

GUIDE FOR CHAIRING A MASTER'S THESIS DEFENCE

Prepared by the

Division of Research and Graduate Studies



Research and Graduate Studies
Last Modified 05/19/2021

The Examining Committee:

The Examining Committee will consist of the following four (or more) members:

- 1) Dean of Research and Graduate Studies (or delegate) who will act as Chair
- 2) External Examiner
- 3) Internal Examiner
- 4) Supervisor(s)

Individual academic units will determine whether the participation of the Head/Director (or delegate) at the thesis defence is required.

All members of the Examining Committee **except the Chair** are expected to review the thesis.

The Supervisor and Internal Examiner must participate in the defence either in person (or remotely).

If the External Examiner is not participating in person (or remotely), they are required to submit a list of questions directly to the Graduate Studies Officer one week in advance of the defence. These questions **must not** be shared with the Candidate prior to the defence. The supervisor will pose the questions.

Procedures to be followed when acting as Chair of a defence:

Part 1 – Candidate’s presentation and question period (open to the public)

- Acknowledgement that we are in Mi’kma’ki, the unceded ancestral territory of the Mi’kmaq nation.
- Introduce the candidate, yourself as Chair, and the members of the Examining Committee. You should welcome the External Examiner and thank them for participating in the defence.
- **The candidate is then asked to present a concise summary of their research, emphasizing the conclusions that have been reached.** This should take a MAXIMUM of 20 minutes.
- Questions from the Examining Committee will follow the presentation. Typically, there are two rounds of questions, using the following order for each round:
 - External Examiner
 - Internal Examiner
 - Head/Director (if participating in the defence)
 - Supervisor
 - Chair
- Committee members may ask as many questions as they deem necessary. As a guide, the External Examiner should be allowed about 15 minutes during the first round. Once two rounds of questions have been completed, you should ask the Committee if they are finished with their questions.
- Members of the audience/public are then invited to ask questions.
- Part 1 of the defence will usually take no more than 1½ - 2 hours.



Tips/advice for the Chair:

- It is the candidate who is being examined. If members of the Examining Committee start debating among themselves, or if the Supervisor answers for the candidate, then the Chair must politely regain control, reminding members of the Committee of the purpose of the defence.
- If the candidate is having difficulty, then the Chair can suggest a short break to allow the candidate to collect their thoughts.
- It is unreasonable for a candidate to be expected to interact with the committee members beyond two (2) hours from the start time of the defence.

Part 2 – The deliberation of the Examining Committee (closed to the public). The candidate and audience will be asked to leave the meeting until deliberations have concluded.

- The Chair should ask the Committee starting with the External Examiner their thoughts on the thesis overall and the performance of the candidate, followed by a determination of needed revisions if any.

The thesis is (A majority vote is required):

- acceptable without revisions;
- in need of minor revisions; or
- in need of major revisions.

Minor revisions are defined as, “Corrections which can be made immediately to the satisfaction of the supervisor.” Examples: typographical or grammatical errors; missing footnotes; formatting issues; need for further discussion on the findings; incorporating a glossary of acronyms or terms; changes to the Appendices; incomplete references; improvement in phrasing; or need for minor clarification of content.

Major revisions are defined as, “Corrections requiring further research, or structural changes, or other substantive revisions.” These revisions will require **more than two weeks to complete** and may require re-reading by the external examiner. Examples: technical errors; insufficient evidence of research findings; inaccurate generalizations; misinterpretation and/or misuse of the matter covered; omission of relevant materials; unfounded conclusions; illogical argument; improper or lack of analysis of data; seriously flawed writing and presentation; faulty conceptualization; inappropriate or faulty use of research methodology; failure to engage the scholarly context; or rewriting of substantial portions to strengthen the thesis.

- The Committee must take the time to communicate all suggested revisions to the Supervisor, who should take detailed notes. The Committee should be clear about which recommendations are mandatory, and which ones are not.
- The last step is to consider the candidate for the Acadia Outstanding Master’s Research Award.

Procedures to follow when recommending a graduate student for the Acadia Outstanding Master’s Research Award:

The Chair will ask the committee whether it wishes to ***unanimously*** recommend the candidate for the award based on the selection guidelines below.



Selection guidelines for the Acadia Outstanding Master's Research Award

1. The award (1 per faculty, per academic year) is restricted to Master's thesis-based programs at Acadia University, namely, M.A., M.Sc., MCD, and M.Ed. Students completing their thesis requirement during May to April are considered for the award offered at the Spring Convocation.
2. The student must have completed the degree requirements within the time limit of their graduate program (6 years for MSc, MCD, and MA in SOPT students; 5 years for all other MA programs; and 8 years for M.Ed. students).
3. The student's research must fall within the top 15% of all Master's theses you have read or examined, at Acadia and elsewhere.
4. **The Academic Record:** Outstanding graduate academic record (at least 3.5 GPA)
5. **The Research:** Research highly original, innovative, and makes a strong contribution to the discipline
6. **The Thesis:** Thesis is impeccably written, and all substantive sections are strong
7. **The Defence:** Student's presentation and response to questions are accurate, clear and thoughtful

Part 3 - Inform the candidate

- The candidate is called back to the room and the Chair informs the candidate of the decision and next steps in working with the supervisor(s) towards completion and submission of final thesis.
- The Committee congratulates the candidate and may offer parting comments.

The Chair is to provide the following to the Graduate Studies Officer (Theresa.starratt@Acadiau.ca) at the conclusion of the defence:

- ✓ The result of the defence (majority vote)
- ✓ Recommendation for the Acadia Outstanding Master's Research Award (if applicable)