

# Master's Thesis Defense Chair Guidelines

To prevent disruptions, please inform the audience that they are to leave at the start if they cannot stay for the entire exam. It should also be requested that all cell phones be turned off.

Ensure that 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).

Normally, only those individuals physically present in the examination room can be counted for quorum. It is permissible for a third member of the Supervisory Committee to attend the defense remotely.

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) and invite questions from the audience. Once questioning is complete, ask the student and audience to leave the examination room. 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 recall the student and announce the decision. Please remember to give the student the completion gift and thesis approval forms provided by the Grad Program office.

**The Chair is responsible for conveying the consensus decision of the examining committee in a memo addressed to Shannon Hagerman, Forestry Associate Dean, Graduate Studies (email to: [julie.morey@ubc.ca](mailto:julie.morey@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.