Guidelines for conducting a remote thesis defence

Wherever possible, master's and doctoral thesis defences 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 defences.

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]().

General Considerations

- It is the responsibility of the Department to facilitate the web/teleconference-based defence;

- 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 defence.

- Remote thesis defences 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 exam, including the oral question period, 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.

- Thesis defences are usually open to the public, but this requirement can be relaxed under the circumstances to reduce internet bandwidth;

- At the discretion of the chair of the examination committee, a defence 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

- The candidate should send their powerpoint slides to examiners ahead of time in case 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 defence. All participants, including the audience should join the meeting at least 10 minutes before the defence begins so that technical issues can be dealt with.

- The exam chair should ensure that the "beep" announcing new participants is turned off so that late arrivals do not distract the candidate once they start their oral

presentation. Alternatively, the exam chair can lock the meeting after the oral presentation begins to prevent anyone else from joining.

- At the start of the defence, the exam chair will explain the format of the defence, including the time allowed for the oral presentation and audience questions, and set the ground rules for participation.

- To avoid distracting the candidate during their oral presentation, audience members' microphones and camera should be turned off, and the examiners' microphones muted. The chat tool should also be off or audience members should be asked not to submit messages until invited to by the exam chair.

During the Exam

- The exam chair introduces the candidate and invites them to share their screen to show their slides and begin their presentation. If they are having difficulty, the host can project the slides on behalf of the candidate.

- When the candidate has finished speaking, the exam chair will invite questions from the audience using the chat tool. Audience members can either ask their question via the tool, in which case the exam chair can ask the question aloud, or indicate that they have a question, in which case the exam chair can turn on their video and microphone and invite them to interact directly with the candidate.

- If the audience can remain for the oral exam after the talk, they should be advised that their cameras and microphones will be turned off for the duration of the defence and they are not allowed to use the chat tool.

- If the oral exam will be closed, a new meeting can be set up and a link supplied only to the candidates and members of the exam committee.

- Before questioning of the candidate begins, the exam chair should remind everyone of procedure such as the time allotted to each examiner for questions.

- The order of questioning of the candidate should proceed as usual, with the external examiner going first in the case of a doctoral defence. The microphones of examiners who are not questioning the candidate should be muted. If sufficient bandwidth is available, examiners who are not speaking could choose to keep their camera on.

- 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 ask the audience to leave the meeting and 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 acceptability of the thesis and the oral defence. 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 via email at the exam chair's discretion.

- 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 of Master's or Doctoral Examination Committee and the Certificate of Approval forms using one of the following methods. More details on digital signatures are provided on the [OGPS webpage](#).

    o a digital Adobe signature on the form,

    o an email message to the exam chair from the examiner's UoG address or the address on record for external examiners;

    o 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 combine the forms and signatures into a single PDF document for submission to OGPS.

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

- If the candidate passes but revision of the thesis is required, the exam chair will provide written comments to the candidate by the end of the second full business day following the exam. All examiners must agree on the required changes. Optional changes that the candidate should consider prior to submitting the thesis for publication should be clearly distinguished from changes required for approval of the thesis.

- If the candidate fails, the exam chair will provide written comments on the oral exam performance and the thesis to the candidate by the second business day following the exam.

- At the department chair's discretion, the candidate may be given a second attempt to defend the thesis.