other conditions of being a university examiner remain unchanged.

Specialized Knowledge Examiner

A specialized knowledge examiner is a person who has knowledge or professional expertise that is relevant to the thesis research (such as a health practitioner or an Indigenous community member) and does not have a full-time academic appointment at a university that confers graduate degrees. A specialized knowledge examiner comes fresh to the examination. They must not be (or have been) a member of the supervisory committee, or have been connected with the thesis research in any way. The examiner should not have a close personal association with the student or the supervisor.

Except in special circumstances (fully justified in writing to the Dean of the department's Faculty), a specialized knowledge examiner should not be an active collaborator of the supervisor(s) (see [Conflict of Interest Guidelines](#) below).

External Examiner

An external examiner from outside the University of Alberta is required for doctoral thesis examinations. An external examiner must not be (or have been) a member of the supervisory committee, or have been connected with the thesis research in any way. The examiner should not have any personal association with the student or the supervisor, including family and social relationships. This examiner must fulfill additional criteria as described under [Final Doctoral Examination](#) below.

Conflict of Interest for Graduate Student Supervisory and Examination Committees

The key relationships are:

- the supervisor to the student;
- the supervisor to the other committee members;
- the student to the committee members;
- the committee members to each other.

Conflict of interest in these relationships is defined by the [University of Alberta Code of Conduct Policy](#) & the [University of Alberta Conflict Policy – Conflict of Interest and Commitment and Institutional Conflict](#). Any personal or professional relationships that alter or affect this academic relationship may constitute a conflict of interest.

In the event that a conflict of interest cannot be avoided:

- the conflict must be openly disclosed to the student, in writing, by the department;
- the student must be informed of their right to consent to the committee member or not. The student must also be advised that they can discuss their choices with an Associate Dean, GPS, once the disclosure is made;
- if the student does not consent, it would be the responsibility of the proposed committee member to recuse themselves and the student would have the right to continue working with the original supervisor and a different committee member without suffering any form of negative treatment and/or behaviour (e.g. intimidation, bullying, harassment) as a result of the decision;
- the disclosure of the relationship and consent of the student must be recorded in writing and filed with the department and with GPS;
- the conflict of interest must be disclosed on the annual UofA Conflict of Interest and Commitment form by the parties involved; and
- the student may rescind their consent later in their program if the measures put in place to manage the conflict of interest change or are perceived to no longer be effective. In this case, the student would indicate this change in writing to the department and GPS.
- No changes to committee membership can be made after the final submission of the thesis to the supervisory committee for examination.

Size and Composition of Examining Committees

For all examination committees, at least half of the examiners must have a degree equivalent to or higher than the degree being examined.

For all examination committees, at least half of the examiners must be current or retired Academic Staff members, Academic Colleagues, Postdoctoral Fellows, or Executive Members/Academic Administrators who will be appointed or re-appointed as Academic Faculty members on the conclusion of their term (current or retired categories A, B, C, D, and E, as defined in the [University of Alberta's Recruitment Policy \(Appendix A\)](#) Definition and Categories of Academic Staff and Colleagues).

Master's Thesis Examination Committee

Where there is a supervisor only, the examining committee is the supervisor and two university examiners or one university examiner and one specialized knowledge examiner.

Where there is a supervisory committee, the examining committee is the ex-officio examiners and one university examiner or one specialized knowledge examiner.

- At least half of the examiners must hold a master's degree or higher (see above).
- The chair is not the supervisor. The chair is a faculty member in the student's home department or with experience chairing master's examinations. GPS recommends that committee chairs not be examiners except in extenuating circumstances where any conflict of interest in this role be managed transparently for the student.

The authority for the appointment of final examining committees rests with the Dean of the department's Faculty [unless delegated to the department].

Doctoral Candidacy Examination Committee

The examining committee consists of the exofficio examiners and either one university examiner or one specialized knowledge examiner.

When deemed necessary by the supervisor, one additional university examiner or specialized knowledge examiner may be appointed to the examining committee. In such cases, the examining committee consists of the ex-officio examiners and either two university examiners or one university examiner and one specialized knowledge examiner.

The examining committee does not normally include an external examiner. However, when deemed necessary by the supervisor, an external examiner may be appointed to the committee. In this case, the external examiner replaces a university examiner or a specialized knowledge examiner.

