5.4 Examination of the Thesis and the Candidate

The Tasks of the Examiners are to:

- Determine if the thesis and the candidate meet recognized scholarly standards for the degree
- Appraise the thesis for content — its underlying assumptions, methodology, findings, and scholarly significance of the findings
- Appraise the thesis for form — its organization, presentation of graphs, tables, and illustrative materials, and its use of accepted conventions for addressing the scholarly literature
- Evaluate the candidate’s skill and knowledge in responding to questions and defending the thesis
- Ensure authenticity of Authorship

The Candidate’s Graduate Program distributes to the Examiners a package consisting of:

- The Thesis
- The “Thesis Evaluation Form”
- “Guidelines for Examiners”
- UWO’s Thesis Format Specifications

The Examiners do their work in a two-stage process.

5.4.1 Stage One: The Preliminary (or Pre-Examination) Evaluation of the Thesis

Each Examiner must independently and without consultation, decide whether the thesis meets the scholarly standards for the discipline and degree in form and content.

This evaluation is recorded on the “Master Thesis Evaluation Form”.

A thesis that requires only minor revisions may be judged acceptable. Minor revisions include typographical or grammatical errors; errors in calculation, labels for tables, nomenclature, and bibliographic form; and the need for minor clarifications of content.

A thesis that requires major revisions in form and or content before it can meet requisite scholarly standards must be judged unacceptable. Major revisions include, for example, faulty conceptualization, inappropriate or faulty use of research methodology, misinterpretation or misuse of data, neglect of relevant material, illogical argument, unfounded conclusions, seriously flawed writing and presentation, and failure to engage the scholarly context. The need for the rewriting of substantial portions of the thesis to make it acceptable cannot be construed as “minor.” As a rule of thumb, revisions requiring more than two weeks to complete cannot be construed as “minor.”

The completed “Thesis Evaluation Forms” are confidential to the candidate’s Graduate Chair and the Dean of Graduate Studies.

The Graduate Program must receive the completed forms from all the Examiners at least two working days before the date scheduled for the candidate’s Thesis Examination.

If the Thesis Content and Thesis Form is Judged Acceptable

A majority of the Examiners must judge that both the thesis content and thesis form are acceptable to allow Stage Two: The Thesis Examination to proceed. An examiner’s preliminary judgment of acceptability is provisional. It does not preclude the examiner changing his/her judgment to finding the thesis unacceptable at the Thesis Examination.
If the Thesis Content and Thesis Form is Judged Unacceptable

If there is not a majority of Examiners who judge the thesis to be acceptable in both content and form, the Program cancels the Thesis Examination, and the Dean of Graduate Studies appoints a Re-Submission Hearing Committee which reviews the case and decides whether or not to allow the candidate to prepare a revised version of the thesis for examination and, if so, the time limit for doing so.

- Where the Re-Submission Hearing Committee* agrees that the candidate should be given the opportunity to revise the thesis to bring it to the acceptable scholarly standard for examination, the committee first establishes a new Thesis Examination date, no earlier than six weeks after the date for the originally scheduled examination. Normally the same Examiners assess the re-submitted thesis. The Chair of the committee provides the Supervisor(s) and student written notification of the decision and the changes suggested by the committee.

* The Re-Submission Hearing Committee is chaired by the Graduate Chair of the program concerned and includes the three Examiners, the Supervisor, and others specified in the procedures of the program concerned. Note: The candidate does not attend the committee meeting.

- The Examination must then proceed as listed in Section 5.1 The Program Requests a Thesis Examination for the re-submitted thesis.
- Whether or not the re-submitted thesis is found acceptable, the candidate proceeds to Stage Two: The Thesis Examination.

5.4.2 Stage Two: The Thesis Examination

The Chair presides over the Thesis Examination

1) To open proceedings, the Chair introduces all present.

2) The Chair then asks the candidate and visitors to leave the room so that the Examiners can decide on the following points:
   - the order in which Examiners are to question the candidate;
   - the number of rounds of questioning desired (usually two);
   - the time limit for each of the Examiners’ questioning periods (typically 15-20 minutes in the first round and 5-10 minutes in the second round).

3) The Chair gives to each examiner a “Master’s Thesis Examination Evaluation Form” (to be completed when the questioning of the candidate is over and the candidate has left the room). The Chair advises the Examiners that their evaluations on acceptability of the thesis content and thesis form should be made independent of the assessment made in Stage One: The Preliminary Evaluation of the Thesis.

4) The Chair invites the candidate and visitors back into the room.

The Examination Begins

1) The Chair explains to the candidate the sequence of events (e.g. two rounds of questioning, order of questioning).

2) The Examiners question the candidate in the agreed-upon order, with the Chair holding them to the agreed-upon time limit.

3) When the Examiners have completed their rounds of questions, the Chair invites questions from other FGS members in attendance. The supervisor(s) may not question the candidate.

4) When the questioning has finished, the Chair asks the candidate and visitors, but not the supervisor(s), to leave the room.

