

Final Oral Examination Review Working Group Internal Report: Proposed Recommendations for Consultation

This detailed set of recommendations is provided to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) for further consultation. Once the recommendations have been accepted or revised, further delineation of some of the models or options will be necessary, in addition to implementation.

Final Oral Examination (FOE) Chair

Appointment process

- **3 models considered:** Outside of the graduate unit, outside of the FOE committee, and within the FOE committee.
 - Please note: All three models were found to retain academic rigour as the Chair of the FOE committee must hold full graduate faculty membership (GFM), as per SGS's existing GFM guidelines.
- **Recommendation:** SGS should extend the parameters of the current "outside of the graduate unit" model for the FOE Chair to "outside of the FOE committee." This would allow faculty members to serve as the FOE Chair for students within their own graduate unit, if they are not active members of the student's FOE committee. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.5)
- **Principles:** Allows for increased disciplinary and programmatic flexibility and a more streamlined and operationally efficient model in securing a chair. Maintains key principles such as academic rigour, sense of occasion, and an exceptional experience for all stakeholders.

External Appraiser

Mandatory component of the FOE

- **2 models considered:** Retain external appraiser or remove the external appraiser involvement.
- **Recommendation:** SGS should retain the external appraiser. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.3)
- **Principles:** Promotes academic rigour, professional development, a sense of occasion, exceptional experience for all stakeholders, equity, diversity and inclusion, and public accountability.

Criteria

- **2 models considered:** Retain the current external appraiser criteria (i.e., arm's-length, two-year restriction on participation) or modify the current external appraiser criteria.
- **Recommendation:** SGS should add the following statement from the SGS Guidelines to the SGS Calendar criteria for an external appraiser: "An external appraiser should not

normally be used more frequently than once every two years by a single supervisor.” It was noted by the working group that the application of this criteria will be more nuanced in emerging or smaller fields.

- **Recommendation:** Remove from the SGS Guidelines “an external appraiser should not be used more frequently than once every two years for committees with substantive overlap of members with whom the external has served within the past two years i.e. three or more voting members.”
- **Recommendation:** SGS should create an arm’s-length attestation process that is completed by the external appraiser, supervisor(s) and student, and reviewed by the graduate chair as a component of the external approval process. Where there is conflict or ambiguity regarding the application of the criteria for the external appraiser, the graduate chair will consult with the Vice-Dean, Students.
- **Principles:** Retains academic rigour, while providing disciplinary and programmatic flexibility, and a streamlined and operationally efficient process.

Appointment process

- **2 models considered:** Retain the current process for approving external appraisers (i.e., SGS approves all external appraisers) or create a more streamlined process at the graduate unit level (i.e., graduate chair approves external appraisers).
- **Recommendation:** To streamline the external appraiser approval process, the graduate chair will be responsible for granting approval of external appraisers. Where there is conflict or ambiguity regarding the application of the criteria for the external appraiser, the graduate chair will consult with the SGS Vice-Dean, Students. SGS should replace its current process of reviewing every external appraiser with a periodic review of external examiners within each graduate unit. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.3)
- **Principles:** Retains academic rigour, while providing disciplinary and programmatic flexibility and ensuring processes are streamlined and operationally efficient.

Defining arm’s length

- **2 models considered:** Retain the current definition for arm’s length or revise definition of arm’s length to extend parameters and allow for a wider pool of possible external appraisers.
- **Recommendation:** SGS should revise the following sentence of the arm’s length definition: “in the past six years, been a departmental colleague of the candidate or the supervisor” to “in the past seven years, been a departmental colleague of the candidate or the supervisor.” This change would more accurately reflect the normative length of the PhD program. (SGS Calendar/Guidelines)
- **Recommendation:** SGS should remove “scholarly work” from the following sentence in the definition of arm’s length in the SGS Guidelines as it was found to be overly broad, as well as define a time frame for the collaboration as seven years: “has collaborated on a research project, scholarly work or publication, with either of them.” Once revised, the

sentence would be: “in the past seven years, has collaborated on a research project or publication, with either of them.” (SGS Calendar/Guidelines)

