## Oral Defence Documents

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<td>Report of Examining Committee</td>
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1. McMaster License - to be signed by the candidate and the defense Chair at the conclusion of a successful examination. This form is to be retained in the defense file.

2. National Library License - to be signed by the candidate following a successful defense. This form is also to be retained in the defense file.

3. Withholding Dissertations - Please remind the student and supervisor sign in the appropriate area of the Final Thesis Submission Sheet to note whether or not this thesis requires a delay of publication. When the student submits their dissertation to MacSphere they will be allowed to select a delay of publication of one year if required.
1. **Purposes of the Examination**

It is the examiners’ task to determine whether the student has met the University's thesis requirement that each doctoral candidate must present and successfully defend a thesis that embodies the results of original research and mature scholarship. The examiners represent Graduate Council and through it the Senate of the University, and are therefore responsible for the standard of the PhD in this University.

The oral defence at McMaster University is an examination of a PhD Candidate’s ability to defend publicly his/her written work. Therefore, questions having to do with the detailed content or the general argument of the thesis are relevant, as are questions regarding the relation between the matter of the thesis and the body of knowledge to which it contributes. (The more general judgment of the candidate's proficiency in his/her discipline and particular area of specialization is presumed to have been made at the time of the comprehensive examination.)

The committee of examiners, both of the written thesis and of the oral defence, will not likely all be expert in the candidate's specialty, or even in his/her discipline. It is the particular responsibility of the external examiner and the supervisory committee to ensure that the thesis does indeed present an original and significant contribution to knowledge. Other examiners may reasonably be expected to exercise their judgment as members of the University faculty, keeping in mind the standards of excellence expected by the University of its PhD graduates.

The examiners (who volunteer) are expected to judge whether the defence is satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The examiners have previously read and reported on the written thesis and they must now give their final judgment on it, and the oral defence of it. Examiners are expected to exercise their judgment on these questions and only in exceptional circumstances should they abstain from voting.

2. **Oral Examination Procedure**

   a. When the candidate arrives, the Chair will introduce those committee members not known by the candidate.

   b. The Chair should explain to those present the composition of the examining committee. There will be a minimum of **four members on the examining committee, but not exceeding 5 voting members**. All examining committee members are required to attend. If four examining committee members are not present, the defence **CANNOT** proceed and will have to be re-scheduled. If an examining member is not able to attend at the last minute, approval from the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies is required to proceed.

   c. The Chair will ask the candidate and any observers to leave the room for a few minutes while the order of questioning is established by the examining committee.

   d. The Chair will then have the student present an oral statement about his/her thesis of approximately 15 minutes duration (in no case more than 20 minutes). **The student should stress the main points of the contribution to knowledge and the principal technical difficulties either of an experimental or theoretical nature which he/she has overcome. A simple summary of the thesis is neither necessary nor desirable.** The Chair should remind the candidate that notes or other aids may be used but the statement may not be read from a prepared script.

   e. Individual examiners will question the candidate according to the order established by the Chair. **All members of the examining committee are expected to put questions to the candidate.** Issues that have been raised by members of the supervisory committee in the course of composition of the thesis may nevertheless be profitably brought up now, when the candidate will have to respond in the presence of others.
f. If present, the external examiner should be given full opportunity to question the candidate. If the external examiner is not present, it is the Chair's responsibility to see that questions raised in the external examiner's report are put to the candidate by some member of the examining committee, preferably the supervisor.

g. Candidates who are unwilling or unable to respond to questions should be cautioned that such an action may cause the examination to be adjourned, or in extreme cases, could lead to failure on one of both questions put to the committee about the thesis and its defence.

h. Visitors who wish to ask questions or comment should introduce themselves and be permitted to speak. All attendees should be reminded to turn off any electronics that may make noise during the defence.

i. When there are no further questions, the Chair should ask the candidate and visitors to withdraw.

j. After a discussion of the examination, the Chair will ask for a vote on the success or failure of the oral defence. If there are two or more negative or abstaining votes, with at least one of these votes being from a member of the supervisory committee, adjournment is mandatory and a decision must be reached at this time as to whether a reconvened oral defence may be held at a later date. If, in the judgment of the examiners, the defence is to be reconvened, the candidate should be told as clearly as possible what he/she must do to improve his/her defence of the thesis. In the event the written thesis is approved conditionally, the Chair is responsible for ensuring that (1) the candidate is advised of the conditions in writing, (2) the conditions are met before the thesis is submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, and (3) the Thesis Coordinator is informed of the conditions.

