Remote Master’s Thesis Defences and PhD Oral Examinations

2020 Guidelines and Procedures during Pandemic Situation
Preamble

In response to the growing concerns surrounding the COVID-19 virus, the College of Graduate Studies has developed a process to temporarily support total remote participation in Master’s thesis defences and PhD oral examinations (hereafter termed defences).

This temporary remote protocol applies for defences held on or after March 17, 2020.

Remote Defence
Remote defences will be supported by Zoom meetings. The Supervisor must confirm that all defence committee members and the candidate have tested ZOOM and are prepared to examine 48 hours before the scheduled defence by emailing gradtheses.ok@ubc.ca. If any member becomes ill in the period of time between confirmation and the defence, please postpone and notify gradtheses.ok@ubc.ca.

All defences will be remote during the pandemic situation. Remote defences will adhere to standard policy surrounding examiners https://gradstudies.ok.ubc.ca/policies-procedures/program-requirements/#item8.

We recommend connecting from a computer that is hard-wired into an internet connection. If you must connect via Wi-Fi, try to test the connection more than once prior to the defence. As we cannot control the quality of each participant’s internet connection, participants should be prepared for technical issues (eg. poor audio or visual quality, dropped connections) and the Chair should be prepared to uphold the responsibilities as outlined below.

Although defences are normally a public event, remote defences will be closed to best ensure an environment that is free from distraction as well as a stable connection for the student and committee. This is a temporary measure by CoGS to best facilitate defences.
Remote Defence through Zoom

All faculty and staff at UBCO can request to have access to Zoom Pro for all of their web conferencing needs. For details, visit [https://it.ubc.ca/services/teaching-learning-tools/zoom-video-conferencing](https://it.ubc.ca/services/teaching-learning-tools/zoom-video-conferencing).

Zoom provides an easy and reliable platform for video and audio conferencing. This guide is meant to assist in hosting a defence using Zoom Pro.

**Zoom’s key features include:**
- Up to 24 hrs meeting duration
- Video, audio, & screen sharing
- Join/Host meetings via a computer or mobile device
- Participants do not require an account to join meetings
- Screen sharing for presentations and collaboration
- Plug-in for Outlook calendar to allow easy scheduling
- Local Recording
- Chat functions

**Installing Zoom**

To use Zoom you will need to install the Zoom app on your computer or mobile device.

Link to Install Zoom: [https://zoom.us/support/download](https://zoom.us/support/download). You do not need Zoom Pro to join a meeting.

**Requirements for Operating Zoom**

- An internet connection – broadband wired or wireless (3G or 4G/LTE)
- Speakers and a microphone – built-in or USB plug-in or wireless Bluetooth – **PREFERABLY ear phones**
- A webcam or HD webcam - built-in or USB plug-in

**Supported Operating Systems**

Supported operating systems are listed on the Zoom [website](https://zoom.us).

**Scheduling a Zoom Conference Meeting**

There are two different methods to schedule a Zoom Conference Meeting:

- Hosting a meeting using your Personal ID
- Scheduling a meeting in advance

**Inviting Examiners to the Zoom Conference Meeting**

In both scenarios, it’s critical that the supervisor share the meeting ID with anyone invited to the meeting at least **72 hours in advance**. As noted above, confirmation must be sent to CoGS 48 hours in advance of the scheduled defence that ZOOM was tested by all members of the committee and the student. **Zoom piloting does not need to be undertaken simultaneously by the whole committee.**
**Piloting the Connection**

Participants are advised to attempt to connect to a Zoom conference meeting in advance of the defence to ensure their hardware meets the minimum requirements and that their internet connection supports the call. You can join a Zoom test meeting at any time by visiting [https://zoom.us/test](https://zoom.us/test).

To pilot the Zoom Pro connection the Supervisor will need to contact the External Examiner prior to the defence

- The document and exam particulars are not to be discussed. Formality and process can be spoken of, during the piloting of Zoom
Adapted Policy Regarding Remote Defences