- **Recommendation:** SGS should add to the arm’s length exclusion criteria: Close family/friend relationship with the supervisor(s) or student. (SGS Calendar/Guidelines)
- **Recommendation:** SGS should add the following sentence from UTQAP’s definition of arm’s length into the SGS Calendar/Guidelines: external appraisers “... should not be chosen who are likely, or perceived to be likely, to be predisposed, positively or negatively, about the FOE and its outcomes.” (SGS Calendar/Guidelines)
- **Recommendation:** SGS should review UTQAP’s examples of what may or may not violate arm’s length and determine if any of the examples listed should be included on the SGS website to further clarify what arm’s length encompasses. (SGS Calendar/Guidelines)
- **Principles:** Retains academic rigour, while providing disciplinary and programmatic flexibility, ensuring equity, diversity and inclusion, and promoting processes that are streamlined and operationally efficient.

Examination Committee

Composition of committee

- **2 models considered:** Keep the current examination committee requirements or change the composition requirements for the examination committee.
- **Recommendation:** SGS should consider explicitly naming the supervisor(s) in the list of voting members for the final oral examination, in addition to the one to two members of the supervisory committee selected as voting members. The regulations should also state that the supervisor(s) normally attend the final oral examination. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.4)
- **Recommendation:** SGS should consider explicitly stating in the SGS Calendar that the external examiner normally attends the final oral examination. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.4)
- **Principles:** Promotes academic rigour, an exceptional experience for all stakeholders, a sense of occasion, professional development, and public accountability.

Examination Committee and Quorum

- **2 models considered:** Retain the current process for approving examination committee membership (i.e., SGS approves all members) or create a more streamlined process at the graduate unit level (i.e., graduate chair approves examiners).
- **Recommendation:** To streamline the examination committee approval process, the graduate chair will be responsible for granting approval of the examination committee. Where there is conflict or ambiguity regarding the make-up of the examination committee, the graduate chair will consult with the SGS Vice-Dean, Students. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.3) SGS should replace its current process of reviewing every examination committee with a periodic review within each graduate unit.

- **Recommendation:** Retain quorum regulations. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.4)
- **Principles:** Upholds academic rigour, while providing disciplinary and programmatic flexibility and ensuring processes are streamlined and operationally efficient.

Type of Examination: In-person, hybrid or fully online

- **2 models considered:** Retain flexibility in type of examination by keeping all three options (i.e., fully in-person, hybrid and fully online), or shift to in-person and hybrid (where student should attend in-person) only.
- **Recommendation:** Retain flexibility in type of examination by keeping all three options in line with universal design for learning principles. However, SGS should explicitly state the benefits of in-person examinations for all members involved, but particularly for the student, and indicate a preference for in-person examinations in the SGS Calendar. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.6)
- **Principles:** Ensures disciplinary and programmatic flexibility, wellness and exceptional experience for all stakeholders, a sense of occasion for students, and equity, diversity and inclusion (e.g., universal design for learning principles).

Clarifying the Voting Categories

Nomenclature

- **2 models considered:** Retain the current nomenclature for the voting categories or revise the voting categories to enhance clarity, applicability and ease of implementation.
- **Recommendation:** SGS should clarify the current FOE voting categories by updating the nomenclature and descriptions to align with the normative length of time required to complete the revisions. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.12)
- **Principles:** Ensures academic rigour, while also increasing transparency, and promoting streamlined and operationally efficient processes.