k. Following the committee's decision the Chair will secure the written votes of each examiner and sign the report form.

l. The Chair will then go to the candidate, inform him/her of the committee's decision(s), and bring him/her back into the examination room for any congratulations or discussion appropriate to the circumstances. A copy of the external examiner's report will be given to the candidate. A successful candidate may be informed of the identity of the external examiner (in cases where the external examiner is not present).

m. The examination will be formally adjourned. Normally, examination of the candidate will not take more than two hours. In no case should it take more than three.

n. If the student has failed or if the oral defence is to be reconvened, the Chair of the examining committee should discuss the situation as soon as possible with the Thesis Coordinator.

o. If the oral defence is reconvened, no new examining committee members will be added, except for necessary replacements. It is the duty of the examiners to attend the reconvened examination, and no subsequent defences may be held.
The CAGS/Proquest-UMI Distinguished Dissertation Awards

The CAGS/PROQUEST-UMI Distinguished Dissertation Awards recognize Canadian doctoral dissertations that make unusually significant and original contributions to their academic field. They were established in 1994 and are presented annually.

There are two awards given out by CAGS nationally:

- One for engineering, medical sciences and natural sciences;
- One for fine arts, humanities and social sciences.

The Awards are granted by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) and are sponsored by Proquest-UMI (University Microfilms International). They include a $1,500 prize, a Citation Certificate, and travel expenses of up to $1,500 to attend the CAGS Annual Conference.

Eligible Dissertations

The School of Graduate Studies deadline is usually at the beginning of March each year.

a. A dissertation in any discipline in engineering, medical sciences and natural sciences completed and accepted by the School of Graduate Studies between January 1 and December 31 (of the prior year).

b. A dissertation in any discipline in the fine arts, humanities and social sciences completed and accepted by the School of Graduate Studies between January 1 and December 31 (of the prior year).

Nomination Criteria

a. A dissertation must have received an Excellent in all categories of the External Examiner’s Report.

b. All members of the examining committee should agree that the oral defense and written thesis was exceptional.

In interdisciplinary domains or in fields that overlap the two broad areas in which the prizes are given, the dean of graduate studies must decide for which prize it is appropriate to submit the dissertation.

If you feel the candidate should be nominated for this award, please contact the student’s graduate department administrator.

Turn over for Governor General’s Academic Medal information
The Governor General's Academic Medal

The Governor General's Academic Medal will be awarded at the Fall Convocation in November.

The Governor General's Academic Medal will be awarded to the graduate student who achieves the highest academic standing in his/her full-time graduate degree program. The School of Graduate Studies deadline is typically at the beginning of October each year. Students who complete a graduate degree in time for either the previous Spring Convocation or the upcoming Fall Convocation are eligible to be nominated.

Nominees for the Governor General's Academic Medal must be exceptional, and it is unlikely that each department and program offering a graduate degree will nominate a candidate every year.

Each faculty is invited to nominate their very best graduate at the master’s and doctoral levels for this prestigious award. If multiple submissions are received at each level from a faculty, the School of Graduate Studies reserves the right to request that the faculties adjudicate internally first.

Eligibility Requirements

Masters

- Canadian, Permanent Resident or International Student
- Minimum overall academic average of 11.5/12.0 in his/her graduate studies
  - defended his/her Master’s thesis
  - filed all revisions of the thesis with the School of Graduate Studies (if applicable)
- Must have been ranked Excellent in at least four of the five categories on the External Examiners Report
- Publications and awards will be considered as further evidence of Academic Excellence

Doctoral

- Canadian, Permanent Resident or International Student
- Minimum overall academic average of 11.5/12.0 in his/her graduate studies (Master’s and Doctoral combined)
- Must have met all their doctoral degree requirements in time to graduate at the fall convocation
  - defended his/her doctoral thesis
  - filed all revisions of the thesis with the School of Graduate Studies
- Must have been ranked Excellent in at least four of the five categories on the External Examiners Report
- Publications and awards will be considered as further evidence of Academic Excellence

If you feel the candidate should be nominated for this award, please contact the student’s graduate department administrator.