UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Thesis Examination Administrative Processes

The University of Calgary's regulations for thesis examinations ("the Regulations") governs the conduct of graduate examinations at the University of Calgary (see *Academic Calendar* - *Graduate Regulations*). This document establishes processes associated with the conduct of graduate examinations under the *Regulations*.

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A. SCHEDULING THE EXAM

Communication of Examination Requirements to Students

Official program documents must provide students with information about the precise nature and form of program examinations.

The Supervisor is responsible for scheduling the examination once they have determined that the entire thesis meets the minimum standard. This includes:

- ensuring that all members of the supervisory committee have reviewed the student's research and/or draft, as established by program guidelines, and providing written consent to that effect (may be in the form of emails). The written consent must be forwarded to the graduate program for record-keeping purposes.
- contacting examiners to determine their availability and their preference for in-person vs. remote examinations.
- forwarding the time and date to the Graduate Program Administrator (GPA).

Under no circumstances are students permitted to make arrangements for an examination.

The Neutral Chair is appointed by the Graduate Program Director to preside over the thesis oral examination, and reports the results to the student.

The Internal Examiner normally must meet the criteria specified in the Thesis and Thesis Examination Regulations (see *Academic Calendar* - *Graduate Regulations*). The graduate program may require the internal examiner to be external to the program. If the proposed examiner does not meet one or more criteria set out in the Regulations, a memo explaining the circumstances should accompany the Notice of Thesis Examination form.

Request for External Examiners

The Graduate Program Director must submit a Recommendation of External Examiner form, with CV, to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) at least **six weeks** before the proposed date of the examination (see External Examiner Approval for instructions on how to generate the form). If the proposed examiner does not meet one or more criteria set out in the *Regulations,* a memo explaining the circumstances should accompany the recommendation. The request must be submitted to: gpoform@ucalgary.ca

Non-Academic Staff Members on Examination Committees

Persons who are not academic staff members of the University of Calgary may be approved to serve on thesis oral examination committees. The Graduate Program Director must recommend this appointment to FGS, accompanied by the proposed examiner's *curriculum vitae* and a memo providing a rationale for the inclusion of this individual.

Remote Examinations

Telephone backup must be available for remote examinations. Information about who is participating remotely must be included on the Notice of Thesis Oral Examination.

Notice of Thesis Oral Examination

The GPA must submit the Notice of Thesis Oral Examination form to FGS (gpoform@ucalgary.ca) at least **four weeks** prior to the examination for approval of the membership of the examination committee.

Posting of the Notice of Thesis Oral Examination

When possible, the Notice of Thesis Oral Examination (excluding ID number and signatures) must be posted at least two weeks before the date of the examination. The Graduate Program Director or Graduate Program Administrator must ensure that copies of the notice are distributed to the student and examination committee.

Rescheduling the Examination

Minor changes

Programs are allowed to postpone the examination by up to two weeks after the scheduled date. Minor changes in the scheduling of examination (e.g., for illness or weather) must be updated in the PeopleSoft system.

Major changes

Postponements of more than two weeks from the original date can be considered in exceptional circumstances and will require approval from FGS. A request, including a revised notice, should be made as early as possible to: gpoform@ucalgary.ca

B. ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Prior to the oral examination, if an examiner suspects that academic misconduct has occurred in the thesis, they must contact the Dean of Graduate Studies immediately (deangrad@ucalgary.ca). The examination will then be suspended until such time as the Dean (or designate) is able to determine whether academic misconduct has occurred and what penalties will be applied. Depending on the determination, the examination may proceed as scheduled, be rescheduled, or be cancelled. If an examiner alleges academic misconduct during an examination or in the post-exam discussion, the Neutral Chair must suspend the examination or discussion and contact FGS immediately (403-220-4938).

