U of G | Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING A REMOTE ORAL QUALIFYING EXAM

Wherever possible, Qualifying Exams (QEs) that have already been scheduled or can be scheduled before the end of W2020 should occur via web/teleconference (e.g., WebEx, Microsoft Teams). This document provides general guidelines for conducting such QEs.

This document does not provide information on using the software platforms. For instructions on using Microsoft Teams, please refer to the CCS Teams webpage. For instructions on using Cisco Webex, please refer to the CCS Webex webpage. Technical questions should be directed to CCS via email at IThelp@uoguelph.ca or via live chat accessible from the CCS webpage.

Departments who require their doctoral students to take a written closed-book exam as part of the QE should contact Michelle Fach in OpenEd to discuss possibilities for remote exams.

General Considerations

- It is the responsibility of the department to facilitate the web/teleconference-based QE;
- To ensure that the candidate knows how to use the software platform, the exam chair and candidate should conduct a test meeting prior to the QE.
- Remote QEs should adhere to the normal requirements and procedures as much as possible;
- The candidate may have one individual in the same room with them for the entire oral exam at the student's request. The individual cannot help the student in anyway, except to indirectly provide moral support by their presence.
- The candidate and the examiners are encouraged to use a headset to reduce audio feedback, and to use an ethernet connection to the internet instead of WiFi.
- At the discretion of the chair of the examination committee, a QE in progress may be stopped and rescheduled, ideally within one week if technical difficulties prevent the student, chair or more than one examiner from participating.

Before the Exam

- If the QE includes an oral presentation, the candidate should send their powerpoint slides to examiners ahead of time in case any technical difficulties prevent projecting them during the teleconference. Candidates should number the slides for ease of reference.
- The exam chair opens the meeting 15 minutes before the scheduled start of the exam. All participants should join the meeting at least 10 minutes before the exam begins so that technical issues can be dealt with.
- At the start of the QE, the exam chair will explain the format of the exam and set the ground rules for participation, including the time allowed for the oral presentation (if any) and for questions from each examiner.
- The exam chair will ask examiners who are not questioning the candidate to mute their microphone. If there is sufficient bandwidth they can keep their cameras on.

During the Exam

- The order of questioning of the candidate should proceed as usual, with the graduate faculty examiners (not members of the advisory committee) going first.

- As usual, the exam chair has the responsibility to mediate and intervene if they feel any examiner is taking an inordinate amount of time or the nature of their questions tends to deviate from the "fair limits" of the examination.

After the Exam

- At the end of the question period, the exam chair will invite the candidate to either leave the meeting or isolate them from the other participants in the "lobby" depending on the software platform used.

- The examiners will discuss the candidate's performance and then each examiner will be asked to vote satisfactory or unsatisfactory on the overall performance. Abstention by an examiner who attended the exam counts as a negative vote. No vote (including abstention) will be recorded for an examiner who was not able to attend the exam. If an examiner must leave early due to technical difficulties, they can be allowed to vote by email at the exam chair's discretion.

- The exam chair will share the letter from the advisory committee regarding the candidate's ability at research with the two graduate faculty committee members, but not until after the exam committee's deliberations are concluded. This is intended to prevent prejudging the candidate.

- The candidate is deemed to have passed if not more than one examiner votes negatively.

- The exam chair will ask the examiners to sign the Report on Qualifying Examination form using one of the following methods. More details on digital signatures are provided on the OGPS webpage.
    - a digital Adobe signature on the form,
    - an email message to the exam chair from the examiner's UoG address or the address on record for external examiners;
    - a Qualtrics survey for which each examiner has been sent a unique access link. (**NOTE**: departments are responsible for generating and administering such surveys. OGPS is not able to assist with this.)

- The exam chair will invite the candidate to return to the meeting and inform them of the outcome of the QE.

- The exam chair will combine the forms and signatures into a single PDF document for submission to OGPS.

- If the candidate fails, the exam chair will provide written comments on their performance within 10 business days following the exam.

- At the department chair's discretion, the candidate may be given a second attempt at the exam within 6 months of the first attempt as per the Graduate Calendar.