

Thesis Preparation and Defence Guidelines

Office of Research and Graduate Studies
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THE GRADUATE THESIS

The preparation and defence of a graduate thesis is the culminating academic experience of a research/thesis-based graduate program. The thesis is based on original research and inquiry, and contributes to the body of knowledge. The thesis provides a demonstration of the student's ability to:

- explore, develop, critically analyze, synthesize, interpret, and communicate ideas and concepts;
- formulate inquiry and pursue that inquiry demonstrating rigour, creativity, originality, and insightful perception leading to new knowledge or understanding.

The thesis must be an original work. Except for presentations and publications that are part of the student's experience and program at TRU, the work must not have been previously published.

This document outlines the standards of the TRU Office of Research and Graduate Studies that guide the preparation and defence of the graduate thesis. Please also refer to the timeline (Appendix A).

Some programs may have requirements in addition to the expectations of the Office of Research and Graduate Studies. Students are expected to be familiar with the requirements of their specific program.

APPROVAL OF THE THESIS PROPOSAL AND PROGRESS REPORTS

Supervisory Committee

The membership of the supervisory committee will vary by program. At minimum, the committee must include at least three members, inclusive of the supervisor (and co-supervisor if applicable), drawn from the list of approved TRU graduate supervisors. At least one committee member must be associated with an academic discipline outside the student's area of specialization.

Depending on the nature of the specific program, the supervisory committee members may have an active role in the development of the proposal and progress of the research. In other cases, the supervisory committee members will only comment on the final thesis draft prior to its defence. The primary supervisor will ensure that the student understands clearly the role of the supervisory committee for the specific program.

Thesis Proposal

By no later than the beginning of the final semester of the program, graduate students must submit the *Thesis Proposal Approval form* and an electronic copy of the approved thesis proposal to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies. An earlier submission deadline may be specified by the specific program.

Compliance Approvals

Research involving human subjects or animal subjects must be approved by the Human Ethics Committee, or Animal Care Committee, respectively. Research involving biohazards must be approved by the Biosafety Committee. Additional approvals may be required from external agencies. Approved protocols must be submitted with the *Thesis Proposal Approval form* prior to beginning the research.

Progress Reports

Regular meetings with the supervisory committee and clear progress reports form an essential part of the graduate student's program. The frequency and nature of supervisory committee meetings vary by program. The *Graduate Student Progress Report form* should be completed after each formal supervisory committee meeting and submitted to the program coordinator.

APPROVAL OF THE THESIS

Once the thesis is complete to the satisfaction of the supervisor, the student prepares a manuscript draft that conforms to the *TRU Thesis Style Guide*.

All members of the supervisory committee will review the prepared draft to ensure the academic soundness of the work and verify that it meets the academic standards for the graduate degree. Members of the committee are responsible to provide critique on substance or content, and also recommend revisions of an editorial nature. The supervisor is responsible to communicate all recommended revisions to the student, and verify that the corrections have been made and that the final thesis draft meets the requirements of the *TRU Thesis Style Guide*.

The *Request for Thesis Defence form* is signed by the supervisor, all members of the supervisory committee and the program coordinator, and submitted to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies together with an electronic copy of the approved final thesis draft. The submission should be received preferably six weeks prior to the proposed date of the thesis defence.

THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

At least three months prior to the proposed defence date of the thesis the supervisory committee must have identified an external examiner. Students are not permitted to have advance contact with the external examiner.

The external examiner is someone from outside of TRU, typically from another university offering graduate programs, who is an expert in the field, but not involved in the student's research (to ensure that there is no conflict of interest). This individual should be able to meet all the criteria for a Full Graduate Instructor/Supervisor at TRU. Specifically, the external examiner:

- is a faculty member (or adjunct faculty member) and/or is an expert in their field;
- holds a terminal qualification or equivalent in the discipline,
- has a proven record of peer-reviewed and disseminated research, scholarly

- activity and/or production of creative works,
- is active in the profession or discipline, and
- has not been involved in the student's research.

The external examiner expands the professional associations of the student and TRU. Considerable thought and attention should be given to the selection of the external examiner.

The *External Examiner Nomination form* must be approved by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies. Once the nomination has been approved and the final thesis draft has been approved by the supervisory committee, the program coordinator will extend an official invitation to the external examiner.