C. EXAMINATION PROCESSES

Before the Examination Begins

The candidate must distribute copies of the thesis to examiners no later than **three weeks prior to the examination date.** Once the thesis has been distributed, the examination has begun, and there should be no discussion of the substance or quality of the thesis among examiners or between examiners and the candidate.

Each examiner is required to complete and sign the official Examiner's Assessment of Thesis. The oral examination cannot proceed until all examiners' assessments are submitted to the Neutral Chair. The assessments are confidential: they are not to be made available to the student or to the examination committee before the final recommendation of the examination committee.

- In the case of a passed oral examination: the official examiners' assessments will be made available to the student electronically.
- In the case of a failed oral examination the official examiners' assessments will be made available to the student or the examination committee **after** the Dean of Graduate Studies makes their final decision.

The Examination

The student may present a brief (up to 15 minutes) opening summary of the thesis, introducing the research and summarizing its significance. Depending on program regulations, the 15-minute presentation will be in addition to the two- hour examination time.

Indigenous students and students working with Indigenous Elders or Knowledge Keepers are encouraged to incorporate Indigenous ceremonies and/or traditions into their examinations. Those who decide to do so should indicate this on the Notice of Thesis Oral Examination and should complete the Indigenous Cultural Protocol Plan.

Absent Examiner

If any examiner cannot attend the examination, the examination cannot proceed until FGS is notified and an approval to proceed is received. Refer to the *Guidelines for Neutral Chair* for further information.

Questions to the Candidate

The oral examination is a formal examination, not an informal discussion with the candidate. Each examiner will have at least two opportunities to question the candidate, beginning with the external examiner (doctoral) or internal examiner (master's).

Questions to the candidate should be relevant to the subject matter of the thesis and should be clear and succinct. The student should be given reasonable time to answer. If the student has understood the question but cannot answer, the examiner should pass to another question and not attempt to extract an answer by prolonged interrogation.

The Neutral Chair should guard against any tendency of examiners to interact with each other instead of concentrating on the examination of the candidate. Examiners' comments on the thesis should not be discussed at the oral examination.

