

MNU PhD Proposal Defense Rules/Process

The PhD Thesis Proposal and its Purpose

1. The thesis proposal represents a formal understanding between the Supervisory Committee and the doctoral Candidate. This agreement outlines the work to be done and the intellectual rigor the Committee expects from the Candidate. The proposal functions as a map guiding the Candidate towards the effective completion of the thesis project.
2. The thesis proposal should substantially advance the doctoral candidate toward completion of the thesis. It may take the form of the preliminary chapters of the thesis.

The Elements

3. The doctoral Candidate works closely with the Supervisory committee in determining the composition of the thesis proposal and in writing the proposal.
4. The proposal should contain details sufficient to describe the significance, background and rationale for the thesis and the work the Candidate will perform for the thesis.
5. The following list of elements is typical for a thesis proposal in the respective field. However, the Research Development Office recognizes that this list may not fit all thesis proposals and thus should be considered as illustrative only.
 - a) Length - Thesis proposals are usually 20-30 pages (not more than 10,000 words).
 - b) Statement of the Problem – includes the background, context in the respective field and in the broader scheme of academic pursuits, key questions, significance of the problem, and description of chosen methodology.
 - c) Grounding and Rationale – provides a discussion of need in the area of study which may include a comprehensive review of theoretical, conceptual, technological or methodological precedents which directly relate to the thesis topic. This section may also include a detailed analysis of the precedents that justify the need for the research, or review the literature that relates to the research.
 - d) Research Plan – details the methods that will be used or the processes that will be followed during the course of investigation. This section describes how the questions posed by the thesis will be addressed.

The Defense

6. The Candidate should submit to the Research Development Office, the intention of submitting the proposal by completing the candidate readiness form, for proposal defense with main supervisors' and Faculty Dean's approval. It should contain proposed details regarding the proposal defense, including, proposal defense title, and an abstract.

7. The proposal will be examined by a panel consisting of the Supervisors, the Dean or Dean appointed member from the Faculty, a member from outside the Faculty and a member from the Higher Degrees Committee.
8. The Research Development Office in consultation with the Candidate and Chair appointed by DVC Research as necessary, schedules a date, a time, and a room for the defense, within three weeks of informing the intention of submitting the proposal.
9. At least two weeks before the scheduled proposal defense date, the final written proposal must be submitted to Research Development Office, then distributed to all members of the proposal examination panel at least 7 working days prior to proposal defense. At this time or earlier, the panel, in consultation with the Candidate, determine the length and outline the structure of the defense.
10. The defense can be scheduled and announced as a public event for university community as well as faculty invitees. However, the deliberations of the Supervisory Committee are private.

The Process

11. Candidate presents their thesis proposal orally, with visual accompaniment as desired by the candidate, to the examination panel and/or the public (subject to clause 8 of this document).
12. The dissertation proposal defense proceeds as outlined below:

Prior to the start of the examination:

- i. The Candidate must be physically present at the exam.
- ii. The Chair (appointed by DVC Research/Research Development Office from an outside Faculty member of the Candidate), Supervisor or Second Supervisor, Faculty member of the Candidate and two general committee members must be physically present at the exam.
- iii. If the Chair is not physically present, then the exam must be rescheduled.
- iv. If the Faculty member selected for the exam is not physically present at the time of the exam, a substitute member from the Faculty may be secured subject to the Doctor of Philosophy Rules. If no member can be found, then the exam must be rescheduled.
- v. If an outside faculty two members are not physically present then, the exam should be adjourned and rescheduled to a later time/date.
- vi. A majority of the Examination panel must be physically present at the exam. E.g. a panel with the minimum 3 required members (Chair, faculty member, and 1 outside faculty member) must have the Chair, the faculty member, and at least one outside faculty member physically present at the exam. Examination/panel with 5 members (Chair, faculty member, and 1 outside faculty member, and two supervisors) must have the Chair, the faculty member, and at least one outside faculty member physically present at the exam.
- vii. In exceptional circumstances the Research Development Office can approve a mixed onsite-online meeting.

Once the Exam Starts

13. The Examination panel may meet initially in private, with or without the Candidate present.
14. The Chair announces when the Candidate and/or the public may join the Panel for the defense.
15. The Candidate presents the key elements of the thesis proposal.
16. The Examination panel questions the Candidate.
17. Finally, the Examination panel reconvenes in private for deliberations. The panel vote for one of the following:
 - a. Accept
 - b. Accept with minor revisions—the Committee/panel requests minor revisions, which are approved by a process that is established by the Chair.
 - c. Accept with major revisions—revisions require approval by the Chair and selected members or the supervisory Committee/panel. See Process* below.
 - d. Reject—the Examination panel may recommend either 1) that a second defense is permitted after a period of additional preparation, or 2) that the student is dropped from the Ph.D. program.
18. A simple majority vote is required. In the event that a simple majority vote does not occur, the deliberations of the Examination panel are continued and a decision is made within five working days of the proposal defense date.

*Process for 'Accept with Revisions

19. The revision process proceeds as follows:
 - i. The committee/panel informs the candidate verbally of the revisions required and the date by which revisions are to be completed.
 - ii. The chair, in consultation with the panel prepares a written description of the required revisions. A copy of the letter is provided to Research Development Office to place in the student's permanent academic file.
 - iii. The chair and the candidate determine the date by which the revisions must be completed, normally within 3 months.
 - iv. The chair distributes the written description to the candidate and the committee/panel.
 - v. Two weeks after the revisions are submitted by the candidate, the committee/panel informs the candidate whether the revisions are accepted or rejected. Research Development Office will inform the Candidate on behalf of the panel.
 - vi. If rejected, the panel recommends, as outlined above, to either permit a second defense or to drop the student from the program.
 - vii. If the revisions are not completed successfully within the specified time period, the Chair may extend the time for revision to up to 6 months from the date of the proposal defense, upon request of the student. After 6 months, the Chair may petition the HDC committee for an extension on justifiable grounds.
 - viii. If the revisions are not completed successfully in the time frame designated, and if the examination panel and the HDC committee concur, the proposal is rejected and the student is dropped from the Ph.D. program at MNU.

Approved by: Higher Degrees Committee

Date approved: 9th December 2020

Review date: