

# Master's Thesis Virtual Defense Chair Guidelines



Virtual Master's Defenses are closed examinations and the meeting link must not be shared with anyone but the student and examining committee.

**Important:** the Chair has authority to discontinue a remote connection at any time they judge that it is interfering with the proper conduct of the defense. If one or more participants drop from the connection or lose audio, the defense must be halted until the participant's connection or audio is restored. If the connection or audio cannot be restored after 30 minutes or if the total amount of time lost exceeds 60 minutes, the Chair **must** suspend the defense and notify [gayle.kosh@ubc.ca](mailto:gayle.kosh@ubc.ca) immediately. The Forestry Graduate Program office will communicate with the student and Supervisor regarding rescheduling.

Ensure there is a quorum and that the student understands the examination process. A quorum consists of:

- the Examination Chairperson,
- a Non-departmental Examiner,
- at least two members of the Supervisory Committee (including the Supervisor).

The exam should not exceed two hours. Announce the order in which examiners will ask questions and then ask the student to present an overview of their thesis research, which should not exceed 20 minutes.

Examiners are given 15-20 minutes for questions during the first round, and less (~5 minutes) during the second round. Once the examiners are done, you may ask your own question (if you wish). **Once questioning is complete, ensure the student is removed from the remote connection for the entirety of the *in camera* discussion.** (Please obtain the student's mobile number or email address prior to disconnecting, so that you can contact them to re-join the meeting, once the *in camera* discussion is completed.) Then solicit the opinion of each examiner regarding the student's performance during the exam and the quality of the thesis.

The Chair and Examining Committee must arrive at a decision (**Honours, Pass, or Fail**) based on each examiner's assessment of the content and presentation of the thesis, and the candidate's oral defense. **For Honours designation:** this must be justified in detail within the Chair report. An Honours (H) thesis grade will be inputted on the transcript instead of a Pass (P). Please remember that the Honours designation must be reserved for theses that are *truly outstanding*, based on the following criteria (an Honours thesis is expected to excel in several – but not necessarily all – of these areas):

- novel, original, innovative research
- broad, complex or otherwise difficult topic
- rigorous in design, analysis and interpretation
- thorough, synthetic analysis

- well-written – clear, concise, cogent
- high anticipated impact
- relevant and important to policy or practice
- intellectual independence of student in idea formulation

The intention is that Honours is assigned only to outstanding Masters theses, defined as those within the top 10% of theses defended annually. **Best Master's Thesis Award:** Theses receiving Honours designation will be entered into the annual competition for Best Master's Thesis. A nomination letter from the supervisor will be required (at a later date) for this competition.

The Examining Committee may recommend the thesis as acceptable in the form presented, or request changes be made before signing the Thesis Approval form. The responsibility for ensuring that such changes are made lie with the Supervisor. If a student fails to satisfy the Examining Committee as to their ability, the examination may be adjourned and reconvened within one month. Failure to meet the required standards a second time will result in the student being asked to withdraw from the degree program. A re-examination will be a closed session.

Once a decision has been reached, the Chair will then contact the student (text or email) to re-join the virtual meeting and then announce the decision. Thesis approval forms will have been emailed by the Grad Program office in advance to the Supervisor; please remind the student and supervisor of this.

**The Chair is responsible for conveying the consensus decision of the examining committee in a memo addressed to Yousry El-Kassaby, Forestry Associate Dean, Graduate Studies (email to: [gayle.kosh@ubc.ca](mailto:gayle.kosh@ubc.ca)).** It should include the names of the Examination Committee members, examiners' comments on the thesis and the defense, and any concerns regarding the examination. If thesis revisions are required, please specify the person(s) responsible for approving the final version. **Please also remember that if Honours is being recommended, the nomination must be justified in detail with reference to the criteria outlined above.**

Thank you for performing this important function for the Faculty of Forestry and our graduate students.