

PGP 3.1.2 Doctoral Examinations Protocol

Summary

When arranging the examination and appointing examiners for doctoral examinations there are regulations and processes that need to be followed in order to facilitate a smooth and successful examination. This protocol outlines the timeframe, submission process, and examination process for doctoral examinations.

Purpose

This protocol outlines the requirements and process for the examination of doctoral students, including Doctor of Philosophy (360 points thesis) and professional doctorates (240 point thesis).

Scope

This protocol is to be used when arranging the examination for doctoral students except for:

- Creative/Format 3 examinations
- Masters Research Examinations
- Bachelor with Honours Examinations

Application

Submission

Three months prior to examination the supervisors should arrange the appointment of examiners. Refer to the *Appointment of Examiners Protocol* for further details on appointing doctoral examiners.

Declaration of Suitability for Examination

The primary supervisor and Associate Dean (Postgraduate), or delegated authority are required to declare that the thesis is of a suitable standard for examination. This relates to the presentation of the thesis, including correct formats, legibility, accuracy, clarity of expression and general freedom from typographical and grammatical errors, but is not an indication of the quality of the work. The University will normally not proceed with the examination of a thesis considered not to be in a suitable form for examination.

Submission Against Supervisor Advice

It is important to note that a student has the right to request that the thesis be examined, even though the supervisors may not believe it to be of a suitable standard. Such instances must be clearly identified on the PGR12 – Lodgement for Examination form, which must have statements from the supervisors and the student outlining the circumstances attached to it. Where the Faculty Associate Dean (Postgraduate) or delegated authority is not prepared to sign off for examination, this should also be noted on the PGR12 along with an explanation of the reason. In such circumstances the GRS will consult with the Dean of the Graduate Research School on appropriate action.

Attestation of Authorship

Students should attest and sign a declaration, certifying the original contribution of the thesis. The attestation of authorship should state:

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

For format two theses, co-authorship needs to be declared with percentage contributions clearly stated. The student should be principal author with contribution of at least 80%.

Lodgement of Thesis/Exegesis for Examination

A student must lodge one digital copy of the doctoral thesis for examination with the faculty postgraduate office, accompanied by a completed electronic copy of the PGR12 'Lodgement of Thesis for Examination' form. Lodgement of the thesis and form need to be approved by the Associate Dean (Postgraduate), or delegated authority. All copies are then forwarded to the GRS for examination.

Confidential Material and Embargo Process

Students may apply to have an embargo for their thesis prior to or at the time of lodgement for examination by submitting a PGR16 – Application for Embargo form. For further details on embargos refer to the Postgraduate Handbook.

Examination process

Examination Timeframe

Examiners are asked to provide their written reports within 8 weeks. All examiners reports will normally be released to the student at a pre-meeting, one week prior to the oral examination. Normally, the oral examination will be scheduled upon receipt of all examiner reports. Throughout the examination process the GRS maintains contact with the examiners to monitor progress. Students may contact the GRS to enquire about the progress of the doctoral examination. The entire examination process and determination of a final grade may take approximately three months.

Convenor

A Convenor will be appointed by the GRS and will accept overall responsibility for ensuring that the examination is fair to the students whilst meeting the expectations of the UPB, University and examiners. The Convenor must be neutral (no expertise in the subject matter), and will normally be located in a different faculty from the student.

Doctoral Examiners Reports

Each examiner is asked to provide a written report to the GRS commenting on:

- The overall performance of the student in relation to peers on comparable programmes;
- The appropriateness of research methodology used;
- The student's original contribution to knowledge in their chosen discipline or field of study/practice;
- The depth and breadth of coverage of the subject matter concerned;
- The presentation of the thesis/exegesis;
- The quality of the knowledge and skills (both general and subject specific) demonstrated by the student.

When all reports have been received, copies will be distributed to all members of the examination panel. There will be no discussion between the examiners, supervisors and student prior to the oral examination. The Convenor may contact examiners for clarification on any issues in the reports.

If there is no clear agreement on the outcome once the written reports have been completed, a third examiner may be appointed and the thesis sent for further examination. Where this occurs, the examiners reports will be made available to the primary supervisors and Associate Dean (Postgraduate) to ensure that a suitable examiner is appointed in relation to the concerns raised.

Oral Examination Process

Student Pre-meetings

The Convenor is responsible for overseeing the arrangements for an oral examination in conjunction with the GRS. In order to ensure the student is familiar with the format of the examination, a pre-meeting will be held with the Convenor, primary supervisor and student, prior to the oral examination. At this meeting the Convenor will explain the oral examination process to the student and provide a copy of the anonymised examiner reports, the identity of the examiners, will also be disclosed.