- At least half of the examiners must hold a doctoral degree (see above).
- The chair is not an examiner. The chair is a faculty member in the student's home department or with experience chairing doctoral examinations

The authority for the appointment of doctoral candidacy examining committees rests with the department.

Doctoral Thesis Examination Committee

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

- At least half of the examiners must hold a doctoral degree or higher (see above).
- The chair is not an examiner. The chair is a faculty member in the student's home department or with experience chairing doctoral examinations.

The authority for the appointment of final examining committees rests with the Dean of the department's Faculty [unless delegated to the department].

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 GPS 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, GPS, the Dean of the department's Faculty, or a Pro Dean (the representative of the Dean, GPS) may attend the examination and participate in questioning the student and in deliberations, but will not vote on the outcome. Persons other than the examiners may attend only with the approval of the Dean, GPS, the Dean of the department's Faculty, or the chair of the committee.

Responsibilities of a Pro Dean at Examinations: A 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, GPS.

The Pro Dean's role is to ensure the proper conduct of the examination, including interceding actively to correct procedural problems and to ensure fairness to the student and adherence to academic standards. The Pro Dean may participate in questioning the student and in deliberations, but does not vote on the outcome of the examination except when necessary to establish a majority for or against adjournment. The Pro Dean also has the power to adjourn an examination at any time prior to the start of deliberations. If problems are encountered, the Pro Dean is asked to submit a brief report to the Dean, GPS.

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 GPS website. The notice of final approval must be received by GPS 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 GPS 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 GPS Council. However, the examining committee may petition the Dean of GPS, and on receiving written approval, may conduct the examination in a language other than English.

Time Limit for Submission of Theses to GPS: 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 GPS within six months of the date of the final examination. Departments that require a thesis-equivalent may have special submission procedures. See [Graduate Programs](#). Departments may impose earlier deadlines for submitting revisions.

If the thesis is not submitted to GPS 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 GPS 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 GPS and have it approved before they can be cleared for convocation. Departments that require a thesis-equivalent may have special submission procedures. See [Graduate Programs](#).

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, 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 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, 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 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 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 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. 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 of the master’s and doctoral thesis must have been approved by the student’s supervisor and supervisory committee respectively.

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), and mixed format theses (combining the traditional format and the paper-based format). 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 reveal 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 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 are responsible for following the [GPS Minimum Thesis Formatting Requirements](#).

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

It is University policy that a thesis be made freely available to the public as soon as possible after a student’s convocation. A general policy of “open access” is also embraced by Tri-Council and other funding agencies. However, it is recognized that circumstances may arise that justify restricting access to a thesis for a specified period of time initially up to a maximum of one year

(also known as an embargo period). The student's department has been delegated the authority to receive and approve a request for restricting access to a thesis for up to two years.

The likely circumstances for restricting access to a thesis include:

- Contractual, where a contract with a company, funding agency or sponsor requires that the research conducted for the thesis must remain confidential for a specified period of time;
- Patent Pending, where a patent application has been lodged by the student, or by another on the student's behalf, relating to a discovery or novel method in a thesis;
- Publication Pending, where a student has a contract with a publisher indicating that the publisher regards the electronic availability of a thesis as a prior publication and will reject any work based on a publicly available thesis, or for a student who has not yet obtained a publishing contract, where a student can show that the practice of the likely publishers in the student's discipline is to consider the electronic availability of a thesis as a prior publication; and
- Ethical Confidentiality, where a thesis requires an embargo period in order for additional steps to be taken to remove information from the thesis where electronic access to the thesis in a university repository without amendment could endanger the physical or mental health or the safety of people.
- Losing originality of research dissemination.

Students wanting to restrict public access to their theses for a temporary period of time must submit a written request with supporting documentation to their department. If approved by the department, the form request must be submitted to GPS for processing at the time of submission of the thesis to GPS.

At the end of an approved embargo period, the thesis will become accessible. An accessible thesis can be located by a Google search or other internet search engine. It is a student's responsibility to contact the Dean of GPS if there are any extenuating circumstances that warrant an extension to the original embargo period.

University policy requires compliance with copyright law.
