

Regarding: This document describes a general process for planning for and conducting a virtual thesis defense.

From: Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies.

Virtual Thesis Defense

1. The examination chairperson is the host of the thesis defense.

2. Matters immediately preceding the defense.

(i) The Academic Unit may choose to host a pre-defense meeting. This is optional.

A pre-defense meeting allows the examination committee to gather online and discuss matters pertaining to the thesis and/or the defense process. Normally, these types of meetings have been scheduled to start 30 minutes prior to the start time of the defense, and normally continue for 15 minutes. Note that the examination committee members need to be informed of the pre-defense start time.

This recommendation for a pre-defense meeting allows for the Zoom connection to be verified, and for important conversations that may need to take place in advance of the actual defense, such as procedure, sequence of questioning by examination members, a particular line of concern regarding the thesis. It also allows the committee members to agree on the mechanism to notify the examination chairperson that they would like to add a comment or ask a question.

(ii). The Zoom meeting may be initiated ~30 minutes prior to the start of the defense by the examination chairperson. Upon closure of the pre-defense meeting (if one took place) and at the discretion of the examination chairperson, the examination chairperson brings the candidate into the online meeting to allow the candidate to connect and set up.

(iii) Members of the public may be admitted to the Zoom meeting immediately prior to the start of the defense.

3. The virtual examination is to be conducted using the Zoom electronic meeting platform that is supported by the University; it consists of the following elements;

(i) Start the event with an introduction of the candidate and the examination committee

(ii) The candidate provides an oral summary of the highlights of the thesis (~15 - <30 minutes as per Program Guidelines). The candidate may use the share screen function to display slides, or props that are being referred to during the oral summary. While screen-sharing in Zoom, it is recommended that the candidate disable the 'attendee annotation' function. The tab is found on the right-hand upper corner under 'more '.

While it is not encouraged by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS), the candidate may request that the thesis presentation be recorded. The recording is to be limited to the candidate's oral presentation (e.g., their summary of the thesis).

With the exception of the 'in camera' deliberations, the candidate can request a recording of other components of the presentation, it is possible provided:

- they send a request to their graduate program chair (GPC) well in advance of the date of the defense
and
- there is no objection from the GPC or from examination committee members

(iii) Questions by the examination committee are moderated by the examination chairperson.

(iv) Questions by members of the public audience are moderated by the examination chairperson.

(v) An in-camera meeting of the examination committee will be held to deliberate the outcome of the thesis defense. Note: the candidate will be asked to leave the Zoom meeting, as this allows the same Zoom conference to be re-joined when they are invited to do so by the examination chairperson later in the process. In addition, members of the public shall be removed from the Zoom meeting prior to commencing the in-camera deliberations.

(vi) Upon reaching a decision regarding the defense, the examination chairperson invites the candidate back into the Zoom meeting via email. The examination committee informs the candidate of the thesis defense decision and discusses any aspects of that decision with the candidate.

(vii) The examination committee chair signs the new RAD form (Results, Approval & Degree Recommendation). The GPA collects the form and forwards it in sequence to other committee members for their electronic signatures. (See page 2 of the RAD for signature requirements.)

(viii) Prior to the closure of the Zoom conference, the candidate is to be asked if they would like a member or members of the examination committee to participate in a post-defense Zoom call with selected members of the public. Note, the post-defense Zoom conference is intended to be hosted by the candidate. See more information below under #4.

(viii) The thesis defense concludes and the Zoom call is ended.

4. At the candidate's discretion, they may host a pre-arranged a Zoom call with selected members of the audience. The candidate may ask their supervisor and/or any other member of the examination committee to announce the outcome of the thesis defense, and otherwise participate in the student's post-defense Zoom conference.

Graduate Program Assistant (GPA) Responsibilities;

Prior to the Virtual Thesis Defense;

GPA-1. Either the Zoom or BlueJeans platform may be used. As of June 2020, Zoom is supported by SFU IT. Note that BlueJeans is restricted to a maximum of 25 participants.

GPA-2. GPA to collect the email addresses and a back-up telephone number of all examination committee members.

GPA to then send an email to the examination committee instructing each of them to download the electronic platform being used. The email shall also contain the time and date at which the Zoom link will be provided for the thesis defense. Note, if a pre-defense meeting is to take place, clear and specific instructions for that start time are to be included.

GPA-3. GPA to inform the candidate of the Zoom conference link, and an expected time that the examination chairperson will admit them to the defense conference.

GPA-4. GPA to contact the candidate for email addresses of members of the public the candidate would like to invite to the public portion of the thesis defense.

GPA-5. It is current practice that the sponsored email address account for the GPA is included in the University's advertisement of the thesis defense. As such, the GPA is to collect email addresses from members of the public who wish to receive the web-link to the thesis defense. The GPA shall provide this address list to the Graduate Program Committee Chairperson for vetting.

GPA-6. As deemed necessary, to perform a trial electronic meeting, especially if any member of the examination committee has not used Zoom. This must be done in series, with for example, the supervisory committee members either together or individually.

As a reminder, prior to the thesis defense examination, the candidate cannot be in contact with the external examiner. A separate meeting must be used with the candidate alone.

GPA-7. While it is not encouraged by GPS, the student may wish to have the thesis defense recorded. The candidate may request that the recording be limited to their oral presentation (e.g., their summary of the thesis). Please note: other public components of the defence may be recorded provided the candidate makes this request of their GPC well in advance of the date of the defense. The 'in camera' session cannot be recorded. If the request is approved, the GPA must then obtain permission from each member of the examination committee. If there is no objection, the public components of the thesis defense can be recorded by the examination chairperson (e.g., record tab within Zoom). *See instructions for uploading the file to the SFU*

vault at the end of this document. The graduate program assistant, not the student, is not to ask the examination committee if the defence may be recorded.

