

# School of Planning Procedures for Completing a Master's Thesis

In the School of Planning, an oral defence is the final step in the examination of a Master's thesis.

## Step 1: Approval of the Reading Committee and scheduling of defence

Students must begin this process a minimum of one month prior to the desired defence date.

The student shall submit the final draft of the thesis (i.e., the complete copy intended to be considered at the defence) to the Supervisor(s) and Committee Member. The Committee Member should have been selected earlier, ideally by the second or third term in the program as per [the description of MA and MES Committee Roles](#). The final draft incorporates previous comments from the Supervisor(s) and Committee Member.

The University of Waterloo expects that graduate theses meet appropriate standards of clarity and coherence in written English. Thesis formatting requirements are specified by the University. Students are encouraged to visit the GSPA website for general information on [preparing your thesis](#). The student is also strongly encouraged to use [iThenticate®](#) to identify and address any citation issues and to discuss the report with their Supervisor(s). The Supervisor(s) and Committee Members may request the submission of an iThenticate® report as part of their review of the final draft.

The Supervisor(s) shall solicit an additional faculty member to serve on the Thesis Reading Committee as the Reader. The student may provide input on the Reader but the final decision rests with the Supervisor(s). The Reading Committee shall be comprised of at least three members, including:

- The student's Supervisor or Co-supervisors.
- A Committee Member who provides feedback on a complete thesis draft before the defence is scheduled.
- A Reader whose expertise can support the evaluation of the Master's thesis. The Reader is an independent, arms-length evaluator of the final thesis.

The Supervisor (or one of the Co-supervisors) and at least one other member of the Reading Committee shall be members of the School of Planning. Adjunct, Cross-Appointed and Emeriti faculty members are considered members of the School of Planning.

Once the Reader has been determined, the student and Supervisor(s) shall select a date and time for the defence and ensure Reading Committee Members are available to attend. This should be done as far in advance as possible. To finalize the defence date, the Supervisor(s) must contact the SoP Graduate Coordinator with the following information:

- Thesis title and abstract
- List of all Reading Committee members, specifying Supervisor(s), Committee Member, department, or adjunct
- Proposed date and time of defence

Once this information is received, the Graduate Coordinator shall draft a notice of thesis defence and obtain approval by the Associate Director of Graduate Studies. Confirmation will be sent to the student and all Reading Committee members in the form of the said notice. The Graduate Coordinator will book a room for in person defense or an MS Teams meeting for online defense, circulate the notice to the graduate student, faculty members and other UW community members and provide necessary/approved logistical support. The thesis defence is open to the University community and interested public, and defending students may invite anyone as guests/audience members.

Defences should not normally be scheduled during the last two weeks of August or the week before the University closes for the December holiday break.

## **Step 2: Submission of thesis**

At least 10 working days prior to the defence date the following must be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator:

- Electronic copy of thesis (email a .pdf file). A hard copy of the thesis is not required for submission purposes. However, hardcopies may be requested by Reading Committee members and is the student's responsibility to print and distribute these to the Reading Committee.
- Written confirmation (e.g., copies of emails) that the Supervisor(s) and Committee Member have read the final draft and approved the scheduling of the final defence.

The Graduate Coordinator will forward the defence copy of the thesis to the Reading Committee.

If any member of the Reading Committee has concerns regarding academic integrity violations in the thesis, the member should contact the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies prior to the oral examination, or, as soon as possible. The Defence may be postponed until a decision has been made about possible academic integrity violations.

The Graduate Coordinator will send a Thesis Acceptance Form to the Chair with all necessary details incorporated into it.

## **Step 3: Thesis defence/oral examination format**

The Supervisor(s) shall serve as the Chair of the thesis defence. The defence begins with introductions and brief comments by the Chair on the order of proceedings, followed by an oral presentation by the candidate outlining the key contents and conclusions in the thesis. The student may make use of computer and projector presentation equipment and/or other suitable visual aids. The oral presentation shall be no longer than 25 minutes.

Following the presentation, the Reading Committee members will ask questions. Normally, questioning takes place in two rounds, with the first round lasting no more than 45-minutes (up to 15 minutes per examiner) and the second round lasting no more than 30-minutes (up to 10 minutes per examiner). The Reader asks questions first, followed by the committee member(s) and then the Supervisor(s) in each round. Co-supervisors share a 15-minute (round one) or 10-minute (round two) time block. Once both

rounds of questioning from the Reading Committee are completed, the Chair may, at their discretion, invite members of the audience to ask questions.