The proposed date of the thesis defence is considered to be tentative, and cannot be fully confirmed until the external examiner has assessed the thesis and submitted the *External Examiner Report form*.

THESIS DEFENCE

General Conditions

The thesis must be defended before a committee comprised of the following:

- Primary supervisor
- Co-supervisor (if applicable)
- Supervisory committee members, including at least one member associated with an academic discipline outside the student's area of specialization
- An external examiner meeting the criteria specified above
- A neutral chair (non-voting)

Only theses of registered students will be examined.

The defence is open to the university community and is announced campus-wide.

Procedure During the Defence

The candidate and the committee should plan to be available for two hours, which is the maximum duration of the defence.

Normally, the defence will proceed as follows:

- The chair introduces the candidate and presents the schedule for the defence.
- The candidate gives a 15-20 minute presentation of their work.
- Following the presentation the chair invites the examining committee to ask questions of the candidate. The order of questioning is normally: external examiner, supervisory committee members, and supervisor(s).

- Questions may relate directly to the thesis or the candidate's understanding of the general subject matter of the thesis.
- After the first round of questions the chair inquires whether there are any other questions from the examining committee. If there are none, the chair may ask a question.
- The chair then opens the floor to questions from others attending the defence.
- When there are no more questions (or after no more than 90 minutes since the start of the exam), the audience and candidate will be invited to leave the room while the examining committee assesses the thesis and its defence.
- The candidate is invited back into the room by the chair who informs the candidate of the decision of the examining committee.
- The chair ensures that the *Thesis Defence Report form* is completed.

Chairs are also referred to Appendix B: Guidelines for Chairing a Thesis Defence.

Decision of the Examining Committee

The committee must select from the following options:

- The thesis is acceptable as is, or with minor revisions. A majority vote is required.
- The thesis is acceptable, but major revisions are required. A majority vote is required.
- The thesis is unacceptable. Written comments must be provided to explain this decision. A unanimous vote is required.

A majority decision of the examining committee will be binding except in the case of an unacceptable thesis, which requires a unanimous vote.

FOLLOWING THE DEFENCE

Minor Revisions

Minor revisions are corrections that can be made immediately to the satisfaction of the Supervisor. Minor revisions may include:

- Typographical or grammatical errors
- Missing footnotes
- Formatting issues
- Need for further discussion or elaboration in a few areas
- Incorporating a glossary of acronyms or terms
- Changes to the Appendices
- Incomplete references
- Need for minor clarification of content

Procedure regarding minor revisions:

1. The Supervisor will communicate all recommended revisions to the candidate and inform the Program Coordinator when all corrections have been completed.

2. The Program Coordinator will complete the *Graduation Approval form*.

Major Revisions

Major revisions are corrections requiring further research, structural changes, or other substantive revisions. These revisions will require more time to complete and may require re-reading by the external examiner. Major revisions may include:

- Significant technical errors or inaccuracies
- Misinterpretation and/or misuse of material
- Omission of relevant materials
- Unsubstantiated findings or conclusions
- Improper data analysis
- Major flaws in grammar and presentation
- Faulty research methodology
- Lack of scholarly context
- Need to rewrite substantial portions to strengthen the thesis

Procedure regarding major revisions:

1. The Supervisor will prepare a written summary of the recommended revisions for distribution to the Supervisory Committee and the candidate.
2. The candidate will make the revisions and prepare a written synopsis indicating how the concerns were addressed.
3. The Supervisor will forward the revisions and synopsis to the Supervisory Committee and/or the External Examiner, and inform the Program Coordinator when all corrections have been completed.
4. The Program Coordinator will complete the *Graduation Approval form*.

Unacceptable Thesis

Procedure regarding unacceptable thesis:

1. Written comments must be provided to explain this decision. A unanimous vote is required.
2. The Supervisor, Supervisory Committee, and the candidate will develop a plan for resubmission and defence of the thesis.
3. A thesis may be re-examined only once.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Student's Responsibilities

- Ensure that the thesis conforms to the requirements of the *TRU Thesis Style Guide*,
- Demonstrate familiarity with the requirements and deadlines of the Office of Research and Graduate Studies and the specific program,
- Be responsible for the expense of the thesis preparation, including printing and binding, unless other arrangements have been made with the supervisor or the department.

