



Graduate Studies Thesis Policy

Classification:	Graduate Studies
Responsible Authority:	Associate Vice-President, Research Graduate and Professional Studies (AVPRGPS)
Executive Sponsor:	Academic Vice-President and Provost (AVP)
Approval Authority:	Committee on Graduate Studies
Date First Approved:	June 15, 2026
Date Last Reviewed:	N/A
Mandatory Review Date:	June 15, 2031

PURPOSE

To establish universal graduate student thesis submission and oral examination (defense) procedures.

SCOPE

This policy will apply to graduate students participating in a thesis-based Masters and PhD programs at StFX, with the understanding that the PhD in Educational Studies does not currently employ internal examiners for defenses. In cases where Nova Scotia's Inter-University Doctoral Program in Educational Studies policies conflict with this policy, StFX will adhere to the Inter-University Doctoral Program policies.

DEFINITIONS

Research-based graduate students – graduate candidates who are required to complete a thesis as part of their degree requirements.

Oral Examination – the thesis defense, which may take place in person or online via MS Teams.

Chair of Oral Examination – The AVPRGPS typically fills this role. If they cannot participate, a member of the Committee on Graduate Studies, normally the Dean of the Faculty or the Graduate Coordinator of the program, will act as Chair for the defense. Otherwise, the Chair must be an elected member of the Committee on Graduate Studies.

THESIS SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

Once the Masters or PhD candidate's supervisor has deemed the thesis ready to be circulated to the internal examining committee (first and second examiner, normally within the department), the candidate submits the thesis document to the supervisor, the first and second examiner, and the faculty Graduate Coordinator of the Department. The committee will normally have four weeks to read the thesis and submit their feedback to the student. Once the candidate has made the necessary revisions

and corrections to the satisfaction of the internal committee, and the internal examining committee has agreed that a candidate's thesis is ready for the oral defense, the supervisor will reach out to the Graduate Studies Advisor with three options for an External Examiner and a suggested timeline regarding the scheduling of the defense. The Graduate Studies Advisor will book a tentative date and time for the defense at the point of confirming with the external, and then handle all subsequent communications with the external examiners. We will make every reasonable effort to schedule the defense in coordination with the student, the Supervisor, and the Committee. The external examiner must be a member of an academic unit at a recognized postsecondary institution that grants graduate degrees, subject to reasonable exception by the AVPRGPS. Every precaution must be taken to select external examiners according to best practices of [the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies](#), and to avoid potential conflict of interest (these include those listed in the [Conflict-of-Interest Doc](#)):

- The external examiner must not be a direct collaborator of the supervisor, and generally be in-line with Tri-Council guidelines on conflict-of-interest in peer review. Ideally, this applies to all committee members, however, if there are areas of collaboration please explain on the Conflict of Interest form.
- The external examiner must not have had any professional relationship with the student, such as an Honours supervisor, a referee, a research supervisor, or have had any direct involvement in the thesis research or results prior to the oral examination.

In certain circumstances, the external examiner may also be external to the graduate degree granting unit rather than external to the university. In this case, the above best practices still apply in the selection of the external. The Graduate Studies Advisor will consult with the AVPRGPS on the list potential externals and reach out to the examiners one at a time (the supervisor is welcome to provide a preferred order of preference). Once an external examiner agrees, they are given a copy of the thesis, and Examiner Assessment forms. The external examiner will normally have four weeks to read and assess the thesis. Once the thesis is approved for oral examination, the Graduate Studies Advisor will make every reasonable effort to schedule the oral examination at a time that is agreed upon by all members of the examining committee and the candidate. However, the external's schedule will necessarily take precedence in the scheduling process.

Once a date has been established for the oral examination, a Notice of Thesis Defense will be sent out by the Graduate Studies Advisor to the campus community at least two weeks in advance of the defense.

Following the oral examination, the Graduate Studies Advisor will process a \$250 honorarium for the external examiner.

ORAL EXAMINATION PROCEDURES

The oral examination, whether in-person or online, will proceed as follows:

1. The Chair of the Oral Examination will give brief opening remarks and introduce the candidate, the thesis, and the members of the examining committee.
2. The Chair will invite the candidate to deliver a 20-30-minute presentation.
3. The Chair will invite the first round of questions from the committee, starting with the external, then the third examiner, then the second examiner, and ending with the supervisor. Each

examiner will normally have 10 minutes each for round one (the time includes the question being asked and the response from the candidate). The chair will then invite a second round of questions, normally allocating 5 minutes for each committee member. The Chair will generally allow the external examiner to use a bit more time (up to 20 minutes total) for questions when needed and relevant. The Supervisor can cede their question time when necessary to allow for more time from the external. Depending on time, the Chair may also elect to allow audience questions for up to 10 minutes following the candidate's presentation when the audience is larger, or the Chair may save audience questions following the committee's examination questions.

4. The Chair will then ask the candidate and all members of the audience other than the examining committee and members of COGS to leave the room (virtual or in-person) for *in-camera* deliberations. The Chair will call for a discussion of the written thesis and the defense of the thesis. Following the discussion, the committee will fill out the Thesis Examination Form and the Graduate Thesis Final Approval Form at this time. For in-person defenses, the committee will sign a paper copy. For online defenses, the Graduate Studies Advisor will collect signatures via email following the completion of the oral examination. Once deliberations are complete, the Chair will call the student back into the room or invite them back in virtually. The Chair will report the examining committee's decision to the candidate.

The candidate will submit their final thesis copy to the library repository for preservation following the instructions on the Graduate Thesis Final Approval Form.

RELATED POLICIES

[Thesis and Dissertation Submission Guidelines, StFX Scholar](#)

StFX Graduate Studies Conflict of Interest Form

RELATED MATERIALS

[Inter-University Doctoral Program in Educational Studies](#)

[Guide to Graduate Studies](#)

