Accelerated PhD Thesis Defences
For Supervisors and Graduate Administrators

School of Graduate Studies
Initiation

To begin the process, *students* must initiate in Mosaic:

- No change to the initiation process or initiation deadlines as indicated in [Sessional Dates](#) listed in the Graduate Calendar
- The *Supervisor* will be asked which stream they want to follow, not students
  - Accelerated Defence *OR*
  - Traditional/Standard Defence
Validation of Supervisory Committee

For the approval to flow through the system, the Supervisory Committee must be accurate in Mosaic in Candidate Management:

- Follows same process as Standard Stream
- Email from SGS to Graduate Administrator reminding them to check the committee
- The thesis system in Admin Tools will validate the Supervisory Committee by confirming that there are:
  - At least three members
  - One of the members must be identified as the Primary Supervisor with a SUP code and the Primary Supervisor box checked off
- Once validated, the data will be uploaded into the system during the next refresh (4 times a day)
- It is essential that email addresses are up-to-date and correct
Supervisor Selects Stream

Supervisors must choose whether they wish to use the Standard Stream or Accelerated Stream. Students can’t direct themselves into the Accelerated Stream.

| Graduate Studies is piloting a PhD defence workflow called the Accelerated Stream that allows supervisors to select an external examiner and coordinate defences along a faster timeline. Graduate Studies will also continue to coordinate defences using the existing process now called the Standard Stream. |
|---|---|---|
| Time to coordinate | At least 8 weeks without exception | Potential for flexible timelines |
| Selection of examiner | Randomly selected | Directed by Supervisor |
| Location of defence | Chosen by Grad Studies | Supervisor’s preference |
| Blackout periods | Strictly observed | No blackout periods |

Supervisors who choose the Accelerated Stream will still need to provide the names of potential external examiners for approval by the Department Chair. Once approved, supervisors will:

1. Personally invite examiners
2. Confirm the participation of an examiner
3. Inform Graduate Studies of the date and time of the defence
4. Assist with securing a chair and room

If you would like to take a more active role in the coordination of your student’s defence by securing the external examiner please choose Accelerated Stream.

If you would prefer that the School of Graduate Studies coordinates the defence entirely please choose Standard Stream. The defence will be coordinated using the existing process.

In the case of the Accelerated Thesis Defence Process the presence of the external is mandatory at the defence, either in person or electronically.

The external nominees must not have primary appointments at McMaster University, and they must be at arm’s length from all members of the supervisory committee and the student.

Important note: Whichever system you choose requires that your external examiner be approved by your committee and department. Therefore, you must start by nominating 1 or more examiners using the link emailed to you. Regardless of stream, you must fill out the form online to move the process forward.

If you need more information, please email gthees@mcmaster.ca

Continue
Reaching Out to External Examiners

The onus is on the Supervisor to recruit the External Examiner in the Accelerated stream

- Supervisors are permitted to reach out to possible External Examiner(s) before completing the nomination process in the system.
- If an External Examiner is secured, you can choose to only nominate the identified Examiner.
- Alternatively, Supervisors can nominate several Examiners and have them approved before reaching out to them.
- Regardless of the recruitment approach, an External must be approved by the Committee and department authority before the thesis can be sent to an Examiner
- When sending the thesis, it is understood that that Supervisor has already negotiated the participation of the examiner. Participation includes:
  - Reading the thesis and completing the Examiners Report, and
  - Joining the examination either in person or via a remote connection and asking any relevant questions of the candidate
Nominating External Examiner(s)

- Once the stream has been selected, the Supervisor is directed to a page to enter the External Examiner info. You may nominate 1 or more examiners.
- You must click “Save” after each nominee, even if there is only one. You can’t click “Submit” without clicking “Save” first!
- To streamline the travel expense process, we now ask for a chartfield during the nomination process. A chartfield is needed when travel expenses will exceed the $200 that SGS provides.
- Tri-Council research accounts (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC) are not eligible for External Examiner travel expenses so any research accounts are not accepted by the system. If you have a research account that is not Tri-Council funded and therefore eligible, you will need to let us know by emailing gthesis@mcmaster.ca so we can track it manually.
- The Supervisor is also required to select Examining Committee Members before continuing.
Participation of the External

- When you ask an External to read your student’s thesis, you must also ask them to participate in the defence, either in person or via a teleconference/web meeting.
- If they can’t commit to participating, then you must choose another date or another External.
- The Accelerated model does not allow for Internal Examiners except in cases where an External, who previously committed, has encountered an emergency and the date of the defence cannot be changed to accommodate them.
- If your External indicates they will not be participating 2 days before it is scheduled, the defence will be rescheduled.
- SGS will reimburse the External up to $200 CAD for travel expenses incurred for attending the defence.
  - If the travel expenses exceed $200 CAD, you or your department must reimburse the additional cost.
Examiner Committee Approves Nominees

Each member will see the following web page by clicking the link sent to their email:

- The nominee(s) will not be sent to the Chair for approval until all committee members have approved the list.
- Approvals are automated but if an approval is missing, it will hold up the process. SGS monitors the status and can resend emails if necessary.
- Grad Admins have the ability to review the status of approvals in Admin Tools under Thesis Defence.
Chair Approves Nominees

The Chair or department authority is asked to approve the nominee(s)

- If the Chair is not available or if the primary Supervisor is the Chair please let us know at gthesis@mcmaster.ca. We can forward the approval link to a designated departmental authority.
Supervisor Selects Examiner & Enters Defence Details

In the Accelerated Stream, the Supervisor is responsible for:

- Selecting the External Examiner from the drop-down list.
- Entering the Defence Date, Time and Location.
  - If a room is not available, please contact gthesis@mcmaster.ca and we can book our Defence Room (GH 212/B) or in MUSC.
  - Rooms should have the technology to support the defence (if needed) and a back-up phone (which can be ordered by SGS).
- Selecting the Chair for the defence.
  - If a Chair is not available, please contact gthesis@mcmaster.ca and we can reach out to our “Help Wanted” distribution list to help recruit a Chair.
  - If no Chair is identified one week prior to the defence, it will be at risk of being postponed.
- Supervisors receive reminders from SGS to complete this step and it is important to fill in this information promptly to maintain the desired defence date.
How Long Does an External Examiner Have to Review the Thesis?

