

Master's Thesis Defence: Instructions for Chairs

Asian Studies Graduate Program, University of British Columbia

The chair has two important roles in the Master's defence: to moderate the examination proceedings and to write a brief Chair's Report. This report includes the student's grade, committee members' names, and a brief comment about the proceedings. Email this report to the Graduate Program Assistant and Associate Graduate Advisor.

PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE CHAIR

1. Establish the order in which examination committee members will question the candidate. Usually, this proceeds from the member who is farthest from the field of research, and the supervisor is normally last.
2. Invite the candidate to present a brief synopsis of the master's research. The candidate may speak from notes and use audio-visual equipment, but must not read from a prepared text. The presentation should last no longer than 20 minutes and should not be interrupted by questions.
3. Call upon each member of the examination committee to question the candidate in turn. The Chair should exercise discretion in managing the question period and should intervene if questioning or behaviour becomes inappropriate or interferes with the proper conduct of the exam. Within reason, the other examiners may join in the conversation.
4. Call for a final round of comments and/or questions from the examining committee, and, if necessary, ask the candidate to address/clarify any points not adequately covered in previous questioning.
5. Request that the candidate leave the room during the deliberation period.
6. Moderate a discussion by the examination committee.
 - First, the committee must decide if the candidate has passed. Discussion usually proceeds, once again, from the member farthest from the student's field of study, with the supervisor weighing in last.
 - Second, assuming the student has passed, the committee must agree upon a final grade for the thesis and defence. The grade reflects both the written and oral performances.
 - In the unusual circumstance that a unanimous decision cannot be reached, the Chair's report should record the recommendation of each committee member. The decision to pass or fail follows the vote of a majority of committee members. The chair is not a voting member of the committee. If there is significant disagreement about the appropriate grade, the chair reports the preferred grades of each committee member and the final grade will be set after consultations between the supervisor and Associate Graduate Advisor. In exceptional circumstances, the committee may decide to allow the candidate to re-do the oral defence, for example if there are significant discrepancies between the written thesis and oral defence performance. A re-examination will be granted only upon consultation between the supervisor and Associate Graduate Advisor and must normally be undertaken no more than thirty days after the initial defence.
7. Call the candidate back into the room and, in the presence of the examining committee, inform the candidate that they have passed or failed. Do not reveal the grade. The student will be informed of the grade by the Graduate Program Assistant.
8. Complete the Chair's Report and submit it by email to the Graduate Program Assistant and Associate Graduate Advisor as soon as possible.