GPA-8. Review the normal thesis defense process on the Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) website along with any departmental requirements for the examination chairperson. Suggested timeframe;

- (i) ask the following question of all students in the graduate program at end of each term; “Do you plan to defend your thesis in the next term?”
 - (ii) For those intending to defend: well in advance, >8 (PhD) or >6 (M) weeks from an anticipated defense date, instruct the student to circulate the thesis draft to the supervisory committee for feedback. The student is fully expected to address the feedback received and thus revise the thesis.
 - (iii) 7 (PhD) or 5 (M) weeks in advance of the defense date: the GPA is to collect information for the completion of the thesis defense form from the supervisory committee and Graduate Program Chairperson, including a formal CV of the proposed external examiner; and up-to-date Research Ethics forms (if applicable.). The candidate may defend in their location of choice, and if the candidate has asked for and received prior permission to defend in the thesis defense room, book that room once scheduling is permitted.
 - (iv) Prior to 6 (PhD) or 4 (M) weeks in advance of the defense date: the GPA processes the completion of thesis defense form; collects the various approvals and signatures from the examining committee, attaches a formal CV; and up-to-date Research Approvals, such as Ethics and/or Biosafety (if applicable). The student submits the final version of the thesis for the defense.
- Master’s (M) Defenses: The GPA sends the examination paperwork including SFU Research Ethics and Examiner CV (for anyone external to SFU) to gradstidy@sfu.ca. The GPA distributes the thesis to the examination committee.
 - Doctoral (PhD) Defenses: The GPA sends the examination paperwork; full formal CV; SFU Research Ethics and/or Biosafety forms (if applicable); as well as a copy of the final thesis to: defence@sfu.ca. GPS forwards the thesis to the external along with a request to provide a pre-defense report 2 weeks prior to the defense. GPS distributes the thesis to the rest of the examination committee.
 - Advertise the thesis defense in the student’s faculty and unit, and post to the GPS thesis defense calendar.
 - Prepare a new RAD (Results, Approval and Degree Recommendation) form for signature at the defense.
- (v) Doctoral (PhD) Defenses: 2 weeks before the defense, GPS will forward an external assessment of the thesis that has been approved by the Associate Dean/GPS; the GPA is to

distribute the PhD pre-defense report to the supervisory committee members plus the internal examiner.

The day of the defense;

(vi) Assist the examination chairperson in setting up the Zoom call, this includes admitting the examination committee, the student, and members of the public. The Zoom waiting room option should be activated, so the examination chairperson has control over admissions.

(vii) Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) recommends a pre-defense meeting to be scheduled approximately 30 minutes prior to the published start-time of the defense.

(viii) GPA to provide the examination chairperson with a hardcopy or an electronic version of forms for blue-ink signatures, as well as hardcopies or weblinks to procedure and thesis defense outcomes as defined in General Graduate Regulations.

(viii) The examination committee chair signs the new RAD form (Results, Approval & Degree Recommendation). The GPA collects the form and forwards it in sequence to other committee members for their electronic signatures. (See page 2 of the RAD for signature requirements.)

Guidelines and suggestions for the Candidate defending their Thesis

It is recommended that the candidate discuss preparation for the defense with their supervisor, and committee members, well in advance of the date.

Candidate-1. Collect the email addresses of all individuals who wish to be members of the public audience at the defense. Each email address should be added to a word document, separated by commas. Provide this file to the GPA who will be responsible for distributing the Zoom (or BlueJeans) link for the virtual thesis defense.

Candidate-2. Inform each member of the public who will participate in the thesis defense that they may ask questions only during question period and only when invited to do so by the examination chairperson.

Candidate-3. Inform each of them to download Zoom. Ensure each audience member understands how to use the electronic platform, and in particular how to mute/unmute their microphone, as well as raise/lower a virtual hand.

Important: Members of the public must have their microphones on mute, except for during the public question period and only if they wish to ask a question.

Note that members of the public who do not have their microphones on mute may be moved from the conference call at the discretion of the chairperson.

Candidate-4. Inform each member of the audience that they are to request admission to the Zoom waiting room approximately 10 minutes before the scheduled start time of the defense. Each member of the audience will be admitted to the Zoom conference call approximately 5 minutes prior to the start of the thesis defense. No late requests to join the defense conference call will be accepted.

Candidate-5. It is the candidate's responsibility to inform members of the public that the examination will move into a closed, 'in camera' session, once the examination chairperson announces the end of the question period. The candidate and the members of the public will then be removed from the defense conference call because the public portion of the defense has concluded.

Candidate-6. The candidate will be invited to rejoin the Zoom conference after the examination committee has reached a decision. The public is not invited to re-join. After the candidate has been informed of the decision, and the decision has been discussed, the Zoom defense is concluded by the chairperson.

Candidate-7. The candidate may then choose to reconnect with the members of the public audience in a separate Zoom call. It is recommended that the student set up this post-defense Zoom conference in advance of the date of the defense.

Recording and Sharing a Zoom Recording to the Vault

Recording:

1. The chairperson will hit record (button at the bottom of the Zoom screen) - a recorded voice will announce that a recording is in process
2. The chairperson stops the recording – a recorded voice announces the recording has ended.
3. A message will pop up on the screen indicating that the recording is being converted to mp4 (this might also happen at the time the recording is reviewed)

Reviewing the Recording:

PC:

1. Open your Documents– a Zoom folder shows up
2. Open Zoom_0 (you might have to click on the documents in the folder before this conversion happens) to review the recording.

Sharing a Link to the Recording from SFU Vault

1. Sign into SFU Vault (email name and password) and save the document
2. Click Share link
3. Copy the link and send it to the pertinent email addresses
4. The recording can then be downloaded and reviewed