

FGSR Policy and Procedures on Master Thesis and PhD Dissertation Defenses

Approved by FGSR Council on 24 April 2013

The processes and procedures around Master Thesis and PhD Dissertation defenses are prescribed in a number of existing Academic Regulations, FGSR Policies, FGSR procedural guidelines, and individual graduate program procedures and guidelines. This document summarizes/references those Academic Regulations and FGSR Policies/Procedures, as well as addresses additional issues concerning Master Thesis and PhD Dissertation requirements, processes and procedures.

Scope:

Processes and procedures around PhD Dissertations are the responsibility of the FGSR. For Master theses, individual program have significant oversight (and responsibility) for processes and procedures, but these must adhere to the Academic Regulations set out in the Graduate Academic Calendar and they should follow policies/recommendations/guidelines set out by the FGSR. Master programs also have the choice of engaging the FGSR in oversight of thesis defenses, or handle the defense process themselves within the program. This Policy does not address Master Research Project (MRPs). The content, process and procedures around MRPs and their examination are defined by the individual graduate programs (e.g. MBA, MFIN).

Academic Regulations related to Master Thesis and PhD Dissertation Defenses:

- **Language of Instruction and Examination** (Regulation #15 in the 2012-13 Graduate Academic Calendar):
 - The language of instruction for all graduate programs is English. Likewise, all theses will be written and examined in English. The only exception to this policy is where the nature of the scholarly topic requires that the thesis be written, in whole or in part, in a language other than English. The rare exceptions for use of a language other than English in a thesis must have approval in writing from the student's supervisor, the Program Coordinator, and the Dean of the FGSR. The Supervisor and Program Coordinator must also ensure that qualified thesis examiners, fluent in the language presented in the thesis, are available for examination of the thesis. Even if the thesis is written, in whole or in part, in a language other than English, the thesis examination will be carried out in English.
- **Program Requirements** (with reference to thesis/dissertation procedures in Regulation #16 (d) in the 2012-13 Graduate Academic Calendar):
 - Where required, a student shall submit a thesis on a subject approved by the Program Committee in which research has been conducted under the direction of a supervisor appointed by the appropriate Program Committee. An oral defense in the presence of

- an Examining Committee appointed by the Program Coordinator and the Dean of the FGSR is mandatory.
- The minimum requirements for the composition of the Examining Committees for Master Theses are:
 - (i) the Thesis Supervisor
 - (ii) an examiner who may have been previously involved in the supervision of the student's thesis research
 - (iii) an "external" examiner who has not been previously involved in the supervision of the student's thesis research; the external examiner must hold a Master's degree or equivalent. Examples of equivalent status may be a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.), a lawyer (L.L.B.), or professional Engineer (P.Eng.) with expertise and research experience in the thesis subject.
 - (iv) a neutral Chair (normally the Program Coordinator or the Dean of the FGSR or their delegates)
 - The minimum requirements for the composition of the Examining Committees for PhD Theses/Dissertations are:
 - (i) the Thesis Supervisor
 - (ii) two examiners who may have been previously involved in the supervision of the student's thesis research
 - (iii) an "external" examiner who has not been previously involved in the supervision of the student's thesis research; the external examiner must hold a PhD, be an expert in the thesis topic, be external to Saint Mary's University, and not be in a conflict of interest with either the PhD candidate or his/her supervisors.
 - (iv) a neutral Chair (normally the Program Coordinator or the Dean of the FGSR or their delegates)

FGSR Policies related to Master Thesis and PhD Dissertation Defenses (available on the FGSR website):

- PhD Thesis Defense Procedures - Defense Agenda
- PhD Thesis Defense - Outcomes

FGSR procedure documents related to Master Thesis and PhD Dissertation Defenses (available on the FGSR website):

- Thesis Defense Procedures - Behind the Scenes
- Submitting the Completed, Revised Thesis after the Defense

FGSR forms related to Master Thesis and PhD Dissertation Defenses (available on the FGSR website):

- External Examiner Nomination Form (Masters and PhD)

Other University and FGSR Policies and Academic Regulations related to Master Thesis and PhD Dissertation Defenses (available on the University's Policy and Procedures website):

- Graduate Academic Regulation #33 - Academic Integrity
- Conflict of Interest in Research
- Senate Policy on Research Integrity in Research and Scholarship

Additional Master Thesis and PhD Dissertation defense requirements, processes and procedures defined by this Policy:

- Attendance at Master Theses defenses:
 - Normally the Candidate must be present in person at the defense. Under exceptional circumstances, the candidate may be given permission to attend the defense by video conferencing (see below).
 - At a minimum the Supervisor, one other member of the Examining Committee, and the neutral Chair must be present in person at the defense.
 - An absent Examiner must, prior to the defense, submit a report on the thesis, provide questions to ask the candidate at the defense, and submit a recommendation on the acceptability of the thesis as a written document. The neutral Chair will ask the questions submitted by the absent Examiner, but the assessment of the quality of the answers will be assessed by the other examiners present at the defense.
- Attendance of Candidates at a Master Theses defenses by video-conferencing:
 - Upon request, and only under exceptional circumstance and with the support of the Examining Committee, a candidate may be given permission by the Coordinator of the Graduate Program to attend the defense by video conference (attendance solely by teleconference is not acceptable).
 - If a Master Thesis candidate is given permission to attend the defense by video-conferencing, the candidate must recognize that attendance by video-conferencing is a privilege and not a right. It is the Candidate's responsibility to ensure that adequate video conferencing technology is in place.
 - Attendance of a candidate by video-conferencing will not be considered grounds for appeal of the outcome of a defense.
 - If a Master Thesis candidate is given permission to attend the defense by video-conferencing, but the video-conferencing technology fails during the defense (the Chair will make the decision on when the technology has failed), the defense will be reschedule for a later date.
- Attendance at PhD Theses/Dissertation defenses:
 - The candidate must be present in person at the defense.
 - All members of the Examining Committee as defined in Regulation #16 (d) must be present at the defense. Normally only one member of the Examining Committee may be present by two-way video conferencing; all others must be present in person.