

## **DISSERTATION PROPOSAL ORAL EXAMINATION**

### **SCHOOL OF NURSING, UBC OKANAGAN**

The purpose of the Doctoral Dissertation Proposal Oral Examination (DDPOE) is for the student to independently defend their approach to the dissertation. It is also intended to serve as confirmation of the student's knowledge of the research topic within the context of their field(s) of study. The DDPOE is one of the requirements to advance to Candidacy along with the Comprehensive exam. The DDPOE is regulated by the School of Nursing.

The DDPOE should normally occur prior to the beginning their doctoral research; however, in exceptional cases the research may proceed prior to the defense if the supervisory committee has approved the written proposal. The student may apply for ethical approval for their study prior to the DDPOE.

### **INITIATING THE DISSERTATION ORAL EXAMINATION**

The DDPOE examination process is initiated once the student has been deemed, by both their supervisor and their supervisory committee, as ready to proceed to defence. The supervisor must have reviewed the student's research proposal and obtained written agreement from the members of the supervisory committee that the dissertation proposal is ready to move to oral examination.

The Supervisor is responsible for the following steps in the oral examination process once s/he has determined that the dissertation proposal meets the minimum standard:

- Ensures that all members of the supervisory committee have reviewed the latest draft of the dissertation proposal, and provided written consents to the supervisor to proceed to oral examination (email is acceptable).
- Contacts a neutral chair to oversee the DDPOE.
- Selects an examination date that is acceptable to the student, committee members and neutral chair.

### **COMPOSITION OF DISSERTATION ORAL EXAMINATION COMMITTEE**

The examination committee consists of:

- The Supervisor;
- All members of the Supervisory Committee;

- The neutral chair

The examining committee assesses the performance of the candidate in the written dissertation proposal and in the oral examination and makes a recommendation to the coordinator of the graduate program.

### **THE ROLE OF THE NEUTRAL CHAIR**

The examination is chaired by a neutral member of the academic staff who is familiar with the examination policies and procedures of the School of Nursing. **The Neutral Chair is not a member of the Examination Committee, does not question the student and may not vote.**

The Neutral Chair must:

- not have been closely associated with the student (now or in the past) as a colleague, supervisor, member of the supervisory committee,
- not have been an academic collaborator with the supervisor.

Either the graduate program coordinator or the school director could serve as Neutral Chair.

The responsibility of the Neutral Chair is to ensure that the examination is conducted in a fair way and according to School of Nursing procedures.

### **ANNOUNCING THE ORAL EXAMINATION**

Upon receiving approval from the dean of the College of Graduate Studies for the External Examiner, the supervisor should proceed with the following:

- Book the examination room & video conferencing (if needed);
- Notify the graduate program academic assistant of the proposal defence by email. Include the graduate student's name, dissertation proposal title, abstract, and date/time of the defence.
- The graduate program academic assistant will email this to school of nursing faculty and students to invite their participation.

### **DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PROPOSAL EXAMINATION PROCESS**

#### **BEFORE THE EXAMINATION**

The Supervisor must ensure that all committee members have a final and complete copy of the dissertation proposal.

Once the dissertation proposal has been distributed, the examination has formally begun, and there should be no discussion of the substance or quality of the dissertation among examiners or between examiners and the candidate (or anyone else).

### **SUSPECTED ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT IN THE DISSERTATION**

If an examiner suspects that academic misconduct, including plagiarism, has occurred in the dissertation proposal, he/she must notify the graduate coordinator immediately. (Please note, this should not entail a conversation with the supervisor or with any others, but should come directly to the graduate coordinator.)

The examination will then be suspended until such time as the graduate coordinator or his/her designate determines whether academic misconduct has occurred and what penalties will be applied. Depending on the graduate coordinator's determination, the examination may proceed as scheduled, be rescheduled, or be cancelled.

If an examiner alleges academic misconduct during the examination or in the post-examination discussion, the neutral chair must suspend the examination or discussion and contact the graduate coordinator immediately.

