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.

Audiences for the student presentation are currently allowed, with some restrictions. Audience members need to be by invitation, and use of the Waiting Room to screen entrance is required to ensure only appropriate audience members are present. We have had instances of Zoom bombing on our campus and need to be careful to provide a supportive environment for our students. Under no circumstances should Zoom links for defences and examinations be publicly announced.
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://ubc.zoom.us/support/download](https://ubc.zoom.us/support/download).

**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 earphones**
- A webcam or HD webcam - built-in or USB plug-in

**Supported Operating Systems**

Supported operating systems are listed on the Zoom [website](https://it.ubc.ca/services/teaching-learning-tools/zoom-video-conferencing).
Scheduling a Zoom Conference Meeting for a Defence/Examination

To set up a meeting go to https://ubc.zoom.us and log in with your credentials. There are two different methods to schedule a Zoom Conference Meeting. Visit https://youtu.be/o-dglfd5g6E for an instructional video on setting up a Zoom meeting.

- **Before clicking on “Schedule a Meeting” go to “Settings” and disable “Private Chat”**. This is to prevent the candidate receiving private messages that the committee can not see.
- Hosting a meeting using your Personal ID – Do not use this option as it is more susceptible to Zoom bombing
- Scheduling a meeting in advance – Use this option and only share the link that is generated with participants. Do not share using social media.
- Start 30 mins prior to scheduled examination start
- Finish 30 mins after scheduled examination completion (+4 hours from start)
- Meeting ID - Generate Automatically
- Enable video for all participants
- Audio – Both computer and telephone, in case of connection issues
- Meeting options
  - Select “Enable Waiting Room”
- Alternative hosts – List the Neutral Chair here so that they can moderate the questioning

Inviting Examiners to the Zoom Conference Meeting

It is critical that the supervisor share the meeting ID and Zoom link 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.

To pilot the Zoom 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 Neutral Chair prior to defence
• Creating the Zoom meeting as per the instructions above
• Work with the student to generate a reasonable invited attendee list and give it to the Neutral Chair prior to the defence.
• Contact External Examiner to pilot Zoom, 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 a 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. If the presentation file is too large, rendering it as a PDF often creates a file of reasonable size.
• 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 start in case of connection issues
Neutral Chair Responsibilities

- Ensuring communication across all participants is clear and understandable/audible
- At the beginning 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
- Ensuring that only invited attendees are allowed into the Zoom meeting from the waiting room (this duty can be delegated if necessary)
- The Chair 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
  - 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 the student’s ability to proceed unencumbered the Chair suspends the defence
  - Submit a report documenting this to peter.simpson@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

The Chair presides over the defence

- Ensure that you have been made a host of the Zoom meeting
- Admit all approved attendees from the Waiting Room
- To open proceedings, the Chair introduces all present.
- The candidate, the Supervisor(s), the Examiners
- Chair advises committee and audience to remain muted when student is presenting and when it is not their turn to ask questions
- Examiners and audience 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 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 proceeds as per standard practice
- Chair periodically checks in with all remote examining committee members to ensure they have not been disconnected
- Between the presentation and the questioning period the Chair ensures that all audience members have left the meeting.
- If the format of the questioning period was not decided prior to the defence, this needs to be handled before the questioning period. Ideally the student would move to the Waiting Room during this discussion. The points that need to be determined are:
  - The order in which Examiners are to question the candidate (Starts with the External Examiner (if relevant), then the University Examiner, then the committee, and finally the supervisor(s))
  - The number of rounds of questioning desired (usually two to three)
  - The time limit for each of the Examiners' questioning periods (typically 15-20 minutes in the first round and 5-10 minutes in the subsequent rounds);
- When the questioning has finished, the Chair asks the candidate to leave the meeting. This can be accomplished by putting the student in the Waiting Room in Zoom. If possible, arrange to text the student when deliberations are complete so that they do not have to stare at a blank screen while waiting.

**The Thesis Defence Board Deliberates and Renders a Decision**

- As with in-person examinations, this process starts with a straw vote on both on both the oral and dissertation/thesis outcomes. It is easiest to use the poll function in Zoom to determine examining committee votes. Do not share the results with the committee on the screen.
- The Chair announces the results of the vote without indicating who voted how.
- 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 deliberation, the Chair invites the candidate back into the meeting by admitting them back in from the waiting room, and informs them of the result. As noted above, it would be easier on the student to arrange to text them so that they do not have to wait in front of their computer.
- All standard practices apply for discussing student work that follows the oral defence.
• All standard practices apply for who signs which forms.

Following the Defence

• The Neutral Chair 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.