If the student has any special circumstances that the examiners should be aware of these should be identified at the pre-meeting and the primary supervisor may submit a Primary Supervisors Report (PGR23) detailing the special circumstances. Such circumstances may include but are not limited to: specific learning difficulties (refer to specific learning difficulties protocol), cultural considerations etc.

Oral Examination

Normally, the oral examination will take place within one to two months of receipt of all the examiners' reports and students are not permitted to defer their oral examination, unless under exceptional circumstances. Students are required to present in person unless there are extenuating circumstances, in such cases the primary supervisor is required to apply to the University Postgraduate Board (UPB) for an exemption. Refer to the *Off Campus Oral Examination Protocol* for more details. The oral examination panel normally consists of a Convenor and all examiners.

The purpose of the oral examination is to:

- Examine the student's original contribution to knowledge in their chosen discipline or field of study/practice;
- Examine the student's critical judgement and understanding.
- Distinguish between the student's contribution and any contributions from other sources to the thesis;
- Enable the student to coherently and competently defend their thesis

The Convenor will chair the oral examination, ensuring that the questions raised in the examiners' reports are put to the student during the examination. The Convenor will determine with the examiners the order of the questions, and who will ask them, prior to the oral examination commencing, along with who will present any absent examiner's questions. The Convenor will not interfere with the questioning and will not comment on the student's thesis.

At the conclusion of the oral examination, the Panel will attempt to reach a consensus on the recommendations:

- 1) If the Panel reaches agreement, the Convenor will complete the PGR13 and write a brief report on the oral examination and submit this report along with the summary recommendation, including the amendments, to the GRS for the next meeting of the UPB.
- 2) If the Examination Panel is unable to reach agreement on the outcome of the examination process, the Convenor will seek approval from the UPB to proceed with an alternative action (including further assessment of the thesis) in order to resolve any impasse.

Recommendations on the outcome and/or amendments to the thesis, either by the examiners or the Examination Panel, will normally be advised to the student and supervisor(s) at the conclusion of the oral examination, and communicated in writing from the Examinations Officer within one week of the examination.

Examination Outcomes

Until a determination has been made on the final recommendation, the recommendations must remain confidential to the GRS and UPB.

The possible outcomes are:

1) That the student be awarded a doctoral degree;

This does allow the student to address any typographical errors and minor editorial matters.

2) That the student be awarded a doctoral degree subject to the student making minor amendments only (as identified by the examiners) to the satisfaction of the primary supervisor or nominee;

These include more than superficial editorial amendments. Normally amendments take up to one month.

3) That the student be awarded the doctoral degree subject to the student making amendments (as identified by the examiners) to the satisfaction of the primary supervisor and/or examiner(s) as appropriate;

These include more than minor amendments and can include rewriting a chapter, reorganising material in the thesis, improving or clarifying an argument, omitting or deleting sections of the thesis. Normally amendments to take up to six months

4) That the student be required to revise and resubmit for further examination within a specified time;

This outcome means the student does not meet the criteria for examination:

- There is limited or no internal consistency;
- More data is required;
- There are methodological issues;
- Multiple chapter changes;
- One or more of the above may include an in-depth re-writing of the literature review.

Refer to the *Revise and Resubmit Protocol* for further details on the resubmission process.

5) That the thesis is not of an acceptable standard and the degree not be awarded;

In this situation the thesis cannot be resubmitted for the same degree. With the permission of the UPB, a revised thesis may be submitted for a lesser degree. Where it is recommended that the degree not be awarded, and no re-examination is permitted, the examiners shall prepare an agreed statement of deficiencies of the thesis, and the reason for their decision, which can be forwarded to the student through the UPB.

Where recommendations and reports are unanimous, the UPB accepts recommendations; where these are not unanimous the Board:

- accepts a majority recommendation (where the majority includes external examiner recommendations); or
- accepts the recommendations of external examiners

Amendment Submission

The student will be advised what amendments are necessary, verbally and in writing. Where clarifications are needed on the required amendments, the student or primary supervisor may contact the GRS for further discussion. When these required amendments have been completed to the satisfaction of the nominee(s) specified in the Convenor's summary, that person will forward a Form PGR14 to the GRS confirming that all the corrections have been completed satisfactorily. The GRS will then notify the UPB and recommend to Academic Board the award of the degree.

For outcome 3 above, amendments can be submitted for sign off no more than twice. Where amendments have failed to be successfully completed after the second submission, the outcome recommendation will be rescinded and the thesis will be deemed as not of an acceptable standard and the degree not awarded.

Outcome

The examination of doctoral theses be thoroughly planned and executed in a timely and effective manner.

Review

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April 2017

Related Protocols

Appointment of Examiners Protocol

Off Campus Oral Examination Protocol

Revise and Resubmit Protocol