Supervisor Responsibilities

• Ensuring the standard paperwork is sent to the Chair of the Defence Committee (Chair) prior to defence
• Hosting a conferencing solution in an appropriate environment that adequately supports the needs of the student and examiners.
• Contact External Examiner to pilot Zoom Pro, as well as remainder of Defence Committee. Piloting can occur collectively, or independently between supervisor and committee members. The student connection should be piloted with supervisor separate from committee.
• Ensuring that piloting of Zoom occurred and that CAMERA will be used. This facilitates the defence when questions or concerns arise. A hand wave can be used when there is a technical issue and/or need to communicate out of the standard question rotation
• When file size is not an obstacle it is recommended that the supervisor have a copy of the presentation to share if committee members ask for a back-up in case connection speed is an obstacle.
• Ensure the student is made aware of services for emotional unloading after the defence. The College of Graduate Studies recognizes the importance of a social network, and activities following the defence for students. This service is encouraged for all students, as even the best and brightest need safe space to convey thoughts and emotions such as “... I can’t believe they asked” and “... I rocked ‘x’ question”. Not all students feel comfortable sharing this with supervisors, and/or have a social network at this time to emotionally debrief. Ensure that the student is aware that The Psychology Clinic is available for pre- and post-defence conversation. They can be contacted at the clinic by e-mail – ipc.ok@ubc.ca or phone – 250-807-8241 (press 1 for reception). The phone and e-mail will be checked throughout the day by the receptionist who will connect with you to answer questions and/or to arrange an appointment with a clinician.

External Examiner Responsibilities

• Submitting intention to attend defence remotely to the supervisor
• Testing the remote connection (all equipment and backups) with the supervisor in advance of the defence
• Submitting questions to the Chair of the Defence at least 48 hours in advance of the defence

Chair Responsibilities

• Communication across all participants must be effectively clear and understandable/audible
• At the beginning the of the defence, the Chair must inform the candidate and all members of the committee of the potential for suspending the defence should technical problems interfere with the integrity of the defence (until the technical problems have been resolved)
• Ensure that all members have video and audio. Video facilitates communication through hand gestures.
• Ensuring that the candidate is alone during their questioning period. This can be done by having the candidate sweep the room with their camera prior to the question period
• The Chair of the Defence must suspend the defence if technical problems interfere with the integrity of the defence and the Chair must gain a mutually agreed upon time to resume at a later time
  o Should technical problems arise the Chair would 1) troubleshoot and attempt to resolve poor connection issues; and 2) when the situation cannot be resolved relatively quickly, where the connection is poor and interferes with the integrity of the defence and/or students ability to proceed unencumbered the Chair suspends the defence
  o Submit a report documenting this to Jennifer.jakobi@ubc.ca

• The Chair of the Defence must guarantee the standards of the defence have been met and the requirements have been satisfied

• Chair submits all paperwork electronically following the defence

  *These requirements are crucial to the fairness and integrity of the oral defence*
The Chair presides over the Defence

- To open proceedings, the Chair introduces all present.
  - The candidate, the Supervisor(s), the Examiners
  - The Chair confirms with their online list and across the committee that no other attendees are listed within the Zoom meeting
  - Chair advises committee to remain muted when student is presenting and when it is not their turn to ask questions
- Examiners are asked to silence and refrain from using electronic devices (cell phones) during the defence (unless in emergencies), and to mute their microphones when they are not speaking.
- The Chair then asks the candidate to leave the meeting so that the Examiners can decide on the following points:
  - The order in which Examiners are to question the candidate;
  - The number of rounds of questioning desired (usually two);
  - The time limit for each of the Examiners’ questioning periods (typically 15-20 minutes in the first round and 5-10 minutes in the second round);
- The Chair and/or supervisor invites the candidate back into the meeting.

The Defence Begins

- The Chair explains to the candidate the sequence of events (e.g. presentation length (according to standard CoGS policy), two rounds of questioning, the order of questioning).
- The presentation screen is shared with the committee
- The defence ensues as per standard practice
  - Chair periodically checks in with all remote members
- When the questioning has finished, the Chair asks the candidate to leave the meeting.

The Thesis Defence Board Deliberates and Renders a Decision

- The Chair invites the comments from defence committee on the thesis, and oral defence.
- The Chair instructs the Examiners of the decisions available to them as per standard in-person Master and PhD Oral Examinations
- The Examiners vote on the acceptability of the thesis and the oral defence by email to Chair, rather than a typical ballot. The Chair should indicate and/or remind committee what the ballot options are, as per standard defences for Masters and PhD.
- The Chair announces the results of the vote
- Following voting the committee must come to a consensus vote on the written thesis and oral defence.
• All standard practices apply to deciding upon the written thesis and oral defence, as outlined in standard in-person defences.

Communicating the Decision to the Candidate

• When the Chair and the Examiners have completed the documentation, the Chair invites the candidate back into the *meeting* and informs them of the result.
• All standard practices apply for discussing student work that follows the oral defence

Following the Defence

• The Chair of the Defence Committee fills in all standard forms that were sent by supervisor, and submits electronically to gradtheses.ok@ubc.ca

• NOTE: no physical copies are needed. Please use electronic signatures. Electronic signatures work best when all parties use them. Placing hand-written signatures and re-scanning the document is NOT be undertaken. All signatures must be gained by the Chair.