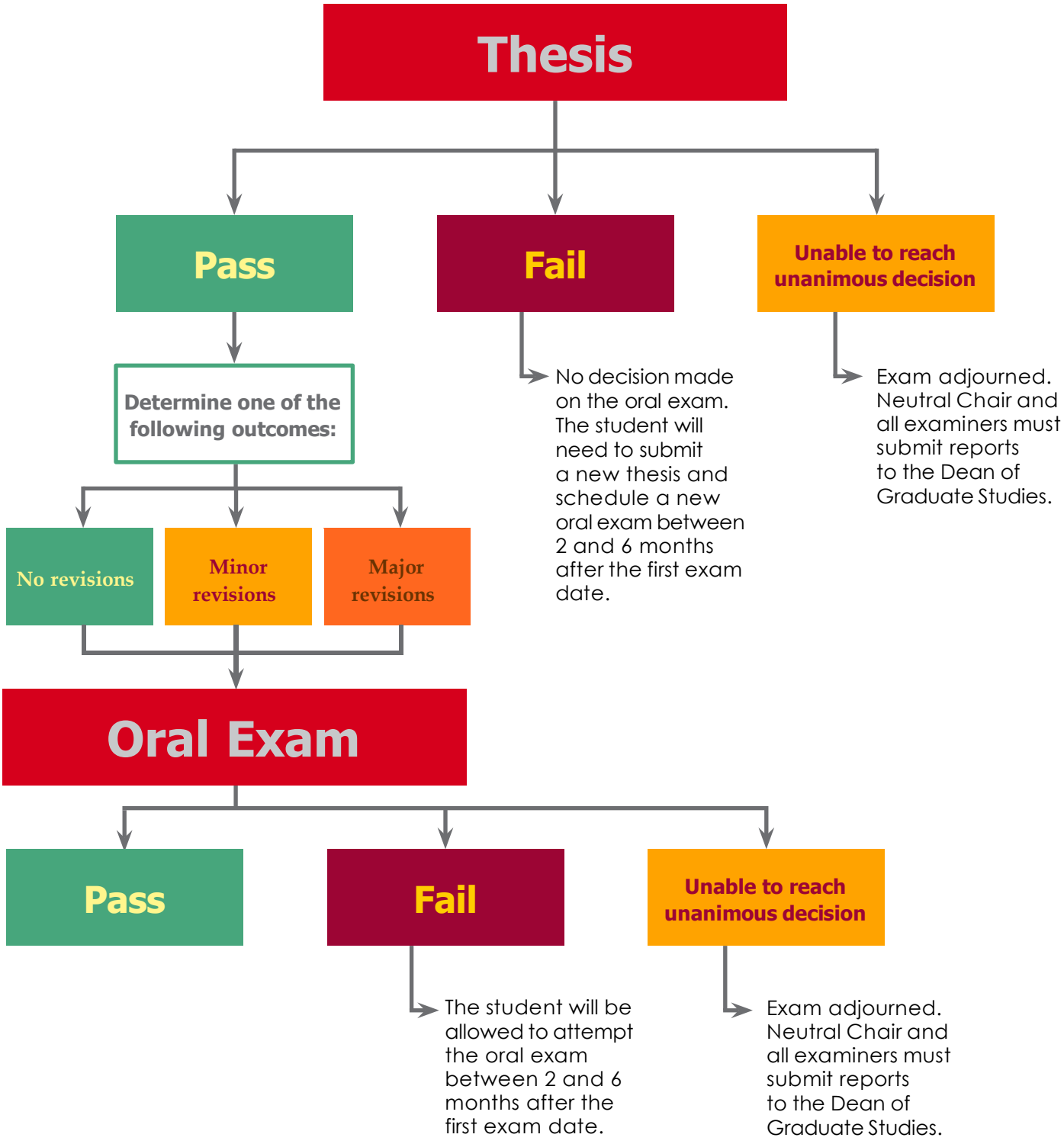
D. POST THESIS ORAL EXAMINATION PROCESSES

At the end of the thesis oral examination, everyone except the Neutral Chair, the members of the examination committee, the department/program head or designate and the Dean of Graduate Studies and/or Dean's representative, is required to leave the room.

Before any discussion, the Neutral Chair conducts a non-binding straw vote, indicating "pass" or "fail" on each of the thesis and oral defence. Refer to the *Guidelines for Neutral Chair* for managing remote examinations. The non-binding straw vote provides the committee with a frame of opinion to discuss the student's performance.

After reporting the outcome of the straw vote, the Neutral Chair will facilitate a discussion among the examiners. The department/program head and the Dean of Graduate Studies, or their representatives, may participate although they have no vote. Examiners must discuss and agree to the scope and content of revisions during the in-camera discussion. may provide the student a list of any suggested revisions.

Thesis Oral Examination Outcomes Flowchart



Recommendation for the Examination Outcomes

D.1 Thesis outcome is a "Pass"

If the unanimous final decision is that the thesis should pass, the committee must indicate whether the thesis is accepted with:

- **No revisions**
- **Minor Revisions:** stylistic changes and/or minor additions or clarification; must be correctable within one month from the date of the examination. Only the Supervisor withholds signature until these are complete.
- **Major Revisions:** typically involve clarification of textual materials, the qualification of research findings, conclusions, or limited additions to the text. Major Revisions normally must be completed and submitted to FGS within six months from the date of examination. If required, students may apply for extensions to program. One or more examiners may withhold their signature until satisfied with the revisions. The committee is responsible for determining the appropriate category of required changes. In the case of major revisions, any examiner who requires substantive changes must raise them at the discussion. The committee members must agree on the content and scope of the revisions during the discussion. Any committee member who would like to oversee particular revisions may withhold their signature on the Thesis Approval Form.

  If any concerns arise over the nature of the revisions, students should consult with the Graduate Program Director, and then the Associate Dean, if necessary.