Who Attends the Master’s Thesis Examination:

- The candidate, the Supervisor(s), the Program Examiners, and the University Examiner must attend the Thesis Examination.
- Any member of FGS may attend as a visitor by having a written request to attend approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies seven days before the examination date.
- The Chair will refuse attendance to all others.
The Thesis Examination Board Deliberates and Renders a Decision

1) The Chair invites the supervisor(s) to comment on the candidate, the thesis, and aspects of the oral defence.
   - In rare cases where the thesis has been submitted without the supervisor(s)’s approval, the Chair informs the Examiners of the supervisor(s)’s written reasons for withholding approval, before inviting the supervisor(s) to speak.

2) At the Chair’s invitation, the Examiners alone discuss the thesis and the oral defence.

3) The Chair instructs the Examiners once again about the difference between minor revision and major revision and reminds Examiners that a thesis cannot be judged acceptable if a majority of the Examiners require what he/she, as Chair, has indicated are major revisions. (See Section 5.4.1 Stage One: The Preliminary Evaluation of the Thesis)

4) The Examiners vote on the acceptability of the thesis and the oral defence by completing their “Master’s Thesis Examination Evaluation Form.” These forms are confidential, only to be seen and recorded by the Chair.

   The Examiners must decide whether the thesis form and thesis content and oral defence were acceptable or unacceptable.

   For each of thesis form and thesis content, they must find the thesis:
   - acceptable as it stands, or
   - acceptable with minor revisions, or
   - unacceptable
     - (If the examiner judges that major revision is necessary, then he/she must find the thesis unacceptable. For a definition of minor and major revisions See Section 5.4.1 The Preliminary Evaluation of the Thesis)

   For the oral defence, the Examiners must determine if the candidate’s responses to questions and general level of scholarly knowledge meets the standard for the Master’s degree and is consistent with the contents of the thesis.

5) The Chair collects the completed forms and tallies the results.

6) The Chair announces the results of the vote on the acceptability of the content and form of the thesis and of the oral defence and asks if further discussion is needed. In rare instances the Chair may allow Examiners to change their votes.

7) The Chair pronounces Thesis Examination Board’s decision.

8) If a majority of the Examiners finds that each of the thesis content, thesis form, and the oral defence are acceptable, the candidate passes the Thesis Examination. The Examiners’ approval may be conditional on the candidate successfully completing minor revisions to the thesis content or thesis form.

   When the Thesis Examination is Successful

1) On the “Master’s Thesis Examination – Chair Report” the Chair
   - Reports the Thesis Examination Board’s decision for the Thesis Examination on page 1.
   - With the assistance of the Examiners, lists the minor revisions, if any, required by a majority of the Examiners on page 2. Note: Infrequent typographical and grammatical errors do not constitute “minor revisions,” but must be corrected before final submission of the thesis.
If there is a determination that the thesis requires minor revisions, ensures that the supervisor(s) will withhold his/her signature from the “Certificate of Examination” until the required revisions have been made.

2) The Chair dates and signs both pages of the Chair’s Report.

3) The Chair, the Examiners and the supervisor(s) sign the Certificate of Examination, except in cases where supervisor(s) withholds his/her signature.

4) The Chair communicates the positive decision to the candidate. (See Communicating the Decision to the Candidate)

When the Thesis Examination is Unsuccessful

The Chair completes the “Master’s Thesis Examination – Chair Report.” In consultation with the Examiners, the Chair states (on page 2 of the report) why the thesis and/or the oral defence was unacceptable.

If the Thesis Examination failed because the thesis content and/or thesis form was unacceptable, the Dean of Graduate Studies refers the case to a Re-Submission Hearing Committee.

- Where the Re-Submission Hearing Committee agrees that the candidate should be given the opportunity to revise the thesis to bring it to the acceptable scholarly standard for examination, the committee first establishes a new Thesis Examination date. Normally the same Examiners examine the re-submitted thesis. The Chair of the hearing notifies the student in writing of the decision.
- The Examination must then proceed as listed in Section 5.1 The Program Requests a Thesis Examination above for the re-submitted thesis.
- Whether or not the re-submitted thesis is found acceptable, the candidate proceeds to stage two — the Thesis Examination.

If the Thesis Examination failed solely because of an unacceptable oral defence, the Dean of Graduate Studies refers the case to a Re-examination Hearing Committee.

- Where the Re-Examination Hearing Committee* decides that a second Thesis Examination is appropriate, it should be held, preferably with the same Thesis Examination Board, within a time period determined by the committee. The Chair of the hearing will notify the student in writing of the decision.
  * Re-Examination Hearing Committee is chaired by the Graduate Chair of the program concerned and includes the three Examiners, the supervisor, and others specified in the procedures of the program concerned. Note: The candidate does not attend the committee meeting.

If the candidate has already been through a Re-Submission Hearing Committee or Re-Examination Hearing Committee, then the Thesis Examination Board’s decision is final. The candidate has no further opportunity for re-submission and/or re-examination.

Communicating the Decision to the Candidate

When the Chair and the Examiners have completed the documentation, the Chair invites only the candidate back into the room and informs him/her of the result and its implications for the candidate’s status in the program.

- Following a positive decision that is subject to minor revisions, the supervisor(s) must meet with the candidate, to ensure that he/she understands the minor revisions required by the Thesis Examination Board.

Following the Examination

The Chair of the examination returns all forms to the Program’s Graduate Chair.