

Guidelines for Remote Graduate Thesis Defences and Qualifying Examinations

March 20, 2020

The overall goal of these guidelines is to ensure that the Faculty of Graduate Studies maintains the academic integrity of University of Guelph graduate programs without causing undue stress (emotional or financial) to students and faculty under the current COVID-19 pandemic circumstances. These guidelines assume that the university remains open, and they are subject to change as external conditions change.

These guidelines are meant to cover issues that are likely to impact all graduate programs, but there may be issues that are specific to some programs. For further information about these guidelines or anything that is not covered herein, please contact the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (OGPS), the Assistant Vice-President, Graduate Studies (AVPGS), the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies (ADGS), or the appropriate College Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies (ADRS).

- Whenever possible, defences and Qualifying Examinations (QEs) that have already been scheduled should occur via web/teleconference (e.g., Webex, Microsoft Teams). Departments should consult Computing & Communication Services (CCS) and/or Microsoft Support for assistance implementing these tools. OGPS is not able to assist with technical issues involving use of these tools.
- It is understood that faculty may take longer than usual to provide feedback on thesis drafts during this period of transition to online course delivery and final exams, which may cause delays in students' abilities to defend before the end of the semester. Courses in progress must take priority for faculty at this time.
- Students or faculty can request that a QE or defense be delayed. Such requests should be directed to the Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC)/Department Chair who has approval authority. OGPS does not need to be notified of delays until the exam has been rescheduled and new defence or QE forms are requested.
- Defences should be rescheduled within a month of the original date, if possible. QEs can be deferred for a longer period, if necessary. Defences should take precedence over QEs to help ensure that students can complete their graduate programs with as little delay as possible.
- Departments should continue to schedule new defences to avoid delaying completion of students' graduate programs any longer than necessary.
- Students who request to postpone a scheduled defence, or whose defence is postponed for reasons beyond their control and thus cannot complete their degree requirements in Winter 2020 **must register for the subsequent semester**. The deadline to register without late fees is **April 26, 2020**.
- If students are blocked from registering as per the program duration policy, submission of a Plan of Study or Appeal for Extension of Maximum Program Duration is **not required** if a defence has been scheduled or if the student has submitted their thesis to the department for defence. In the latter case, the Graduate Program Assistant (GPA)

should notify the Graduate Records & Postdoctoral Officers in OGPS that the student's thesis has been received and that scheduling of the defence is underway.

- The deadline to pay tuition with personal funds has been extended to **May 29, 2020**. Students who expect to pay via payroll deduction, scholarships or OSAP loans must submit a Graduate Settlement Form by **April 26, 2020**. Requests from students for tuition reduction or relief beyond May 29, 2020 due to delays in scheduling a defence should be submitted to the GPC and will be dealt with by OGPS on a case-by-case basis for the time being.
- As much as possible, departments should adhere to the normal requirements and procedures for defence and QE exams. For example, it should be clear to students what aids they can bring to the exam.
- QEs that involve written closed-book exams should be proctored using Respondus via CourseLink. OGPS is working with staff in OpenEd to develop a protocol for this; more will be communicated to the Faculty of Graduate Studies to this effect, soon. In the meantime, it may be necessary to postpone such QEs.
- Thesis defences are usually open to the public, but this requirement can be relaxed under the circumstances. However, it is possible to stream the oral presentation to an audience using either Webex or Microsoft Teams. Video and audio input from audience members can be muted to reduce internet bandwidth. The audience can be invited to ask questions via the chat tool. Departments are encouraged to use this option to allow people to attend the oral presentation. If the oral exam following the presentation is not open to the public, it should be held as a separate meeting that is only accessible to the student and examiners via invitation.
- Departments should consider allowing the student to have one person in the room with them during an oral exam, at the student's request. It must be clear to the student that this person is present for moral support only and cannot help the student to respond to questions from the examiners in any way.
- At the exam chair's discretion, an exam in progress can be stopped and rescheduled if technical difficulties prevent the student, chair or one examiner from participating. If the student, chair or more than one examiner becomes unavailable and the issue cannot be resolved quickly, the exam must be terminated and rescheduled. Before this occurs, every attempt should be made to proceed with the exam (e.g., one or more participants join the meeting by phone instead of internet, video feeds are muted to reduce bandwidth, etc.).