Current language vs. proposed revisions

1. **Current: Acceptable as it stands** - the candidate must make arrangements to submit the thesis to the digital research repository within one week of the date of the examination. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.12)

Proposed revision: Change to “Accepted as it stands”

2. **Current: Editorial corrections** - the candidate must complete the corrections within one month of the date of the examination, and the supervisor will inform the candidate of the necessary corrections. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.12)

Proposed revision: “Revisions that must occur within one month” - The supervisor will supervise the proposed revisions. Revisions must be completed within one month of the date of the final oral examination. The examination committee must decide the nature of revisions, but it is intended that these revisions could be more substantial

typographical errors, corrections in style, expanding on material, such as adding a limitation, and less than major changes in the thesis. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.12)

- 3. Current: Minor revisions** - a subcommittee will supervise the proposed revisions. One member of the subcommittee is designated by the chair, with the approval of the examination committee, as the convenor. The convenor will be responsible for the preparation of a statement detailing the revisions required. Revisions must be completed within three months of the date of the oral examination. The examination committee must decide the nature of minor revisions, but it is intended that minor revisions should be more than corrections in style and less than major changes in the thesis. A typical example of minor revisions might be clarification of textual material or qualification of research findings and conclusions. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.12)

Proposed revision: “Revisions that must occur within three months” - The supervisor or a subcommittee of the examination committee will supervise the proposed revisions. If there is a subcommittee, one member is designated by the chair, with the approval of the examination committee, as the convenor. During the FOE, the examination committee may determine whether a subcommittee is necessary when the revisions require more substantial input and/or the expertise of multiple committee members to complete the revisions. The supervisor or convenor (depending on the option chosen) will be responsible for the preparation of a statement detailing the revisions required. Revisions must be completed within three months of the date of the final oral examination. The examination committee must decide the nature of revisions, but it is intended that the revisions should be less than major changes in the thesis. A typical example of revisions might be more substantial clarification of textual material or qualification of research findings and conclusions. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.12)

Striking a subcommittee for minor revisions

- **2 models considered:** Mandatory creation of a subcommittee to oversee minor revisions process or increased flexibility in oversight of minor revisions process.
- **Recommendation:** SGS should allow the examination committee to determine whether additional oversight by a subcommittee is necessary in instances where a student must complete minor revisions (term to be revised) to the thesis following the final oral examination. In circumstances where additional oversight by a subcommittee is not needed, the examination committee may opt for review by the supervisor(s) only. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.12)
- **Principles:** Enhances disciplinary and programmatic flexibility, while ensuring academic rigour, as well as streamlined and operationally efficient processes.

Adjournment and reconvening of the FOE

- **2 models considered:** Adjourn and reconvene if voting consensus is not reached on first attempt or revise the process to fail on first FOE attempt and have a second exam.
- **Recommendation:** Keep current process as is; however, SGS should review its process and procedures for adjournment, reconvening, and outcomes for the second FOE for

clarity. For example, SGS could consider in its revision of the SGS FOE Guidelines web page providing information on different options that can be discussed with students by supervisors and graduate faculty administrators in the event of an adjournment (e.g., preparing for a second FOE, process to appeal, withdrawal) and unsuccessful second exam (e.g., process to appeal, termination). (SGS Calendar: 8.3.12/Guidelines)

- **Principles:** Promotes wellness for students.

Format of the FOE

Closed defense vs. public component

- **2 models considered:** Retain the current model (i.e., largely closed, with an option for GFM members able to attend) and revise the current model to formalize the option for a public component (i.e., open to colleagues, community members).
- **Recommendation:** SGS should add language to the SGS Calendar to ensure graduate units are aware of the choice to include a public component in their final oral examinations, in addition to the required closed component. (SGS Calendar: 8.3.9)
- **Principles:** Academic rigour, disciplinary and programmatic flexibility, wellness and exceptional experience for all stakeholders, sense of occasion, professional development, and public accountability and transparency.

Time length

- **2 models considered:** Keep the guidelines broad in relation to time length or state a normative time length for the exam.
- **Recommendation:** SGS should explicitly state a normative length of time for the final oral examination. If a graduate unit chooses to have a public seminar as a component of the final oral examination, the public component will normally last up to a maximum of one hour. The closed examination component of the final oral examination will normally be two to three hours. (SGS Calendar)
- **Principles:** Ensures some disciplinary and programmatic flexibility and equity, diversity and inclusion, while maintaining academic rigour, transparency, sense of occasion, wellness and an exceptional experience for all stakeholders.