DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Ph.D. THESIS DEFENCES: IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

External examiners can choose to attend in person, join the exam by teleconference or send in questions. This document lays out expectations for each of these options.

Expectations of examiners during the oral defence:

**Attending In person:** the examiner will attend the entire defence and sit with the rest of the examining committee until the chair declares that the exam is complete.

**Attending by skype or teleconference:** The senior supervisor should discuss details of videoconferencing with the examiner well in advance of the defence date.

*If the exam is to be held in a room in the Faculty of Science*, the supervisor should email Steve Obadia ([scitech@sfu.ca](mailto:scitech@sfu.ca) or fos-it@sfu.ca) *at least 1 week in advance* to arrange testing with the parties involved. Please send Steve the following information:

1) Date of the defence  
2) The examiner's name and coordinates  
3) What software they would like to use or have available.  
4) The date and time on which we can test the connection with them

*For examinations in Bennett library,*  
a staff person at the library will coordinate and troubleshoot videoconferencing. The Graduate Program Assistant fills out the appropriate webform for booking.

**The examiner should confirm connectivity with SFU on the day of the exam at least 30 min prior to the start time.**

During the examination, the examiner is expected to view the entire proceedings (student presentation and question period) and to ask questions when prompted by the Chair. PhD exams may take as long as 3-3.5 hours.

**Sending written questions only:** The questions from the examiner will be read by the Chair and the committee will be asked to assess the candidate’s answers and ask follow up questions if appropriate.
How the exam will proceed:

1. The Chair announces the name of the Candidate and the title of the thesis to be examined and introduces the Candidate and all members of the Examining Committee.

2. The Chair describes how the exam will be conducted as follows:
   a. The Candidate will be asked to present their research (30-45 minutes for Ph.D. students). After the presentation, there may a 5-minute break.
   b. The Examining Committee will then take turns in asking questions, typically no more than 20-30 minutes per member. Questioning begins with the External Examiner followed by the Internal (or Public) Examiner, the Supervisory Committee members, and concludes with the Senior Supervisor.
   c. The Chair will ask the Examining Committee if they wish to have a second round of questions. If so, Examiners will ask questions in the same order as for the first round. Generally, this round is limited to only a few questions from each examiner.
   d. The Chair will then invite questions from the audience.
   e. After the question period, the Candidate will be asked to withdraw while the Examining Committee deliberates.

3. The Chair announces that recording or transmission of any part of the defence is prohibited unless approved by the Chair, the student, and all members of the examining committee.

4. The examination then unfolds as described by the Chair. If a question from the audience seems to be inappropriate or irrelevant, the Chair may ask the advice of the Examining Committee as to the suitability of the question, allowing the Committee to authorize or refuse public questions.

5. At the end of all questioning, the audience and Candidate are asked to withdraw while the Committee completes its evaluation. The Candidate is asked to wait somewhere nearby.

6. The Examining Committee will be presented with following options:
   1) The thesis was passed as submitted.
   2) The thesis was passed on the condition that minor revisions be completed to the satisfaction of:
      a. the Senior Supervisor. All other members of the Examining Committee sign the Thesis, OR
      b. the Examining Committee. Some members have withheld signatures pending revisions
   3) The Examining Committee deferred making judgment. The thesis was considered to be passable after additional work by the candidate.
      a. A second oral defense will be required, OR
      b. The Examining Committee will reach its decision based on the written, revised thesis. A re-defense is not required.
   4) The thesis failed and the candidate is required to withdraw from the University.

7. Examination Committee members sign the Results, Approval and Recommendation of Degree Form.

8. The Candidate is brought back by the Chair who conveys the Examining Committee's findings. If all is successful, congratulations and handshakes from the Committee members are in order.

9. If appropriate, the chair invites the audience back into the examination room and announces the outcome.