The committee must also indicate the outcome of the **oral examination**:

- **Unanimous Pass**
- **Fail:** If the examining committee unanimously determines that the oral thesis examination is not acceptable, it recommends a failed oral defence to the Dean of Graduate Studies. The final decision will be at the discretion of the Dean of Graduate Studies. Should the Dean of Graduate Studies uphold the recommendation of "fail," the candidate will be allowed a second, final attempt to present an acceptable oral defence of the thesis within six months of the first examination.
- **Failure to reach unanimous decision** (see section D.3)

D.2 Thesis outcome is a "fail"

If the examining committee unanimously determines that the underlying research is not acceptable, then the examination committee recommends a Unanimous Fail on the thesis to the Dean of graduate studies. The final decision will be at the discretion of the Dean of Graduate Studies. Should the Dean of Graduate Studies uphold the recommendation of "fail," the candidate will have a second opportunity to present and defend an acceptable thesis. **No judgment should be made on the oral defence, because the new thesis will need to be defended.**

In the case of a failed thesis, only one re-submission will be allowed and a new defence will be required.The second oral examination will be scheduled and normally heard by the original examination committee no sooner than two months, and no later than six months from the date of the first examination. Any necessary revisions to the thesis must be completed by the candidate and approved by the committee before the second oral examination is scheduled.

D.3 Failure to reach unanimous decision on the thesis or the oral examination

If the examiners are unable to achieve unanimity regarding one or both components, there must be no further discussion regarding that component of the examination and the Neutral Chair must select "Failure to Reach Unanimous Decision" on the Final Thesis Oral Examination form and immediately inform FGS of "lack of unanimity." The final decision will be at the discretion of the Dean of Graduate Studies, who, before rendering a decision, may consult with anyone involved in the post-examination deliberation.

Reports from the examination committee

For either a unanimous decision to fail the thesis, oral defence or a lack of unanimity, the following reports must be submitted to gpoform@ucalgary.ca within **five working days**:

1) **The Neutral Chair** must submit a written report to the Dean of Graduate Studies, describing the examination procedures and copy it to the Graduate Program Director.

2) **Each Examination Committee member** must provide a confidential written report to the Dean of Graduate Studies explaining the reasons for his/her recommendation and copy it to the Graduate Program Director and the Supervisor.

3) **The Graduate Program Director**, after consultation with the supervisor, summarizes the essential points of the above post exam reports in one single written report and forwards this to the gpoform e-mail address. The GPD should hold off on sharing this report with the student until a final decision on the exam has been made by FGS.

E. COMPLETION OF FINAL THESIS ORAL EXAMINATION FORM

In all cases, the GPA must submit the Final Thesis Oral Examination form along with the examiners' assessments to FGS (gradform@ucalgary.ca) **within 24 hours** of the examination.

Dean's Action in Lack of Unanimity

When the Neutral Chair of a thesis oral examination reports a failure to reach unanimous decision, the Dean of Graduate Studies may consult with anyone involved in the post-examination deliberation and the student before rendering a decision.

F. SUBMISSION OF THESIS

Pass with no revision

If no minor revisions are requested and the thesis is passed as defended, all examiners must sign the Thesis Approval form. The signed Thesis Approval form must be retained by the student as part of the supporting documents when submitting the final approved thesis to FGS. The student must submit the thesis to the FGS within **five days** of the examination.

Pass with minor/major revisions

The supervisor/program must retain the original Thesis Approval form when revisions are requested. Once satisfactory revisions have been made, the form must be signed and returned to the student for inclusion in thesis submission.

For minor revisions: the student must submit the revised thesis to FGS within **one month** of the examination.

For major revisions: the student must submit the revised thesis to FGS within **six months** of the examination.

G. SECOND EXAMINATIONS

The second examination must be conducted under the procedures described in the aforementioned sections. A student who fails any component (thesis or oral) will be required to withdraw.

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