In their questioning, Reading Committee members should focus on issues, themes and topics arising from the submitted thesis. However, Reading Committee members are free to ask any questions needed to test the student's knowledge and understanding of the theoretical, methodological and practical aspects of the scholarly area in which the thesis is situated. Questions should be brief and succinct to ensure the majority of time is available for the student to respond.

At the end of the question period, the candidate and the audience are excused while the Reading Committee deliberates on a decision.

The candidate is then asked to return, and the decision of the Reading Committee is communicated to the student by the Chair.

### **Typical schedule for the oral defence**

The thesis defence takes place within two and half hours, maximum, from start to finish. The following is a typical schedule:

- Introductions and instructions by the Chair (10 minutes)
- Presentation by the student (25 minutes)
- First round of questioning (45 minutes – maximum 15 minutes for each Examiner; Co-supervisors share the 15 minutes)
- Break (10 minutes, if required)
- Second round of questioning (30 minutes – maximum 10 minutes for each Examiner; Co-supervisors share the 10 minutes)
- Deliberation of outcome (20 minutes)
- Reporting of results (10 minutes)

(At Chair's discretion, additional time for audience questions)

Total: 150 minutes

It is the responsibility of the Chair to record the decision of the Reading Committee in the Thesis Acceptance Form and obtain their approval in the form of signatures and submit it to the Graduate Coordinator.

### **Possible outcomes of the defence**

The Thesis Acceptance Form provides for five possible outcomes from the defence.

1. Accepted
2. Accepted with Minor Modifications (To be approved by Supervisor(s) / designated Reading Committee Member)
3. Accepted with Major Modifications (Indication of the nature of the required modifications)
4. Decision Deferred (Indication of the nature of the required modifications)

## 5. Rejected

A Category 5 decision may not be used during a first oral defence. If the Reading Committee cannot accept the thesis, either as presented (Category 1) or with some level of modifications (Category 2 or 3), they must defer the decision (Category 4). In these instances, the student must be given the opportunity to revise the thesis and the Reading Committee must provide clear instructions on the required modifications and a timeline for completion. Once the revisions are completed to the satisfaction of the Supervisor(s) and Committee Member, a second oral defence is scheduled with a new Reader.

When a thesis proceeds to oral defence for second time, a Category 4 decision is no longer available to the new Reading Committee. The new Reading Committee must either reject (Category 5) or accept the thesis, either as presented (Category 1) or with some level of modifications (Category 2 or 3). If the thesis is rejected at a second oral defence, the student will be required to withdraw from the program.

### **Step 4: Final thesis approval & submission**

After the defence, the Chair (Supervisor) shall return the Thesis Acceptance Form duly signed by the Reading Committee Members, preferably by 4:30 pm on the day of defence.

If any revisions are required to the thesis, the student must submit the final thesis to Supervisor(s) and designated Reading Committee Member(s) once completed for approval. These requirements will be agreed to at the defence, according to the outcome determined.

The Supervisor(s) must advise the Graduate Coordinator by email when the final version of the thesis has been reviewed and approved.

Completion paperwork will then be prepared by the Graduate Coordinator and submitted to Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA).

Once approved the student will receive notice from the University to submit the final thesis to UWSpace. Submissions to UWSpace will normally be reviewed within 3 to 5 business days of GSPA receiving the final completion paperwork from the student. In certain cases, GSPA may ask for further formatting revisions before a thesis is accepted. Please allow for delays.

For details, consult the UWSpace submission instructions. Please visit the GSPA website for information on preparing your thesis (formatting requirements, etc.).

### **Step 5: Apply to graduate in Quest**

Immediately after submitting their final thesis to UWSpace, the student must apply to graduate in Quest. Login to Quest, Navigate to My Academics > Graduation, and select Apply for Graduation. Students must select the term in which they will complete their degree requirements (not the convocation ceremony). Notify the Graduate Coordinator when this step has been completed.

## **Step 6: Degree completion**

Once the thesis has been approved by UWSpace, the Graduate Coordinator will approve the student's graduation on Quest. Once processed, the degree will appear as "complete" on the student's unofficial transcript.

Students must return their office key to the Graduate Coordinator upon degree completion.

### **Important deadlines:**

The 100% and 50% tuition refund deadlines are indicated in the calendar each term. The thesis must be approved by UWSpace (step 4) on or before a deadline to avoid penalties or for any refund to be automatically applied to the student's account.

Deadlines to apply to graduate in Quest are fixed: Spring Convocation - April 30; and Fall Convocation - August 31.

### **Important links:**

[Graduate Studies Academic Calendar includes minimum requirements for the Master's degree](#)

[Guide for Graduate Research and Supervision](#)

[Key university policies and reference materials](#)