- Traditionally, the minimum time given to an External Examiner to review a thesis is 2 weeks, with an upper maximum of 4 weeks.

- The system will automatically email reminders to Externals:
  - If the defence date is over 4 weeks away, the due date will be 2 weeks before defence date.
  - If the defence date is less than 4 weeks away, but over 3 weeks then the due date is 2 weeks after the date supervisor uploads the thesis.
  - Reminders are sent:
    - 7 days before the due date, and
    - 2 days before the due date.

- Examples:
  - Thesis sent March 1\textsuperscript{st} & defence is June 14\textsuperscript{th}: Report is due June 1\textsuperscript{st}
  - Thesis sent March 1\textsuperscript{st} & defence is March 25\textsuperscript{th}: Report is due March 15\textsuperscript{th}
External Completes Report Online

The External is asked whether they will be participating via a remote connection. If they click the “Yes” box, another text box will open to ask for their contact information. If they do not click the box, SGS will confirm how they will be attending.
Report Received by SGS

A link to the External Report is sent via email and may include attachments with additional information.

- Positive External reports are emailed automatically to the Supervisor, Committee, and Graduate Administrator
- Negative External reports are received by SGS and then distributed manually to the Associate Dean, Committee, and Grad Admin
- Reports are always shared with the student
External Report Due Dates

- We need the report from the External at least 1 week before the defence.
- If SGS does not receive the report 1 week before the defence, the student has the option to defer their defence or to waive their entitlement to the report.
  - SGS will email the student, with a CC to the Supervisor, to confirm in writing that the defence is proceeding on the scheduled date.
- If the report isn’t received 2 business days before the defence, it will be rescheduled by SGS without exception.

Reports not received by the Due Date could mean postponing the Defence
Accelerated Defence Process Review

- Student initiates defence in Mosaic
- Examining Committee is validated by Admin Tools
- **Supervisor chooses** between Standard or Accelerated Stream
- Supervisor nominates 1 or more External Examiners
- External Examiners are approved by Committee and department authority
- Supervisor selects the External Examiner, enters defence details, and uploads thesis
- External Examiner accesses thesis online
- External Examiner completes report via online report form
- Report is emailed to SGS, Supervisor, Committee, and Graduate Administrator
- SGS emails defence notice to Candidate, Supervisor, Examining Committee (including External and Chair), and Graduate Administrator
- SGS prepares a Chair package and arranges for delivery
Thesis Defence Process Flowchart

Traditional vs. Accelerated

SGS creates Chair package, sends out defence notice, processes honorariums and travel expenses
Criteria for External Examiner

Extracted from the School of Graduate Studies Calendar

- Selection of an External Examiner is the responsibility of the Dean of Graduate Studies. To aid in that selection, the Supervisory Committee is required to provide, through the Chair of the Department, the names and contact information for three potential Examiners, at least one month prior to the submission of the thesis. The nominees must be at arm’s length from all members of the Supervisory Committee and the student.

- The role of the External Examiner is to provide an expert’s assessment of the thesis document, which should be a complete and comprehensive account of the work that was done as well as the results. Although it is desirable that the External Examiner attend the oral defense, to also participate in examining the student as a potential researcher, that participation is not mandatory at McMaster unless under the Accelerated stream.

- Nominations for an External Examiner should meet the following criteria. If a nomination does not meet one or more of these criteria, an explanation must be provided as to why the nomination is nonetheless appropriate. Several of the criteria are meant to ensure that the evaluation of the student’s work is as free as possible of the appearance of any kind of bias that might predispose a particular outcome from the examination.

1. The proposed External Examiner should possess an earned doctorate or equivalent relevant credential. If that is not the case, she or he should have achieved a record of accomplishment that can be seen to be equivalent to a doctoral degree, which should be noted in the comment box on the nomination form.

2. The proposed Examiner should be a recognized expert in a relevant area of study.

3. There should not be a close family or personal relationship between the proposed External Examiner and the student or any of the committee members.

4. The proposed External Examiner should not have recently been, or expect to soon become, employed by the department.

5. The proposed External Examiner should not have been in a supervisory relationship with the student or the supervisor.

6. There should not be a current or recent active collaborative research relationship between the proposed External Examiner and either the student or the Supervisor.

7. Neither the student nor the Supervisor should have recently been in, or expect to soon enter into, a business, employment, or research relationship with the proposed External Examiner.
Definition of Arm’s Length

The nominees **SHOULD NOT**:  

1. Have been a research Supervisor or student of the Supervisor or the student within the last 6 years.
2. Have collaborated with the Supervisor or the student within the past 6 years or have made plans to collaborate with these individuals in the immediate future.
3. Have other potential conflicts of interest (e.g. personal or financial).
4. Have been employed by or affiliated with the student's or Supervisor's department within the past 6 years or expect to become employed in the department soon.
Chair of the Defence

An eligible Examining Committee Chair is a tenured faculty member (or Professor Emeritus) who has supervised a doctoral student to completion, and who has also participated previously in the McMaster Ph.D. defence process.

Please send PhD Thesis Defence questions to: gthesis@mcmaster.ca