Thesis Supervisor's Responsibilities

- Ensure the thesis is an original and valuable contribution to knowledge,
- Ensure the student addresses suggestions for improvement recommended by the supervisory committee and external examiner,
- Ensure the thesis is presented according to the specifications of the TRU Office of Research and Graduate Studies, and is in a scholarly style acceptable to the discipline, meeting the highest standards.

Office of Research and Graduate Studies Responsibilities

- Approve the selected external examiner,
- Support the Program Coordinator as necessary to coordinate the defence,
- Certify that the thesis meets institutional standards.

APPENDIX A

Thesis Procedures

Timeline	Activity	Forms/Additional Requirements
No later than the beginning of the final semester of the program (unless an earlier deadline is specified by the program)	The thesis proposal is approved and filed with the Office of Research and Graduate Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis Proposal Approval form • PDF of proposal • Compliance Approval Protocols
Ongoing	The student meets with the supervisor and supervisory committee to monitor progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate Student Progress Report
At least 3 months prior to the defence	The supervisor will identify an external examiner for approval by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Examiner Nomination form
Preferably 6 weeks prior to the defence	The thesis is approved by the supervisory committee and circulated to the external examiner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request for Thesis Defence form • PDF of thesis (final draft)
At least 2 weeks prior to the defence	The thesis is approved by the external examiner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Examiner Report
At least 1 week prior to the defence	The defence is announced campus-wide	
Defence date	The examining committee assesses the thesis and its defence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis Defence Report
Following the defence	The student completes any revisions requested by the examining committee and is approved for graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduation Approval form • Theses Non-Exclusive License • PDF of final thesis • Hardcopies of final thesis

APPENDIX B

Guidelines for Chairing a Thesis Defence

All members of the examining committee including the chair are expected to read the thesis.

The Supervisor must be present at the defence.

The External Examiner may be present in person or via tele- or video-conference. If unable to attend, the external examiner may submit written comments and questions in advance of the defence to the program coordinator.

Part 1 –Candidate’s Presentation and Questions Period (open to the public)

- Introduce the candidate, yourself as chair and the members of the examining committee. Welcome the external examiner to TRU and thank all for coming.
- Invite the candidate to make a 15-20 minute presentation
- Questions from the examining committee follow the presentation. Refer to the procedures in the *Thesis Preparation and Defence Guidelines*.
- Thank everyone for coming, then invite the audience and the candidate to leave the room until the committee has reached a decision on the thesis and its defence.

The chair may be required to refocus the discussion on the examination of the candidate under one or more of the following situations:

- The examining committee starts debating among themselves: politely remind the committee of the purpose of the defence,
- The supervisor answers for the candidate: remind the supervisor that it is the candidate who is being examined,
- Someone asks an inappropriate question: suggest that this might be a discussion that they may have at another time and remind the group of the purpose of the defence.
- The candidate is having great difficulty in the defence situation: suggest a short break (suggest everyone take a bit of a stretch, use the washroom, etc).
- The session seems to be going too long: As 90 minutes are approaching, providing the candidate kept their presentation to 15 minutes, point out to the group that time is getting on and suggest that they ask only the most pertinent questions related to the defence.

Part 2 – Private Deliberations of the Examining Committee (closed to the public)

- Please follow the directions on the *Thesis Defence Report form*.
- In the case of minor revisions or major revisions, a majority decision of the committee is binding.

- For the thesis to be judged unacceptable, a unanimous vote is required.
- In the case of minor or major revisions, the committee must take the time to communicate all suggested revisions to the Supervisor, who should take detailed notes. The committee should be clear about which recommendations are mandatory, and which are not.
- In the event that the thesis is judged unacceptable, the committee will be asked to prepare a written report.

Part 3 – Inform the Candidate and Complete Thesis Defence Report

- Ensure the *Thesis Defence Report form* is completed accurately and signed by all members of the examining committee in attendance.
- Call the candidate back to the room and inform them of the decision in the privacy of the examining committee.
- Ensure that the candidate and supervisor are given copies of the appropriate forms, and understand the procedures that follow.