Virtual Master's Defense
Planning Information and Protocols

In response to COVID-19, we have developed a process to support virtual master's defenses.   This protocol mirrors the G+PS process for virtual doctoral examinations.

This remote protocol applies to all Forestry master's defenses until further notice.

The usual quorum requirements and other defense planning procedures still apply. Refer to the Forestry Gradbook "Master's Thesis Defense" section for more information.

ACCEPTABLE PLATFORMS
Master's defenses are held on Zoom. Please familiarize yourself with the Privacy information as outlined on UBC's IT information page.

ADVANCE NOTICE & WHO SETS THE VIRTUAL MEETING
Once the student and supervisor have confirmed a defense date and time with all examining committee members, please notify the graduate program office *at least two weeks in advance*. Our staff will then send out (~7 days prior) the formal exam notifications (procedure and protocol) and Zoom meeting link to all participants, and post-defense forms and completion checklist for the student.

Zoom meeting configuration will be as follows:
- Host capabilities assigned to both the Supervisor and the Chair;
- Password required;
- Waiting room enabled;
- All participants able to join before host(s).

CLOSED DEFENSE vs AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION
Although in-person master's defenses are public events, virtual defenses present additional challenges to the student and may be more difficult. Having an audience at a virtual defense also creates potential technical issues and privacy concerns.

In order to ensure a rigorous, fair, and uninterrupted defense, the virtual defense will **not** be open to anyone outside the examining committee, unless approved by the student and all examining committee members *in advance.* Refer to specific procedures and rules further below.

Do not circulate the Zoom URL to anyone but the committee and defending student (and pre-approved invited audience members, if applicable).

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE AND ADVANCE TESTING
The quality of both the audio and visual components will depend greatly on the quality of each participant's internet connection. The recommendation is to connect from a computer that is hard-wired into an internet connection rather than using Wi-Fi.

For optimal system performance, **do not** connect from a remote desktop session.

If there are any concerns about how to use the online platform, refer to the UBC info page. Please test your connection prior to the exam. If you have difficulty with your test session, contact a Forestry IT person at forestry.ithelp@ubc.ca *at least* two days in advance of the examination.

As we cannot control the quality of each participant's internet connection, participants must be prepared for technical issues (e.g. poor audio or visual quality, dropped connections) and the Chair should be prepared to uphold the responsibilities as outlined below.

RESPONSIBLITIES OF THE CHAIR SPECIFIC TO VIRTUAL DEFENSES
The following information is also detailed in the Chair Guidelines document, sent to the student and examining committee in advance:

- Outline the potential technical issues that may occur, encourage patience and kindness towards each other, and describe the Chair's responsibility to suspend the defense if there are technical difficulties that compromise it.*****
- Management of the invited audience (if pre-approved before defense) within the Zoom meeting, including communicating appropriate attendance protocols, moving audience members from waiting/break-out rooms and locking the meeting to prevent uninvited participants.
- Chair the *in camera* discussion of the Examining Committee and convey the outcome to the student.
    a. Ensure the student is put in waiting room for the entirety of the *in camera* discussion.
    b. Once the *in camera* discussion is completed, then admit the student back in so that they can re-join the meeting. For back-up, ensure that the student's mobile number or email address is known prior to disconnecting.

*The Chair has the authority to discontinue a remote connection at any time they judge that it is interfering with the proper conduct of the examination. If one or more examining committee members 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 their Supervisor regarding rescheduling the defense.

August 2020

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION RULES

These rules mirror the protocol developed by G+PS for doctoral examinations, which were prepared following advice from UBC IT and the Office of the University Counsel.

**Disclaimer: it is not possible to prevent members of the audience who are not UBC faculty or staff from audio or video recording the defense without permission. If you have concerns about privacy or confidentiality of information in the defense, we strongly recommend you do not invite an audience.

STEPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR AUDIENCE ATTENDANCE

1. Obtain Consent of Student, Examining Committee and Chair

Examinations in a virtual environment may pose additional stresses or challenges for the student and committee. Because the inclusion of an audience can potentially increase these stresses, an audience may only be included if the student and committee all agree. Students, in particular, must always be offered the opportunity to refuse an audience without feeling pressure to have one.

The Chair is responsible for management of the audience within the Zoom meeting and therefore an audience is only permitted if the appointed Chair agrees.

At least one week in advance of the defense, **the supervisor is responsible** for securing from the student and all examining committee members their agreement (via email confirmation) to allow an audience. This allows the Chair time to familiarize themselves with the necessary protocols in advance.

2. Audience by Invitation only

Defenses must not be advertised outside the UBC community. The Zoom link must not be shared on social media.

Audiences, on the advice of UBC University Counsel's Office, should be limited to the following groups of people:

- Faculty and staff of UBC,
- Current UBC students,
- External scholars or other experts invited by the Chair,
- Other individuals invited by the student.

Forestry Graduate Program staff will book the Zoom meeting and distribute the defense details approximately seven business days prior to the defense. At that point, the student or supervisor may send the meeting details to the list of invitees.

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 must only admit the people on the invite list to the Defense Zoom Meeting. A maximum of 12 audience members is permitted.

3. Instructions to the Audience

The Chair is responsible for 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.

4. 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 rejoin (as is the case for in-person defenses).

5. Hosting the meeting

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 in advance of the defense on 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.

6. 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.

August 2020