

Virtual Master's Defense CHAIR GUIDELINES

PLEASE READ IN ADVANCE

Virtual defenses are held on Zoom. The Chair is required to be competent with managing virtual hosting tasks as outlined [on page 3](#) of this document.

Unless requested by the student, and arranged and approved *in advance* of the exam, virtual Master's Defenses are closed examinations and the meeting link must not be shared with anyone but the student and the examining committee.

If the Chair has given advance agreement to audience participation and received the list of pre-approved attendees from the student/supervisor prior to the defense, then management of that audience within the Zoom meeting is the responsibility of the Chair.

AT THE DEFENSE

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 of the examining committee 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 immediately. The Forestry Graduate Program office will communicate with the student and Supervisor regarding rescheduling.

Ensure there is quorum and that the student understands the examination process. 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 have 15-20 minutes for questions during the first round, and less (~5 minutes) during the second round. Once the examiners are finished, you may ask your own question (if you wish).

Once questioning is complete, ensure the student is put in the “Waiting Room” for the entirety of the *in camera* discussion. (Please obtain the student’s phone number prior to disconnecting, just in case.) 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 indicated on the transcript instead of a Pass (P). Please remember that the Honours designation must be reserved for *truly outstanding* theses, 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 truly 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 considered for the annual Best Master’s Thesis competition. 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 is reached, the Chair will then re-admit the student to re-join the virtual meeting and 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). 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 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!

Zoom Hosting Tasks

Normal practice for virtual defenses is for **the Chair and supervisor to have co-host permissions** in the Zoom meeting (the supervisor acting as back-up, if the Chair encounters any difficulty). Both will be required to familiarize themselves with how to do the following:

- admit people individually from the waiting room,
- lock/unlock the meeting,
- create the breakout room and move people into it,
- end the breakout room and bring everybody back,
- audio and video mute participants who forget to mute themselves.

Protocols for Pre-approved Audience Participation

The student or supervisor must provide the confirmed list of invitees to the Chair no later than 3 working days before the defense. The Chair may only admit the people on the invite list to the Zoom meeting. A maximum of 12 audience members are permitted.

Chair Responsibilities:

1. **Managing the audience.** This includes providing instruction on the following points and ensuring that the audience follows the instructions:
 - The audience will be required to disable video for the majority of the proceedings. This will allow the candidate to view only the Examining Committee members in gallery view on Zoom, thus keeping the video feeds of the committee a reasonable size, and also reducing bandwidth demand.
 - Like committee members, audience members must mute audio throughout, except if they are asking a question at the audience question time.
 - Audience members will be instructed that they are not authorized to record any part of the defense.

2. **Locking the meeting.** Once the defense begins, the Chair is responsible for locking the Zoom meeting. This means no one leaving the meeting will be able to re-join (as is the case for in-person defenses).

3. **In-Camera deliberations.** The Zoom break-out room feature is the best option for in-camera deliberations with an audience. The Chair will create/open the break-out room at the appropriate time, inviting the audience to go into the room; this allows the audience to congratulate the student while the examining committee is deliberating. The audience members can leave the meeting at this point, or wait with the student. The Chair is responsible for returning the committee to the main meeting once deliberations are completed.