### **THE DOCTORAL STUDENT'S ORAL PRESENTATION**

The student may present a 20-30 minute opening summary of the dissertation proposal, introducing the research and summarizing its significance. The candidate may speak from notes, and may use audio-visual equipment, but must not read the synopsis.

The neutral chair will stop the presentation if it exceeds 30 minutes. The presentation is outside of the two-hour examination time.

### **LENGTH OF THE EXAMINATION**

The formal oral examination should not exceed 1.0 hour. This 1.0 hour is in addition to the thirty minutes allowed for the opening summary.

This time limit does not include the opening summary presentation, the questions from the audience, nor the deliberation time of the examination committee. Examination committee members and the neutral chair should, therefore, reserve at least 2.0 hours for the summary presentation, examination, public questioning and deliberation periods.

### **ATTENDANCE AT THE EXAMINATION**

The doctoral oral defence is a formal examination, which should be accorded due professional respect. Examination committee members should be present ten minutes prior to the start of the examination.

The examination **cannot** start without the examination committee member. If the examination committee member arrives within the first 30 minutes, the neutral chair must poll other examiners to determine if they are ALL able to stay for at least two hours commencing from that moment. If this is the case, the Neutral Chair can start the exam.

If any examiner is unable to remain for that time period, the examination may be cancelled and rescheduled.

### **QUESTIONS TO THE CANDIDATE**

During the formal question period, only examination committee members are allowed to question the candidate.

Normally, the question period may consist of two to three rounds but should proceed (within the allowable time frame) until examiners have no further questions. During question period, the supervisor should be taking notes about concerns and areas for revision. The neutral chair does not question the student.

Questions to the candidate should be relevant to the subject matter of the dissertation proposal, and should be clearly and succinctly phrased. The student should be given reasonable time to answer. If the student has understood the question but cannot answer, the examiner should pass to another question and not attempt to extract an answer by prolonged interrogation.

The neutral chair should guard against any attempt by the supervisor to help the student in any way, or any tendency of examiners to interact with each other instead of concentrating on the examination of the candidate.

Normally, dissertation proposal oral examinations are open to the public. If the oral examination is still within the limit of one hour, and if the examination committee does not have any further questions for the student, the neutral chair may invite questions from audience attendees.

### **ADJUDICATION OF THE ORAL EXAMINATION OF THE DISSERTATION**

When the question period has reached one hour, the neutral chair asks the candidate and the audience members to leave the examination room. Only the neutral chair and members of the examination committee should remain in the room.

**Before any discussion of the candidate's performance**, the neutral chair passes out ballots to each examination committee member. Each examiner must then identify by secret ballot (which is non-binding), whether s/he favours recommending a pass or fail on the oral defence. The ballots are handed back to the neutral chair. This procedure provides the committee with a frame of opinion upon which a full discussion of the student's performance may then be based.

### **OFFICIAL EXAMINERS' DISCUSSION**

The neutral chair reads off the ballot results and then facilitates a full post-examination discussion. At the conclusion of the discussion, the neutral chair may request up to 2 additional rounds of open voting to try to reach a consensus. A unanimous decision is required for the oral defence. If the examiners are unable to achieve unanimity regarding the defense, **there will be no further discussion and the neutral chair must ask committee members to submit a confidential email to the graduate program coordinator** documenting the exam and rationale for their recommendation within 5 business days.

### **DOCTORAL PROPOSAL EXAMINATION OUTCOMES**

#### **DECISION ON THE OUTCOME OF THE ORAL EXAMINATION**

The examination committee must select the outcome of the **Oral Examination**:

1. **Unanimous Pass**
2. **Fail**

If the examining committee unanimously determines that the oral defense is not acceptable, it recommends a failed oral defence to the graduate coordinator. The final decision will be at the discretion of the graduate coordinator. Should the graduate coordinator uphold the recommendation of 'fail', the candidate will be allowed a second, final attempt to present an acceptable oral defence of the dissertation proposal within three months of the first examination. The student will be provided with guidelines on how to improve their performance on the defense based upon the examining committee feedback from the first exam. For a retake of the oral examination, the composition of the examination committee will remain the same. **If the student fails the oral retake, they will be required to withdraw from the graduate program.**